

SONS OF ABRAHAM
PART 8

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:6-14

April 4, 2010

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

A. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO DISTINGUISH THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL?

Having examined the importance of distinguishing the law and gospel, we next took up the question:

B. HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL?

We began answering this question by looking at the law. We noted three characteristics about the law.

1. LAW

A. THE LAW IS NATURAL TO MAN (ROM. 1:32; 2:14-15).

Michael Horton writes, “The law is not news. It is what we already know inside of ourselves,” (*Gospel Driven Life*, p. 21).

Second, because of the corruption of man’s heart,

B. THE LAW TEACHES US WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO, BUT GIVES NOT STRENGTH TO DO IT (MATT. 22:37-40; ROM. 7:7-14).

The law reveals what it looks like to be a loving person but it doesn’t create a loving heart.

C. THE LAW PROMISES LIFE UPON THE CONDITION OF PERFECT OBEDIENCE AND THREATENS CURSING FOR

DISOBEDIENCE (GEN. 2:16-17; DEUT. 30:15-20;
GAL. 3:10; JAM. 2:10).

The promises in the law operate differently from the promises of the gospel. The law can be summarized as: “Do this and live,” or “Disobey this and be condemned.”

The major proposition in the voice of the law is: “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them,” (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26).

As a result of the Fall, man lost the *ability to obey* (power not to sin; *posse non peccare*) but retained the *ability to disobey* (power to sin; *posse peccare*).

Therefore, justification by works of the law became impossible because man lost the ability to obey God’s law.

The law now reveals our sin, as Paul writes in Romans 3:20, “...through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

This convicting work of the law is necessary in bringing a man to trust Christ as He is offered in the gospel. John Colquhoun writes, “no man will ever love or so much as understand rightly a single doctrine of the gospel unless he sees and feels that as a sinner he is utterly undone. It is to men as sinners that the word of this salvation is sent,” (*A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, p. 103).

Thus, the convicting power of the law is not intended to leave us in utter despair but rather to lead us to Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:22).

This then brings us to the gospel.

LESSON:

2. GOSPEL

Residing at the heart of Christianity is Good News! What, then, is the gospel?

This seems like a simple question. However, from Galatians we are learning that it is not so simple. The difficulty is not because the gospel is complicated but because our hearts are so fallen and false teaching is so seductive.

Galatians reveals how this question can become quite heated and controversial. One of the greatest dangers Christians face is to take for granted that we know what the gospel is.

Galatians 1:6 stands as a chilling reminder at how quickly believers can be tempted to abandon the true gospel for a false one.

To answer the question, “What is the gospel?” it will be helpful to compare the three characteristics of the law with the three characteristics of the gospel.

- A. THE GOSPEL IS DIVINELY REVEALED (MATT. 11:27; 16:17; LK. 2:8-11; 1 COR. 1:18, 23; 2:12-14).

Unlike the law, the gospel is not in us by nature and therefore does not come natural to us. Though all men in some degree have a natural knowledge of the law, none have any natural knowledge of the gospel.

The gospel must be revealed to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. In response to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am,” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” (Matt. 16:15-16). Note carefully Jesus’ reply to Peter, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven,” (v. 17).

The law makes sense to us because it was inscribed upon our consciences in creation.

The gospel, however, seems strange and foolish. In 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23, Paul writes, “¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing... ²³ we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...”

In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes, “The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

Only the Holy Spirit can make the message of the cross truly comprehensible to a person (“...we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God,” 1 Cor. 2:12).

Religion, which demands, “I obey/do therefore I am accepted,” makes perfect sense to the fallen heart (and to a degree even in the believer’s heart!).

Michael Horton writes,

“We do not need a reporter to announce to us that we need to be better parents, spouses, and friends; that we should have integrity in our relationships; to be less selfish and more giving...Give us advice on these matters and we nod. We begin to take notes and resolve to put them into practice next week. Our ears perk up when we hear exhortations to be all we can be. Our self-righteousness springs to its feet when we are told that we have what it takes if we just put the game plan into practice,” (*The Gospel Driven Life*, p. 22).

On the other hand, the gospel which announces, “I am accepted, therefore I obey/do,” is utterly strange and surprising. Again, Michael Horton writes,

“We do not just naturally think that we are born in sin, spiritually dead, helpless, and unable to lift a finger to save ourselves or impress a holy God. As a result, it does not...occur to us that our greatest need is to be redeemed, justified, regenerated, sanctified, and glorified by God’s saving work in his Son and by His Spirit,” (*The Gospel Driven Life*, p. 19).

Unlike the law, the gospel is never an “of course,” “precisely,” “Oh, yes, I get it.” The gospel is not self-evident. Luke makes this very clear in his account of Jesus’ discussion with the two disciples on the Emmaus Road. Here are two disciples of Jesus walking and talking with the Risen Lord and they are utterly oblivious as to who Jesus is. In Luke 24:16, Luke writes, “...their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” It was not until their eyes were opened that they recognized Jesus (Lk. 24:31).

Because of our Fallen state, we are not naturally inclined to trust in another’s obedience and perfect performance.

Our default tendency is to respond like the children of Israel when Moses set before them all the words that the LORD had commanded him (Ex. 19:7-8, “All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do,’” (v. 8).

Basically they said to Moses, “Just tell us what to do and we will do it.” This is exactly what the Rich Young Ruler asked Jesus, “...what must I *do* to inherit eternal life,” (Luke 18:18, emphasis mine).

Man’s problem, Augustine wrote, is that he is curved in on himself. Deep in the heart of every man resides a desire for self-justification. Man is always looking to *do* something rather than *believe* something for his salvation.

But, the gospel doesn't call us to do anything. Rather, the gospel calls us to believe in what Christ has done for us as Paul writes in Romans 4:4-5, “⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,” (cf. Acts 16:30-31).

Because the gospel is counterintuitive, surprising and even offensive, it must be revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This leads us to a second characteristic about the gospel.

B. THE GOSPEL IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF GOOD NEWS
(LK. 2:10-11; ROM. 10:15).

Strictly speaking, the gospel is an announcement of good news, the declaration of a joyful message!

Luke 2:10-11 summarizes the major voice in the proposition of the gospel, “¹⁰ Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

The gospel commands nothing but rather announces to sinners staggering, joyful news of free salvation through faith in Christ!

Michael Horton observes how it is interesting that the biblical writers chose the word “gospel.” He writes,

“The heart of most religions is good advice, good techniques, good programs, good ideas, and good support systems. These drive us deeper into ourselves, to find our inner light, inner goodness, inner voice, or inner resources. Nothing new can be found inside of us. There is no inner rescue deep down in my soul; I just hear echoes of my own voice telling me all sorts of crazy things to numb my sense

of fear, anxiety, and boredom, the origins of which I cannot truly identify. But the heart of Christianity is Good News. It comes not as a task for us to fulfill, a mission for us to accomplish, a game plan for us to follow with the help of life coaches, but as a report that someone else has already fulfilled, accomplished, followed, and achieved everything for us...It is about God and His faithfulness to His own purposes and promises,” (*Gospel Driven Life*, p. 20).

The nature of the gospel is a free promise of life and salvation through faith in Christ alone.

As previously noted, the promises in the law operate differently from the promises of the gospel.

The law promises life on the condition of perfect obedience, “Do this and live,” and threatens death as the penalty for disobedience, “Disobey this and be condemned.”

But, the gospel announces, “Fear not! Live for all is already done!”

What, then, is this good news announced by the gospel?

The bad news is that because of the Fall man no longer has the ability to perfectly obey what God has commanded in his law. All, then, who rely on works of the law fall under the law’s curse (Gal. 3:10).

The good news is that Jesus in His life, death and resurrection, has removed the curse of the law and in its place given life!

JESUS, IN HIS LIFE, FULFILLED THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW FOR US (MATT. 5:17-18).

“¹⁷ 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, IN HIS DEATH, BORE THE CURSE OF THE LAW FOR US (GAL. 3:13).

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Jesus, in His resurrection, assures us that the curse has been removed (Rom. 4:25).

In Romans 4:25, Paul writes that Jesus “...was delivered up for our trespasses and *raised for our justification*,” (emphasis mine).

The opposite of justification is condemnation. The resurrection assures us that the condemnation of the law has been removed.

When Jesus cried out on the cross, “It is finished,” He knew that His death had fully borne the curse of the law but His followers didn’t.

As far as they knew, Jesus died and was put in a tomb. Thus, his followers thought that it was finished! But the resurrection proves it wasn’t the end!

The resurrection declares that God the Father is fully and completely satisfied with the saving work that His Son accomplished on the Cross. By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was making a powerful declaration concerning Jesus’ person (Rom. 1:4) and work (Rom. 4:25).

The resurrection powerfully declares that Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Law in His life and bore the penalties of the Law in His death.

The resurrection is God's BIG "Yes!" to all of His promises concerning Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20). The resurrection proclaims:

Yes, Jesus bore the curse!
Yes, Jesus atoned for sin!
Yes, God's justice is satisfied!
Yes, there is no more condemnation!
Yes, death has been conquered!
Yes, God is your Father and not your Judge!
Yes, you are joint heirs with Christ!
Yes, a new creation awaits you!

However, if Jesus had not been raised, all of these gospel blessings would be a resounding "No!" No resurrection means that His life and death were a failure. Without the resurrection, there is no assurance that the condemnation of the law over your life has been removed. There is no assurance of God's goodwill and favor toward you.

It is not enough to say that Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses. The gospel is incomplete unless, like Paul, we also add that He was raised for our justification.

The resurrection is the hinge to the gospel. It is central and without it there is no good news, no assurance that His saving work was completed.

If Jesus had not risen, B.B. Warfield asks,

"...what would enable us to say, He was able to pay the penalty He had undertaken? That He died manifests His love and His willingness to save. It is His rising again that manifests His power and His ability to save. We cannot be saved by a dead Christ, who undertook but could not perform, and who still lies under the Syrian sky, another martyr of impotent love. To save, He must pass not merely

to but through death. If the penalty was fully paid, it cannot have broken Him, it must needs have been broken upon Him. The resurrection of Christ is thus the indispensable evidence of His completed work...It is only because He rose from the dead that we know that the ransom He offered was sufficient, the sacrifice was accepted, and that we are His purchased possession," (*The Person and Work of Christ*, p. 544).

Third and finally, the gospel is good news because:

C. THE GOSPEL GIVES WHAT THE LAW DEMANDS (EZEK. 36:26-27; ROM. 1:16; 10:17; GAL. 3:2; EPH. 1:13)

Unlike the law, which teaches us what we ought to do but gives no strength to do it, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Listen to Ezekiel 36:26-27, “²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

True obedience to the law is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is received by faith alone as Paul writes in Galatians 3:2, “...Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”

Both justifying faith and the Holy Spirit are given through the hearing of the gospel (cf. Eph. 1:13; Rom. 10:17).

Augustine understood this and thus he prayed, “Let Him give what He commands, and command what He will.”

REFLECTION:

The Law commands us to love God more than anyone or anything else in life. Can you honestly say that this is true of you?

The Law calls us to love our neighbor more than ourselves. Can you honestly say that your daily habits, schedules, interests and concerns are always directed toward the wellbeing of your neighbor, beginning with you wife, children, coworkers or even total strangers?

If we are honest, we must admit that we have never once loved God or our neighbor perfectly. Someone may respond, “But I thought Christians were good people?”

Thus, you may be wondering what is a Christian?

A Christian is a person who confesses, “I have not loved God or my neighbor as I should. I have broken God’s law. Nevertheless, I believe I stand righteous before God because of Christ alone.”

It is at this point that the enemy of our faith comes to us with his accusations and asks, “Do you really think you have a right to say such a thing? Look at your life. Remember your thoughts. Don’t you know that the Law teaches whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (Jam. 2:10)?”

The Christian responds, “Yes. I am guilty of breaking the whole law. Yet, despite this fact, I am righteous in Christ. For the gospel says, ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us,” (Rom. 8:33-34).

This isn’t self-righteous boasting but rather extreme humility. The Christian doesn’t look within himself to find reasons for his right standing with God. There are none! A Christian is one who looks

totally away from himself and outward to Christ alone. Paul looked at all of the “good” things he had accomplished by his own strength and zeal and wrote,

“⁷ whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...”
(Philip. 3:7-9).

Over against every accusing and assaulting voice from within and without, a Christian trusts in the almost-too-good-to-be-true news announced in the gospel.

Like Abraham, the man of faith, the sons of Abraham believe God’s promises, which is counted to them as righteousness as well (cf. Gal. 3:6-10).

Martyn Lloyd Jones writes,

“Like Abraham, you must never look at yourself again, and at all that is so true of you. You are justified in spite of all that; it is what God has done in Christ. Look to that, rest on that, be confident in that. Hold up your head with boldness; yea, I say it with reverence, go even into the presence of God with ‘holy boldness’ and in ‘the full assurance of faith’; not boldness in yourself, but in your Mediator, in your great High Priest, in the One whom God raised from the dead in order to let you know that your sins were dealt with at the Cross once and for ever, and that He looks upon you as His dear child,” (*Romans*, p. 250).

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