

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 2.19.2023

THE GOSPEL IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH - PART 3 - LAW AND GOSPEL

I. INTRODUCTION

- Throughout the history of the church there has been much confusion about the role of the OT law and how it applies to the Christian life.
- On the one hand, there are those who reject the law as irrelevant for believers, on the other hand, there is a conflation between the law and the gospel.
- Having a right understanding of the law and the gospel has implications for our daily Christian life.
- In our passage today, we'll look at what purpose the law, if any, has on the life of the believer and draw distinctions that will help us flee to the gospel for comfort and hope.

1 Timothy 1:3-11

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, **4** nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. **5** The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. **6** Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, **7** desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, **9** understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, **10** the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, **11** in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

II. WHAT GOOD IS THE LAW

- Paul writes that these individuals who were teaching a different doctrine, desired to be teachers of the law.
- They were misguided in the understanding of the law.
- JND Kelly, wrote that these false teachers were "*Judaizers who concentrated on far-fetched minutiae of rabbinical exegesis to the detriment of the gospel. They read out of the law fantastical myths and ascetic prescriptions which proved that they missed the point of both the OT and the gospel.*"
- They were not promoting the true gospel but some syncretistic aberration of the gospel.

- We need to ask ourselves, do we have a right understanding of the law?
- Are we misguided in our use or application of the law?
- Are we missing the point of the OT and the gospel because we don't understand the law and the gospel?

- v8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully.
- We need to ask, what does Paul mean by the law?
- Paul uses "the law" as shorthand for all of the OT law, referring to the whole of the Mosaic law as it was revealed to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai.
- The Mosaic law had three expressions or dimensions.
- **The Moral law**
- -Summarized in the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue.
- These are perpetually binding on all of humanity and predate Mount Sinai. They are the ethical standard that exists for all people at all times in all places.
- The moral law is a reflection of God's holy, unchanging, and transcendent character, therefore, the moral law is unchanging.
- This moral law is etched into every human heart, though suppressed by our sinful nature (Rom. 2:14-16).
- **The Ceremonial law**

- These prescribed the worship of God and governed the Tabernacle and later the temple. They include the dietary laws, circumcision and all of the purification rites and ritual elements and the feasts.
- **The Civil or Judicial law**
- These governed how the people of God lived in the land God gave them.
- It prescribed how people were to be judged and punished if they committed a crime.
- Deut 6:1 "Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it,"
- The Ceremonial or Civil laws are no longer binding since they ceased with the end of the theocratic nation of Israel. Christ fulfilled all of these laws and they are abrogated with his coming.
- The Moral laws continue to be binding upon everyone, including believers.

THE GOODNESS OF THE LAW

- Paul says that the law is good (8).
- Many Christians tend to have a negative view of the law.
- But Paul states that it is good. In fact, when you read Psalm 119, you get the impression that the law was not seen as something harsh by God's people, it was seen as what it was, a gracious gift of God to His covenant people.
- Romans 7:12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.
- Matt 5:17-18 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Jesus said he did not come to eliminate them but rather to fulfill them.
- Jesus upheld that everything in the OT law is an expression of God's moral will and character.
- He showed that we need to obey God's law from the heart, obedience is not just a matter of external conformity to the law.

THE PROPER USE OF THE LAW

- The law is good because it is God's revealed moral will for his creatures.
- But Paul says the law is only good if it is used lawfully or properly. (8)
- That means there is a lawful use and an unlawful use of the law.
- Let's look at the lawful use first.
- Martin Luther developed the two uses of the law and Calvin later articulated three uses of the law of God.
- **First use of the law: Convicting**
- The law reveals the perfect righteousness of God, his requirement for moral perfection, and how we fall short of it. This should drive us to Christ for salvation.
- Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
- The law is like a mirror reflecting back to you your utter sinfulness and inability to keep the law.
- Sin didn't come into existence when the law was given, rather the law ensures that sin will be counted against us. (Rom. 5:13).
- That knowledge of sin leads to further rebellion (Romans 7:7-11).
- Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- We are condemned by the law to judgment and a death sentence.
- This should drive the soul to long for forgiveness and freedom from the curse of the law and to flee to Christ in repentance and faith.
- Gal. 3:22-24 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.
- **Second use of the law: Restraining**
- The law helps to restrain lawless behavior. When the law is backed by a civil code that administers punishment to proven offenders it is deterrent to lawlessness (Rom. 13:3-4).
- It helps secure some civil order and protects the weak and society at large from the unjust.
- The law cannot change the heart, but the threats of punishment can restrain an evildoer.
- **Third use of the law: Instructing**
- Calvin called this the principal use of the law. It provides guidance for believers.
- Calvin wrote that the third use is for those whose hearts have already been made new by the Spirit of God and where he already lives and reigns.
- The law is written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God (Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16) and they are so quickened by the Spirit that they long to obey God.
- This is profitable for the believer in at least two ways:
- Through the law, the believer learns what is the nature of God's will and understands it.

- By frequent meditation upon it they would be stirred to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression.
- In the perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive.
- This use of the law is not meant to drive the believer to despair or discouragement but to drive the believer to flee to God's mercy in Christ.

LAWFUL AND UNLAWFUL USES OF THE LAW

- These are some of the lawful and proper uses of the law:
 - To inform people of their duty to God and man.
 - To convict believers and unbelievers of their inability to keep it apart from the Spirit.
 - To convince the self-righteous that their law-keeping does not justify them.
 - To help people get a sense of their sin and misery and to see their need for Christ and the perfection of His obedience.
 - To hold it up to unbelievers so that they will see how they have transgressed God's law, help them see their sin and misery, and drive them to Christ for forgiveness and salvation.
- **These are some of the unlawful and improper uses of the law:**
 - Pitting the law against the gospel as if it was opposed to Christ and His gospel.
 - Looking to our law-keeping for our justification or when we seek acceptance before God by law keeping.
 - Adding our keeping of the law to our justification or sanctification thus robbing God of his glory.
 - Discouraging a broken-hearted sinner with the law.
 - Weaponize the law to use in unprofitable and unfruitful disputes.
- In Christ we don't fear the law because Christ perfectly obeyed all of its requirements for us.
 - He freed us from the curse and condemnation of the law (Rom 8:1-4).
 - Now we see the law as something that makes Christ more precious to us.
 - Through his life and death we have been freed from the law's condemnation, we have been delivered from the law of sin and death and we can now walk by the law of the Spirit of life.
- We need a right understanding of the law so that we avoid the two ditches we can fall into.
 - Legalism and self-righteousness.
 - Antinomianism. (means 'no law')
 - The law prepares the way for the gospel.
 - If we don't get the law right, we don't get the gospel right.
 - All law and no gospel - legalism.
 - All gospel and no law - antinomianism.
- The law must be handled lawfully.
 - We must apply it properly to our life considering the uses of the law and we must apply it properly in how we confront or encourage other believers and how we communicate the law and gospel to unbelievers.

III. THE LAW / GOSPEL DISTINCTION

V9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient,

- Paul has in mind the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and the second use of the law, its restraining effect.
- When we look at the catalog of sins here they seem to correspond in order to violations of the commandments in the second table of the law.
- What does Paul mean that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient?
 - Law is not necessary if everyone did what was morally right.
 - All law is designed for those who have a natural tendency to NOT keep it.
 - God's law with its prohibitions and sanctions relate to the lawless.
- **THE MORAL LAW**
 - Paul proceeds to illustrate the principle with examples of lawbreaking.
 - Lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane.
 - These correspond to our duty to God in the first table of the law.
 - The Ten Commandments are divided into two tables.
 - The first table of the Law, our duty to God in the first four commandments.
- The next set of sins Paul lists are more specific and mostly correspond to the second table of the law.
 - V9,10 for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers,
 - The second table of the Law, is our duty to our neighbor, the last six commandments.

- Paul makes his list comprehensive by stating “and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.”
 - The sound doctrine is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.
 - These sins which violate the Ten Commandments, the Moral Law, are also contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel.
 - The moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law.
 - The law and gospel are NOT in disagreement as to what righteous living and practice looks like for a Christian.
 - The distinction between the law and gospel has to do with salvation.
 - The law condemns, the gospel justifies.
 - The law is good but it cannot save.
 - The gospel is good and it saves to the uttermost.
 - The gospel tells the story of the glory of the blessed God, the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
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- The law can only condemn. Christ is our only hope.
 - Flee to Christ who perfectly kept God’s law.
 - Cling to the hope of the gospel, you are justified by faith in Christ alone.
 - His perfect obedience alone is the grounds of our justification.
 - His sacrificial death secures our forgiveness for our transgression of God’s righteous law.
 - His resurrection ensures we will have everything He has promised us in his glorious gospel.
 - What God demanded in His law he has graciously provided for us in His gospel.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?