

The Ten Commandments and Jesus

by

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The Ten Commandments and Jesus

In this five-session study of the Ten Commandments and Jesus, we will focus on what the Old Testament says about the Ten Commandments, what Jesus said about them, how the New Testament refers to them, and how the fruit of the Spirit relates to them.

The topics we will study over the next five sessions will include:

1. The OT and the Ten Commandments
2. Jesus (the Gospels) and the Ten Commandments
3. St. Paul, rest of the NT, and the Ten Commandments
4. Fruit of the Spirit and the Ten Commandments
5. How do Law and Gospel relate?

Ten Commandments and Jesus

Session #1—The OT and the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21)

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| 1. Do not have any other gods | 5. Honor your father and mother |
| 2. Do not make for yourself idols | 6. Do not kill |
| 3. Do not take the name of the Lord in vain | 7. Do not commit adultery |
| 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy | 8. Do not steal |
| | 9. Do not bear false witness |
| | 10. Do not covet |

God revealed the 10 Commandments through Moses to God's people after the Exodus from Egypt. The first four (or the 1st tablet of the law) are about how we are to relate to God and the next six (the 2nd tablet) are how we are to act toward each other. Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments in this way in Matt 22:37-40: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [Deut 6:5] This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [Leviticus 19:18] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Historically, when the commands were given, the nation of Israel was already in a covenant relationship with God through Abraham: "I will be your God and you will be my people." The Exodus narrative begins when God hears the groanings of Israel, and "remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exod 2:24). After God has established himself as Israel's Lord through the historical fact of the deliverance from oppression in Egypt, the law is administered. That is why the Ten Commandments begin with "I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The laws have their place in the context of a covenant. Yahweh has chosen Israel as His people, and Israel has acknowledged Yahweh as its God. Covenant is the larger concept than law and always taking precedence over law.

The Ten Commandments are the externalized summary of the will of God. The Law contains over 600 commands, and the "ten words" (Exod 34:28, Deut 4:13, and Deut 9:9-11) are the summary of these commands.

The Ten Commandments to Israel are universal requirements of ethical existence addressed to the whole human race. They embody and define law, and they are absolute in their authority. They exist and should be followed "so that your days may be long in the land" (Exod 20:12). They idealize the social character and relatedness of living.

The Ten Commandments are the summary of the law of God, which is "perfect, true, and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:7-9) and "holy, just and good" (Rom 7:12), but it does nothing to create the state it requires. The law does not enable fulfillment. The Ten Commandments are the truth, but not the means with which to apply it. The law does not effect what it demands. The

apostle Paul writes: “If a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law” (Gal 3:21).

About the law, Paul Zahl writes: “The Ten Commandments are God’s laws, they are true and right, and an accurate summary of description of what it means to be obedient, happy, and fulfilled. If we were able to fulfill it, the law would be the answer to humanity’s problems. The Bible declares the law to be good and right (Psalm 119, 1 Timothy 1:8, Rom 3:31, Rom 7:12-16) but then with one great insight deprives the law of any lasting capacity to do us any good (Romans 7:24-25). The law tells us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about ourselves. But the law fails to convey the power to correct the maladies it diagnoses. The law is painful, like iodine on a cut, but another agent is required for healing to occur. That agent is grace.”

The big idea in the Bible is the relationship of God’s perfect and true law to the self-absorption of the human heart. We cannot understand God’s grace without first understanding God’s law. The law is one great step toward humanity’s self-understanding. Only an inflexible picture of what is required of the human is able to penetrate to the center of creaturely insufficiency and failure and sin. If we cheat on law, we are cheated on grace.

God’s Commandments and Our Hearts

Deut 6:5-6—“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”

Jeremiah 31:33—“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Book of Common Prayer, pages 317-318— During Lent, after each command is read, we respond with: “Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this commandment.” And the response after the final command is: “Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these laws in our hearts.”

Conclusion

The commands are the perfect and true expression of the will of God, but they do not have the power to generate what they command because what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.

Ashley Null is a scholar on Thomas Cranmer and said this about God commands and our hearts: “According to Cranmer’s anthropology, what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn’t direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants. The trouble with human nature is that we are born with a heart that loves ourselves over and above everything else in this world, including God. In short, we are born slaves to the lust for self-gratification. That’s why, if left to ourselves, we will always love those things that make us feel good about ourselves, even as we depart more and more from God and his ways. Therefore, God must intervene in our lives in order to bring salvation. Working through Scripture, the Holy Spirit first brings a conviction

of sin in a believer's heart, then he births a living faith by which the believer lays hold of the extrinsic righteousness of Christ."

Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

"Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Ten Commandments and Jesus

Session #2— Jesus (the Gospels) and the Ten Commandments

Review from Session #1

1. “Two Tablets”—first four about how we are to relate to God and the next six about how to act toward each other.
2. Ten Commandments are the summary of the law of God, which is “perfect, true, and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9) and “holy, just and good”(Rom 7:12-16)...BUT the law does not generate or effect what it commands. The apostle Paul writes: “If a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law” (Gal 3:21).
3. If we cheat on law, we are cheated on grace.
4. The commands are the perfect and true expression of the will of God, but they do not have the power to generate what they command because what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. Our hearts (affections and desires) are the problem: “Lord, have mercy upon us...and incline our hearts to keep these commands.”

Jesus on the Law

A serious misunderstanding of Jesus and grace is to think that law doesn't really matter. People talk as if Jesus showed up to tell us that we're alright and pretty decent people who just need to follow our hearts. Jesus does the exact opposite. In reality, he talked about the law a lot and one on occasion acted like a New Moses.

In Matt 22:37-40, Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments following the Two Tablets and we quote it at the beginning of our service: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ [Deut 6:5] This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [Leviticus 19:18] All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Our response is similar to the Decalogue reading:

Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Jesus is pointing the law directly us and our response is not “OK, that sounds easy and fun,” but instead we say “Lord have mercy on us!” We need mercy because we don't do those two things. You don't love God or your neighbor perfectly. That's why you need a savior.

In Mark 10:17-31, Jesus has a conversation with a rich young ruler and Jesus applies the law of God to him because he wants to bring him to the end of him self in order to bring him new life. Jesus is laying down the law in order to pardon. Jesus lays down the law in order to absolve, not to condemn!

A young rich man eagerly comes to Jesus. He asks “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It is good to ask about eternal life, but his question reveals a deep flaw. You see, while he wants Something More, he can't imagine pursuing it in any other way than more winning and striving. His question shows that he's confident there are techniques for achieving eternal life.

Jesus puts the law of God in his face so he'll take an honest look at how unsuccessful he's actually been at practicing the goodness he thinks is the answer to his problems. Jesus is hoping this young man will see that the law can save no one because the law can be kept by no one. So, Jesus says to him: "You know the commands: Don't kill, commit adultery, or steal. Honor your parents. Why don't you take a good look at these commands and see how you are really measuring up?"

The young man responds, "I've done all those things perfectly since I was a kid. So, why don't you give me a harder, more grown-up assignment?"

So, with patient love and cosmic understatement, Jesus breaks the GOOD NEWS to him, by pressing the law even further. "You only have to do one simple little thing. Sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and then come follow me into my death." This is really just the first commandment applied to this rich guy: "Worship no other gods but God. Serve nothing but God." And this guy worshipped wealth. Jesus was showing him how much he failed to fulfill the commandments.

The only response to looking to the perfect law of a perfect God is what the disciples say in verse 26: "Who then can be saved?"

In Matt 5:17-20, Jesus repeats the OT view of the Law. It is not to be abolished but fulfilled: "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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

In Matt 5:21-47, he sharpens the point of the spear of the law and assumes the role of the New Moses (a new law giver). He refers to the law: "You have heard that it was said...*BUT* I say to you..." He intensifies murder (verses 21-26 and Exodus 20:13), adultery (verses 27-30 and Exodus 20:14), divorce (verses 31-32 and Deut 24:1), lying (verses 33-37), eye for eye (verses 38-42 and Exodus 21:24, Lev. 24:20, Deut. 19:21), and loving enemies (verses 43-47 and Lev. 19:18).

Just to make sure the point is clear, Jesus ends with verse 48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus' point of intensifying is to get to the heart and communicate that it is not just your outward behavior that is sinful, but that if you sin inwardly you have broken all of the law.

Conclusion

The law is God's law and God is the judge who renders a verdict and passes sentences. No amount of thoughtful reflection can eliminate this accusatory function from the law. Consequently, the law can never be only a rule for life. It has always exercised an accusatory function and it will do so in the final judgment. It functions this way for every individual, for the god-less as well as the so-called righteous, and also for the regenerate.

Christ had this view of the law, but we have seen an obvious heightening of the demands of the Ten Commandments in his Sermon on the Mount. In contrast to a merely external function of the commandments, he demands the inner fulfillment of the heart. We learn from Jesus' view

of the law that the law was, is, and remains a demand for everyone. It is fully valid. It is irrevocable. Not an iota will pass from it and it ought to be and must be fulfilled (Matt 5:18). Not once did Jesus loosen the law of God. In fact, he tightened it. He “out-lawed” the teachers of the law (Matt 5:20)

When Jesus transposes the criteria for fulfillment from the external to the internal, he presupposes that his hearers know what feelings of hatred and lust are. For those who receive Jesus’ heightened interpretation of the Ten Commandments as directed toward them, it exposes their own inner nature, and demonstrates to them that their opposition to God’s law is not only possible, but actual. Under Jesus’ application of the law, we are all already guilty of these transgressions. The law always accuses and Jesus intensifies this accusation, exempting no one from this verdict. According to Christ, the law always exposes sins. There is no situation, as long as the law reigns over us, where it would not exercise this accusatory function. This is seen in his call, directed to everyone, for repentance from the heart. In light of the law, all we can do, according to Jesus, is repent (Matt 3:2, Mark 1:15, and Luke 13:3-5). Repentance is not the same thing as restitution or a changed heart. Repentance of felt sorrow for what you have been and done.

Jesus recognized the inability of the law, which shows us exactly who we ought to be, to provide its own fulfillment. The law cannot fix what it has broken—that’s what Jesus does. Because of Christ’s fulfilling of his own interpretation of the law and taking the retribution for our law breaking, he takes our anxious dread of the truth under the law. The law is a law of retribution, not only for ill, but also for good. It not only threatens punishment, but also promises reward. The two cannot be separated from each other. If in redeeming us from the curse of the law, Christ has redeemed us from the fear of punishment, then he has also redeemed us from the hope of reward. Neither punishment nor reward determines our attitude toward God. Rather, from God’s side the relationship is grace alone (one-way love); and from our side, faith alone.

This good news is illustrated in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*:

Every little touch would hurt my conscience. But one day, as I was passing in the field, suddenly I thought of a sentence: “Your righteousness is in heaven.” With the eyes of faith, I saw Jesus sitting at God’s right hand. And I suddenly realized—THERE is my righteousness. Wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say to me, WHERE IS YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS?... for that was right before Him. I saw that my good fame of heart could not make my righteousness better nor a bad fame could not make my righteousness worse... for my righteousness was Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Now my chains fall off indeed. I felt delivered from slavery to guilt and fears. I went home rejoicing for the love and graces of God. Now I could look from myself to him... Christ is my treasure, my righteousness. Christ was my wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and salvation.

Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent

“Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul. Amen.”

Ten Commandments and Jesus

Session #3— St. Paul, the rest of the NT, and the Ten Commandments

Review of Session #1 and #2

#1—The Ten Commandments are the summary of the law of God, which is “perfect, true, and righteous” (Psalm 19:7-9) and “holy, just and good” (Rom 7:12-16)...but the law does not have the power to generate what it commands because of the human heart/mind. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so” (Rom 8:7-8)

#2—Jesus repeats the OT view of the Law (Matt 5:17-20) and says it is not to be abolished but fulfilled. Jesus also intensifies the law (Matt 5:21-48). The ultimate intensifying of the law is in verse 48—“Be perfect!”

The Rest of the NT on Law

1. Law, Sinful Nature, and Christ

The sinful mind is hostile to God. *It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*” (Rom 8:7-8)

The law is made, not for the righteous, but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious. (1 Tim 1:9)

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4)

2. Righteousness and promise come, not by observing the law, but by grace through faith and believing in Christ

I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who *believes* is *justified* from everything you could not be *justified* from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38-39)

For we maintain that a man is *justified by faith apart from observing the law*...God, who will *justify* the circumcised *by faith* and the uncircumcised through that same *faith*. (Romans 3:27-31)

It was *not through law* that Abraham and his offspring received the *promise*, but through the *righteousness* that comes *by faith*....The promise comes *by faith*, so that it may be by *grace*. (Romans 4:13-16)

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be *righteousness* for everyone who *believes*. (Romans 10:4)

A man is *not justified by observing the law*, but by *faith* in Jesus Christ. So we have put our *faith* in Christ that we may be *justified by faith* in Christ and *not by observing the law*, because by *observing the law no one will be justified*....I do not set aside the grace of God, for if *righteousness* could be gained through the *law*, Christ died for nothing. (Galatians 2:16 and 21)

All who rely on *observing the law are under a curse*, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do *everything* written in the Book of the Law." Clearly *no one is justified before God by the law*....*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us*. (Gal 3:10-13)

For if the inheritance depends on the *law*, then it no longer depends on a *promise*; but God in his *grace* gave it to Abraham through a *promise*. (Galatians 3:18)

You who are trying to be *justified by law* have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from *grace*. (Gal 5:4)

I consider all things rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ*—the righteousness that comes from God and is *by faith*. (Philippians 3:8-9)

3. Law makes us conscious of sin, brings wrath, increases transgressions, arouses sinful desires, reveals sin, and pronounces guilt; and it does these things in order to lead us to Christ—who takes away our sins.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, *so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God*. Therefore no one will be declared *righteous* in his sight by *observing the law*; rather, *through the law we become conscious of sin*. (Romans 3:19-22)

The *law brings wrath*. And where there is no law there is no transgression. (Romans 4:15)

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:20-21)

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the *sinful passions aroused* by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death...*I would not have known what sin was except through the law*. For *I would not have known* what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, *produced* in me every kind of covetous desire. *For apart from law, sin is dead*....When the commandment came, *sin sprang to life and I died*. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually *brought death*. For sin, *seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me*, and *through the commandment put me to death*....*In order that sin might be recognized as sin*, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment *sin might become utterly sinful*. (Romans 7:5-13)

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. (James 2:10-11)

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. (1 John 3:4-5)

What, then, was the purpose of the law? *It was added because of transgressions* until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come..... *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ* that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (Galatians 3:19 and 24-25)

4. The law is fulfilled in love, which is produced by the Spirit.

He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments—"Do not commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet" and whatever other commandment there may be—are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:8-10)

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Gal 5:14)

If you really keep *the royal law* found in Scripture, "*Love your neighbor as yourself,*" you are doing right. (James 2:8)

But now, by dying to what once bound us, *we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit,* and not in the old way of the written code. (Rom 7:6)

Did you receive the *Spirit* by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by effort?* (Galatians 3:2-3)

Conclusion

God's terms are embodied in the Law. We cannot obey the Law, first, because we are not able to. We are not good enough and are not gifted enough and are not strong enough. Second, we break the Law because we want to. There is something about us, that when we are told what to do, we immediately desire to do the opposite. So the Law fails. The Law fails to accomplish its work in us because human beings cannot do it and also because they will not do it. We therefore cannot justify ourselves.

The law functions according to how obedient we are to the law. If we do what it requires, it promises that we will "live." The law says is that if someone does not continue to do everything written in law, they are "cursed." In other words, if one presumes to be saved by the law, he must become a slave to the law and follow it perfectly all the time, or else it will not allow them to live. No one can do this, and thus we find that what was intended to bring life actually brings death, and that slavery to the law is torment.

Faith, on the other hand, functions according to another's obedience, not our own. It trusts in someone else's work. Paul explains this best in Romans 4, "When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." Whereas law puts all the weight on those of us who presume to obey it, faith puts all the weight on the one in whom we believe, to do the work that we cannot do.

Paul came to believe that what God requires of us is faith, which is child-like trust. This is the only thing God requires of a person. Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Jesus. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God." Thus, God has loved the human race in a new way in the coming of the Jesus Christ. This has put faith in place of Law-keeping as the key to relating to God.

This was a new idea in the ancient world, where religion had always been based on something human beings did to satisfy, appease, or please God. All the ancient religions worked that way. But Paul taught that nothing we do in ourselves is ever enough or will ever satisfy. God has to work the work of divine loving and initiative. All we need to do is trust Christ and believe this good news.

Prayer: Proper 18 and Proper 22

"Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy. Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen."

Ten Commandments and Jesus

Week #4—The Fruit of the Spirit and the Ten Commandments

Review of Sessions #1, #2, and #3

#1—The Ten Commandments are the summary of the law of God, which is “perfect, true, and righteous” (Psalm 19:7-9) and “holy, just and good” (Rom 7:12-16)...but the law does not have the power to generate what it commands because of the human heart/mind. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so” (Rom 8:7-8)

#2—Jesus repeats the OT view of the Law (Matt 5:17-20) and says it is not to be abolished but fulfilled. Jesus also intensifies the law (Matt 5:21-48). The ultimate intensifying of the law is in verse 48—“Be perfect!”

#3—Righteousness and promise come, not by observing the Law, but by grace through faith and believing in Christ. Law makes us conscious of sin, brings wrath, increases transgressions, arouses sinful desires, reveals sin, and pronounces guilt; and it does these things in order to lead us to Christ—who takes away our sins.

Doug Coupland or Aristotle?

In *Life After God*, Coupland says: “My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.” This is an honest response to the Law, especially as intensified by Jesus (Matt 5). We can either respond with this confession/prayer or Aristotle’s advice.

Aristotle held that we acquire righteousness by doing righteous deeds, just as we acquire skills by practicing. In *Ethics*, Aristotle writes: “Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones.” Aristotle sets forth commonsense human wisdom about good works. What he says seems right. We learn to play the piano only by practicing and we learn a skill only by doing. This is the wisdom by which the world runs.

But the good news is different. The righteousness before God comes only by believing in Christ. Works performed on the premise that one was going to become righteous thereby are not good to begin with. Works that can be called good, however, flow *from* righteousness as from an overflowing vessel, not into it as an empty one waiting to be filled. The one justified by faith becomes Christ’s vessel and instrument. Works are only truly good that are done spontaneously and joyfully out of faith, hope, and love. Luther writes: “The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it.”

The Work and Fruit of the Holy Spirit

1. Regulations and Human Effort Do Not Work

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These

are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. *Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.* (Colossians 2:20-23)

Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to obtain your goal by human effort?* (Galatians 3:2-3)

2. The Holy Spirit Works In You and Controls You

Therefore, as you have always obeyed, *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.* (Philippians 2:12-13)

Those who *live according to the sinful nature* have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who *live in accordance with the Spirit* have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but *the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace*; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. However, *you are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit*, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; *but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live*, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. (Romans 8:5-15)

3. The Holy Spirit Creates the Fruit of the Spirit

So I say, *live by the Spirit*, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.* The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Galatians 5:16-26)

He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments—"Do not commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet"—are summed up in this one rule: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" *Love* does no harm to its neighbor. *Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* (Romans 13:8-10)

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Gal 5:14)

This is love for God: *to obey his commands.* (1 John 5:3)

Conclusion

In his writing, Paul commonly portrays the Christian as being composed of two separate and opposing natures, which are always battling one another as long as we live on this earth. One he calls "the Spirit," that is, the Holy Spirit, who resides in our "heart" or "inner being" or "mind" or "spirit." And the other he calls "the sinful nature" or "the flesh" or "the earthly nature," which resides in the very members of our body. Paul must have found it to be a crucial concept, as it appears quite often in his letters. See Romans 7: 18-23 for an example.

Being a Christian means believing that we have been made righteous by the work of Christ alone, and yet still dealing with the fact that we are nonetheless sinning and doing what we do not want to do. Evidently, it was the temptation of many who had received Paul's message of grace, to attempt to blot out these visible transgressions by imposing on themselves all kinds of strict rules made by humans. But Paul pleaded with them that this was not the way, that they had lost sight of what it meant to be saved by Christ, and that they were abandoning the freedom they had found in Christ by seeking a righteousness of their own.

Paul's message in Colossians 2:20-23 is clear: Do not fool yourselves into thinking that, in your flesh, you can defeat your sinful nature. That would be as if to say that your flesh can defeat your flesh, or that your sinful nature can defeat your sinful nature (they're the same word in the Greek). This is the reason the law is powerless to save or even to sanctify—because it demands of our flesh what our flesh cannot do. But, as Paul writes in Romans 8:3-4: "...what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Now, this phrase "live according to" (or in other places "live by") is worth looking into, so that we do not understand it wrongly. Here we see that Christians "do not *live according to the sinful nature* but *according to the Spirit.*" In Galatians we read "So I say, *live by the Spirit,* and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16). In various places, Paul quotes Habakkuk: "The righteous will *live by faith.*" In another place, Paul writes "if you *live according to the sinful nature,* you will die, but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will *live*" (Rom. 8:13). In one sense, we might think Paul is using the phrase as a command: as one is to "live by" or "live according to" a certain set of rules or guidelines, so he should "live by" or "live according to the Spirit." By that thinking, however, we make the Spirit (who is God) into the law, and the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) into burdensome commandments—"You must be joyful, or else!"—and we seem to have lost the whole idea of "freedom" that Paul describes.

There is another way, however, to read these phrases. “Live according to” or “live by” can also be taken to mean “to be given life by” or “to be sustained by.” So we read: “If you are given life by the sinful nature you will die, but if by the Spirit...you will live” (because there is *no* life in the sinful nature). “Do not be sustained according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit” (because there is *no* sustenance in the sinful nature). “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” In other words: “Here is the fountain of life—the fountain that gave you life—from which you may drink *for free* and live. Why would you work in the desert to earn a drink of sand? To drink *water* is to be who you are! You have not earned a single sip from this fountain, but in Him, *all* of it is yours. To drink from here is to be who you are. Now, it is ridiculous to work any longer! Rather trust that through Christ you are of the fountain and the fountain is in, so that you shall live for eternity, and even now, bear fruit.” Of course, even this we will not do, except *by the Spirit*, by grace, because every good thing comes from God alone. Without Him, we would work for eternity to drink from a sand-pit. But He who called us to be alive and free has done the work for us and in us. As Paul said, “by the grace of God, I am what I am...” (1 Cor. 15:10).

“That’s all fine, well, and good,” we might respond, “but what do we *do*? The gospel can’t be that impractical! We don’t just want to trust God; we want to do what He would have us do.” This request is astoundingly similar to that which a desperate crowd posed to Jesus in John 6: “What must we do to do the work God requires?” they asked. And Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent.” The crowd was not content with this answer, but Jesus did not compromise, and at the end of the chapter he told them, “The Spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing” (v. 63). Paul’s message couldn’t be summed up any better!

God has won the Christian’s heart. God has made us a new creation. The battle that still wages in us can only be won by Him, and our work is to not work, but to trust that He *has* and *will* be victorious. That is why Christians set their hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things, for they have died, and their life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ *is* our life (Col. 3:1-4). His Spirit lives in us, so that now, we “bear fruit” that is good. And though daily we struggle with sin, we may be assured that sin is no longer who we are, for “it is no longer I who do it, but sin living in me who does it.” So, neither shall we boast in the good (though He does good things in us), nor shall we fear the bad (though it threatens us still), for we have been clothed with Christ. Our old self has been taken off along with its practices and the new self has been put on, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator (Col. 3:10).

Proper 9 and Proper 17

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart and united to one another with pure affection. Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works. Amen.

Ten Commandments and Jesus

Week #5—How Do the Law and Gospel Relate?

Review

#1—The Ten Commandments are the summary of the law of God, which is “perfect, true, and righteous” (Psalm 19:7-9) and “holy, just and good” (Rom 7:12-16)...but the law does not have the power to generate what it commands because of the human heart/mind. “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so” (Rom 8:7-8)

#2—Jesus repeats the OT view of the Law (Matt 5:17-20) and says it is not to be abolished but fulfilled. Jesus also intensifies the law (Matt 5:21-48). The ultimate intensifying of the law is in verse 48—“Be perfect!”

#3—Righteousness and promise come, not by observing the Law, but by grace through faith and believing in Christ. Law makes us conscious of sin, brings wrath, increases transgressions, arouses sinful desires, reveals sin, and pronounces guilt; and it does these things in order to lead us to Christ—who takes away our sins.

#4—The Holy Spirit work in you to WILL and to ACT according to God’s good purposes. The Spirit dwells in and fills believers and causes the Fruit of the Spirit to grow. The love of God does not first discover but creates what is pleasing to it.

The Problem—Our Hearts

In a letter to a friend (To Benjamin Bailey on November 22, 1817), Keats once wrote: "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of imagination."

Jesus said the opposite about the human heart—“Out of the human heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander, greed, malice, deceit, envy, and arrogance” (Matt 15 and Mark 7).

Thomas Cranmer’s view of humanity is that what the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn’t direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants. The trouble with human nature is that we are born with a heart that loves ourselves over and above everything else in this world, including God. In short, we are born slaves to the lust for self-gratification. That’s why, if left to ourselves, we will always love those things that make us feel good about ourselves, even as we depart more and more from God and his ways. Therefore, God must intervene in our lives in order to bring salvation. Working through Scripture, the Holy Spirit first brings a conviction of sin in a believer’s heart, then he births a living faith by which the believer lays hold of the extrinsic righteousness of Christ.

Jesus Intensifies the Law to Show our Need for Mercy (Tom Weaver, *The Gospel Solution*)

“If you can accept that the teachings of the Lord before the cross were not designed to tell you how to live but to flatten out your self-righteousness, you will be right where God wants you. You will be ready to accept the work of Jesus on the cross, without which no one will ever come to the Father. His teaching is not the ultimate pattern for living. It demonstrates God’s standards, and those standards are impossibly high for unworthy people. Their purpose is to bring us to the place where we fall at His feet and cry: ‘Lord, be gracious to me, a sinner.’”

How Law and Gospel Relate (Paul Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, pages 84-88)

The Law and Grace are resolved in a one-time resolution that is connected to a single historical instant, the death of Christ. The law of God is absolute and the grace of God is undeviating. Psalm 85:10 says that “Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” It is the idea that God’s demands (Law), of his righteousness, will one day coincide with his mercy (Gospel). Hope is held out in Isaiah 53:11-12 for a resolution of the two: “The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities...because he...was numbered with the transgressors.”

The kiss of Law and Gospel, or demand and mercy, is found in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. The crucifixion of Jesus is the union of law and gospel (or one-way love).

The law is good because it shows us how things really stand. Law obliterates our illusions and shows us the truth. But law is also a stress from which there is no release. Nothing we are able to do endows us with peace if its aim is in any way to appease the force of law.

When grace is heard and received after the law has been made clear, when it is not confounded in any degree by the law, it paints a masterpiece: a person unconditionally affirmed who becomes instantaneously the expresser of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control. The graced person becomes the flesh-and-blood example of the thing the law has wanted out of them. Grace produces the appearance of what the law says it wants, but only grace is able to act unilaterally. Looking at the graced person—the one who has been given grace unconditionally—we see established in that person the very faithfulness and chastity and hopeful spirit that the law had sought to pound into that person. Against grace there is no law.

“Wave upon Wave of Grace”—A Puritan Prayer

O God of grace, teach me to know that grace precedes, accompanies, and follows my salvation; that it sustains the redeemed soul, that not one link of its chain can ever break.

From Calvary's cross, wave upon wave of grace
reaches me,
deals with my sin,
washes me clean,
renews my heart,
strengthens my will,
draws out my affection,
kindles a flame in my soul,
rules throughout my inner man,
consecrates my every thought, word, work,
teaches me Your immeasurable love.

How great are my privileges in Christ Jesus.
Without him I stand far off, a stranger, an outcast;
in him I draw near and touch His kingly scepter.

Without him I dare not lift up my guilty eyes;
 in him I gaze upon my Father-God and friend.
Without him I hide my lips in trembling shame;
 in him I open my mouth in petition and praise.
Without him all is wrath and consuming fire.
 in him is all love, and the repose of my soul.
Without him is gaping hell below me, and eternal anguish.
 in him its gates are barred to me by His precious blood!
Without him darkness spreads its horrors before me.
 in him an eternity of glory is my boundless horizon.
Without him all within me is terror and dismay,
 in him every accusation is charmed into joy and peace.
Without him all things external call for my condemnation;
 In him they minister to my comfort,
 And are to be enjoyed with thanksgiving.
Praise be to you for grace,
 and for the unspeakable gift of Jesus.

Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.