

Growing in the Grace of God #03 - the Old Covenant of Law

by Bob Hoekstra

This sermon contrasts the Old Covenant of Law with the New Covenant of Grace, emphasizing the need for internal transformation and the impossibility of justification through the Law alone.

Duration: 48:56

Scripture: Leviticus 19:1-4, Deuteronomy 6:5, 1 Peter 1:15-16

Topics: "Old Covenant", "Gods Law"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the message and content of the law of God. He refers to Deuteronomy chapter 9, where Moses receives the tablets of stone containing the words spoken by God. The preacher emphasizes that the old covenant of law still stands, with the standard of being holy and loving. He also mentions Matthew 5, where Jesus intensifies the law by emphasizing that it is not just about actions, but also about thoughts and desires. The content of the law includes commands to be holy, to revere parents, to keep the Sabbath, and to avoid idols. The preacher challenges the common misconception that the law simply requires people to try their best, emphasizing that God asks for more than our best efforts.

Transcript

Last week, by way of introduction and reminder, we looked at the New Covenant, because this class about growing in the grace of God is integrally woven into the New Covenant. The New Covenant is what Christians live under. This cup, Jesus said, is the New Covenant in my blood, and we are servants of the New Covenant we saw.

The New Covenant we saw was promised to Israel eventually. We also saw that that covenant essentially involves a personal relationship with God, the forgiveness of sins, and then the issue that we're going to spend most of our time on this class, an internal working of God. I don't know how to stress this enough, let alone too much, that the work of God is primarily an internal work that flows out into an outward life.

And that is so unlike the philosophies and religions of the world, where external forces are to come to bear upon man to change him. And we'll spend a lot of time on this aspect of the New Covenant, the internal working of God. We also saw that the New Covenant is inaugurated, instituted, in operation for the church now.

That's part of what Hebrews is all about. It's part of what Galatians is all about. It's part of what the heart of 2nd Corinthians is all about.

And clearly it comes up time and time again in the ministry of Jesus, and very powerfully at the end of his ministry on earth. His ministry continues in heaven, but as his ministry ended and he instituted the Lord's Supper, he made it very clear that what we're to do always in remembrance of him was tied into the New Covenant. It's all about the New Covenant.

So though the New Covenant is promised to Israel eventually, the essential aspects of it are already inaugurated in operation for the church now, and that's critical to understand. And then we saw that all of the New Covenant is related to the grace of God. And we looked at synonymous terms for New Covenant living, or living under the New Covenant, or growing in the grace of God, and just suggested that terms like Christian discipleship, spirit-filled living, and the abundant life, they're all just synonymous terms with growing in the grace of God or living under the New Covenant.

These are not steps to, you know, some kind of Masonic fullness of the spirit or something, you know, after you get to 32nd degree or something like that. There's always more fullness available than we've ever tapped into, but it doesn't come by degrees of kind of, well, now I'm, you know, I'm a 14th degree Christian. The categories of Christian living are really simple.

Flesh and spirit. Self or Christ. One is deadness, and it can just get deader and uglier.

The other is life, and it can just get more sweet and more full. There's no end of the heights into which it can grow or the depths into our heart in which it can go. But the categories are very simple, you know.

It's either man striving or God actually doing something, you know. So all these terms are just a different perspective on the glorious reality of life in Christ. Now, in this study, we're going to begin a contrast concerning law and grace.

Contrast concerning law and grace. This study is the Old Covenant of Law. Next week, study number three in this course is the New Covenant of Grace, and this is a critical contrast to understand, both to see how not to try to walk with God as well as to see how we can walk with God.

The Old Covenant of Law is a great appetizer for the New Covenant of Grace. It's what God uses to throw us on the grace of God, to chase us to the grace of God. And then the more we consider His grace, we are drawn to His grace.

The Old Covenant of Law, a very important issue to look at to understand the New Covenant and grace. We want to see it in vivid contrast with Old Covenant Law. Because you know what happens? If we don't see the radical contrast between law and grace, what do you think, what would you just guess that we sort of naturally tend to drift toward? Law.

Give me a standard. Tell me what to do. Come on, I can do it.

I want to know where I stand. You know, what is it? Do this, don't do that, and don't worry about it. I'll try harder than you ever saw.

I mean, that's the natural tendency, is to drift toward the law. And praise God, He's given us much in the word about the law of God. And it's very important for us to let God speak to us.

For example, we'll be looking at, under the Old Covenant of Law, its message, its inability, its ability, and its fulfillment. Just going right down the headings that we're going to look at in this study. The message of the law, that is what the law says.

What is it saying? Its inability. Ah, you mean there are things the law can't do? Oh yes, very important things the law can't do. But its ability.

There are things the law can do if it's lawfully used. And then its fulfillment. Hey, how do we walk and grow in what the law is speaking about and demanding? And the word of God speaks very clearly on those four areas.

First, its message. Deuteronomy chapter 9, the message of the law of God. That is, what the law is saying when it speaks to us.

Verses 9 through 11. When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water.

Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God. And on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights that the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.

And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights that the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights that the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass at the end of forty days and forty nights that the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.

What covenant is that? The old covenant. What is the essence of it? The law of God inscribed on stones. God's covenant of law, commandments, His contract, compact agreement with His people, terms describing what they needed to know about God.

And the tablets of the covenant, the old covenant of law. What about the content of this? Leviticus 19. Verses 1-4, And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy.

For I, the Lord your God, am holy. And every one of you shall revere his mother and his father and keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

Do not turn to idols nor make for yourselves molded gods. I am the Lord your God." Clearly, as in so much of Leviticus, the law is in focus here. Some of the commandments are even given, revering father and mother, keeping Sabbaths, staying away from idols.

And then right in the midst of all of that context of commandments, a two-word summary of the message of the law of God. Be holy. Be holy.

Living as per the commandments, what are their message? What are they saying? What are they commanding? What are they demanding? Be holy. How holy? How sour-faced? No. Be holy for I the Lord

your God am holy.

The measure of holiness is the holiness of God. Be holy because God is holy. Oh, that means be as holy as God.

That's all it's asking. All we need there is just a little time to work that out, right? Surely we can come up with that. And then in 1 Peter 1, verses 15-16.

We'll come right back to the Old Testament in a moment. 1 Peter 1, 15-16. Remember? These words are repeated by the apostle.

1 Peter 1, 15-16. But as He who called you is holy, the holiness of God, you also shall be holy in all your conduct. You mean beyond Sunday morning, Wednesday night, Bible college class? Yeah, in all your conduct, be holy because God is holy.

Because it is written, and now it's a quote here from where we were reading in Leviticus 19. Be holy for I am holy. The message of the law summarized in two words is be holy.

Now, in Deuteronomy 6, there's another two-word summary of the law of God. In fact, we'll look at three two-word summaries right out of the Scriptures of the law of God. Deuteronomy 6, verse 5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Loving God with all of our being, the law demands it. Right along with that, Leviticus 19.18. Leviticus 19.18. You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Loving God and loving others. And then Matthew 22. See that this is brought right into the New Testament.

Matthew 22. 36-40. Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets. What is this two word summary of the law? Be loving. Love God with all your being.

Well, where do others fit in? Pour out on them the love God has been pouring out on you. Jesus added in the Gospel of John, Love one another as I have loved you. Sacrificial undeserved love poured out on others.

The love of God. Be alert to this aspect of the law of God concerning loving one another. This is a day and age to be very alert to the psychological philosophies of our culture.

They are pouring into the church. In the church the way this Matthew 22 is taught, Love God with all your being. Love others as you love yourself.

And then usually the common bridge is, Now we all know we don't love ourselves the way we should. So obviously you got to get out and learn how to love yourself the way you should. Because only then can

you love others as you love yourself rightly.

And then eventually you can get around to loving God. Now, outside of violating all of biblical theology, What's wrong with that teaching right here in this context alone? Well, the first major twisting of scripture on that is it adds a third commandment. Love yourself.

Learn to love yourself. How many commandments did Jesus say are here? Two. He said everything in the word of God hangs on those two commandments.

There's nothing left to hang on an imaginary third commandment called, You got to learn to love yourself. Another major torturing, adulterating of the scripture in this twisted kind of teaching, Is it not only adds a third commandment, it reverses the priority. What does the teaching of Jesus clearly send people out concentrating upon? Learning to love God.

This new teaching that is totally psychologized, It comes from psychological theory, it doesn't come from the scriptures. In fact, it tortures the scripture and twists it to try and fit it in. Flipping that up on top sends people out learning how to love themselves.

How sad. How sad. Adding a commandment.

Oh, it's serious to add and take away from the word of God. Adding a commandment, that's a very major no-no. And shifting the priorities of the word off of God onto self.

Can you see the clever tactics of the enemy in that? The summarizing of the law is, be loving. Love God with all your being, love others as you love yourself. Just watch out for that twisted view of the American church world now.

Where it's discouraged, disappointed, pressured, failing, frustrated people. You tell them they don't know how to love themselves the way they should. Oh, the flesh grabs on that.

I knew there was something wrong. Yes! And here we go on a quest to love self. We should be on a quest to learn to love God.

And if someone says, yeah, but where do people fit in there? Oh, just pour out on them. The love God pours on you. In fact, give them the loving attention you've given to yourself all your life.

Love others the way you already do love yourself. Self-love is not something to chase. It's something to watch out for.

It's what pulls man under in a self-absorbed, self-centered life. The law of God, be holy, be loving. And notice, both of these appear in the Old and the New Testament.

It isn't that God tried something in the old and, you know, that didn't work so well. So, well, let's try something new. That holiness thing didn't work.

Let's go to, well, just be better, you know. Well, let's see, that love God with all your being didn't work too well. I know, people need to learn to love themselves, you know.

No way is that what it's about. The same words are put in the Old and New Testament. Same God.

He hasn't changed His character. The standard is still the same. Be holy.

Be loving. In Matthew chapter 5, there's one more two-word summary of the law of God. Matthew 5 is from the Sermon on the Mount.

Part of the Sermon on the Mount, major parts of it are all about the law of God. In fact, they're an intensifying of the law of God. Jesus said, you've heard it said, but I say to you.

For example, you've heard it said that a man shall not commit adultery, but I say to you. If you're lusting after someone in your heart, you've already done it. Whoa, man, the law is tougher than I thought it was.

It just gives you no room. It's not just what you do, it's in your thoughts. Man, this is heavy.

And in that context of intensifying the understanding of the law of God, not lessening it, Jesus added in Matthew 5.48, therefore, the point is this. You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. So there's another two-word, the third two-word summary of the law given right in the Scriptures.

Be perfect. When the law of God is speaking to us, here's its message. Be holy.

Be loving. Be perfect. The old bromide, you hear it all the time.

Well, nobody's perfect. And that's a true confession. But all that means in light of the law of God is everybody's in major trouble.

Because the law demands perfection. Be perfect. That's what the law is saying.

Be holy. Be loving. Be perfect.

Be holy. Be as holy as God. Be loving.

Be loving like Christ. Be perfect. How perfect? As perfect as your Father in heaven.

You know what it seems most people think the law is saying? If you said to a lot of Christians, well, summarize the law of God. Often people would summarize it something like this. Try your best.

Sound like you bought that, no? Work harder. Be better than you used to be. I mean, that's the way it seems people summarize the law in practicality.

Who knows precisely what they would say its biblical theological content is. Though in practical import, people would kind of give the impression that, you know, it's just... Here's the reasoning. Hey, listen.

I'm giving it my best shot. What more can God ask of me? Well, let me tell you. God is asking of you so far beyond your best shot, forget thinking that your best shot will be sufficient.

The message of the law is way beyond that. Not only do people generally think that the law is just saying, do your best. They often kind of infer, and by the way, don't be too uptight because God grades on a curve anyway.

You know how you can pick that up? Because people say, you know, I'm not doing great, but I'm not doing as bad as he is. Oh, good. Where does that put you now on the curve? About a C-, you know? Well, I don't know, you know.

I don't know about that. I'm not doing as well as Pastor Chuck, you know, but, well, you know, I'm not doing as bad as she is. That gal, oh, man.

So often in our dialogue, our language, our explaining of our Christian life and struggle, it often comes through that we're not hearing what the law is saying. The law is saying, be holy, be loving, be perfect. See, what God is demanding of us is far more than just our best effort.

He's demanding something that our best effort could not even begin to achieve. This doesn't mean we don't end up throwing ourselves totally, heart, soul, mind, and strength into the life in Christ. But we'll see along the way, as we're doing that, it's in union with, in identification with, in cooperation with, as a response to something God is doing in us.

If we think our best is going to satisfy God's commands, we have not heard what the law is saying. Jonathan? I was just thinking as you were sharing that, that Jesus, when Jesus expanded on the Lord and sat on the mount, he was showing that the law was internal, not external. Mm-hmm.

Yes, what a scary thing, you know? Especially when the fact that it was given on stones externally. People just assume, you know, you just try your hardest and measure up. Much more spiritual thing than that, really.

Amen, amen. So, the message of the law, high, lofty message. But here's an interesting thing.

There is an inability in the law. Let's look at that next. It's inability.

That is, what the law cannot do. Now, this is not man bad-mouthing the law because we just don't like tough standards. This is God revealing what his law was not designed to do.

Hebrews 7, 18 and 19. Hebrews 7, 18. For on the one hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness.

For the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God. Right in those two verses, a contrast between the old and new covenants.

The old covenant of law and the new covenant of grace. And right in verse 19, the heart of the inability of the law surfaces. For the law made nothing perfect.

Now, think of that. In Hebrews 7, 19, the law demands perfection. But the law can provide perfection to no one.

The implications of that are enormous. In other words, the law was not designed to give what it demands. Let's go a little further.

Let's see how significant it is that the law can make nothing perfect. Let's apply that truth. Let's examine it in the area of justification.

Galatians 2, 16. Justification. You know, starting out with God.

That which happens at the time of new birth, but is something more judicial than birth related. It's a pronouncement by God, the holy judge, that a sinful, unholy person is innocent, righteous, not guilty, justified in the sight of God. Galatians 2, 16.

Boy, notice how this verse pounds this issue. Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law. You cannot be justified by working hard to measure up to the law.

You cannot try your best to be as holy as God, to be as loving as Christ, and to be as perfect as the Heavenly Father, until some point comes where the Father goes, close, just a little harder, just a little more, just a little bit more effort, just a little bit better performance. There, bingo. I now declare you justified.

A man is not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Even we have believed in Christ Jesus. Why? That we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.

Why is this so important? For by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. I mean, it just boom, boom, boom, hits it. By works of the law, striving to live up to the standards of God, no one among the human family will be justified.

That is, declared righteous, declared holy, declared innocent, declared not guilty. No one. So, the law can't justify you.

By works of the law, no flesh will be justified. The law just showing us what we have to do and demanding it of us, and then saying, okay, give it your best shot. Justification could never come that way.

Chapter 3, verse 11. But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith. That little statement, first given in Scriptures through... Habakkuk 2.4. Absolutely.

And then it appears in Romans 1, Hebrews 10, and Galatians 3. That one little statement. So critical, gets right at the heart of it all. The just shall live by faith.

That applies to justification, certainly. Right here, it's applied to justification, that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident. Why? For the just shall live by faith.

Here, that's applied to justification. So, the law can't justify because it's... Faith is needed for justification. Trust.

Dependence. Now, again, we're not going to spend a lot of time on justification in this course. We didn't come together as Christians in Growing in the Grace of God to study justification, but we want to look at it because the very same issues and principles and realities that bring us justification are the same realities we're to press on in for sanctification.

And that's what exactly happens here in Galatians 3. A lot of Galatians 2 is about justification. Watch this. Watch these two verses, Galatians 3, 2, and 3. This only I want to learn from you.

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Now, this is about the days of justification, new birth, starting out with God. How did we receive the Spirit? In other words, how did the Spirit of God come to first dwell in our lives? By the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Did we do our best? Did we get, you know, seven out of ten commandments going pretty well, about a B-minus average, you know, or whatever? Greater on the curve, of course, you know. And it was just that point came where the Lord said, okay, I cannot withhold my Holy Spirit from you any longer.

You know? You're just too deserving. You know, so all of a sudden the Spirit comes to dwell in us. That would be ludicrous.

We know that's not the way we started out with God. This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? It's by the hearing of faith.

We heard the truth that Christ died for our sins. In His name we could be forgiven. He would send new life to us by the Spirit, and His Spirit would come to dwell in us.

And we believed all of that. We were forgiven, born again, justified in His sight, and the Spirit came to dwell in us. It was all by the hearing of faith.

A hearing of what God said that stirred faith in our hearts. Now watch this. Verse 3. Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit? We're still talking justification issues.

New birth, starting out with God. Now watch this shift. Are you now being made perfect by the flesh? The whole half of that verse is about sanctification.

Having begun in the Spirit, justification, new birth. Are you now being made perfect, growing up, being sanctified by the flesh, by your own best effort to live up to the standards of God, to make yourself like Christ and as holy as the Father? And notice the question. Are you so foolish? If the American church were honest, we'd almost have to say, Okay, all together now, yes we are.

Because coast to coast, across denominational lines generally, even those who have been born again by the Spirit, are trying to be made perfect by the flesh. They thank Christian maturity, Christ's likeness, growth in godliness, a more righteous life. All hinges on how hard you try and how much you do.

I mean, this is a pretty high standard. Be as holy as God. Be as loving as Christ.

Be as perfect as the Heavenly Father. You can't do that with just a casual effort. You've got to throw yourself into it diligently.

And folks are trying to be made perfect by the flesh. The flesh is what tries to strive to live up to the law of God. Well, just as no flesh will be justified by works of the law, so no flesh will be perfected, sanctified, mature, grow up, by their best effort to live up to the standards of God.

Now, every real Christian knows no flesh, no humanity, no one can be justified by works of the law. How do we know every Christian knows that? Exactly, to put it the reverse way, if they don't know that, they're not a Christian. I mean, it isn't like we have this great insight, you know, into every life, oh boy, to my wise.

It's like, if you don't know this, you're not a Christian. But what is it? That though we know that, we become so foolish as to think that having begun in or by the work of the Spirit of God, now we're going to grow up, mature. But what is it? That though we know that, we become so foolish as to think that having begun in or by the work of the Spirit of God, now we're going to grow up, mature, be victorious, be more Christ-like by the flesh.

I mean, this great book of Galatians is written to clarify both justification and sanctification. It's packed with justification verses. We'll get to other sanctification verses like Galatians 2.20 later on.

Okay. The law demands perfection. No one will be justified by trying to live up to the law, so the law can't justify.

But no one will mature, grow, be sanctified, perfected, develop in godliness by human efforts to live up to the law, by law works. The flesh and law and law works and deeds of the flesh, they all go together. Human effort to live up to the standard of God.

Oh, may God make it as clear to us on sanctification as He has made it to us on justification. You know what the stakes are? We'll see right through this whole course. We're talking life and death.

We're talking dead humanistic religion or the living power of God at work in our lives. We're talking about human self-striving or God doing a heavenly miracle day by day in and through our lives. I mean, the contrast is enormous.

Enormous. The law cannot justify, that is, start us out with God. The law cannot sanctify, that is, grow us up with God.

The law cannot perfect lives in either standing or walk. Well then, what can it do? Some people at this point would like to just jettison the law. You know, I never liked it anyway.

I always felt kind of uncomfortable around it. Well, sure, look what it's demanding. How comfortable can you get with something that's saying, on your own best effort, be as perfect as God? I mean, that's not a comfortable message once you really hear it.

If you think that's your only hope. If you think that's what God's really asking of you. My goodness, that's what I've got to do out of my resources? Who are you kidding? Then why have the law around? Because it has some ability.

There are things, you know, Scripture says, the law is good if one uses it lawfully, as God intended for it to be used. Okay, what can the law do? What is the ability of the law? I put down in our outline, just for a little reflective thinking, and then we'll get into some specific verses, Genesis through Deuteronomy and Matthew 5 through 7. In other words, the Pentateuch and the Sermon on the Mount. The five books of Moses and the most extended message of Jesus.

The Pentateuch especially, the first five books, are especially packed with the law of God. It's when it was first given and expounded upon. And though all of the Sermon on the Mount is not about the law of God, major sections of it are.

So there are two Old Testament and New Testament presentations of the law of God, just to reflect on a little bit. What are they saying? Why are they there? What value to us? Well, in general terms, there is the revelation of the character of God. Be holy for I am holy.

What does holiness look like when you bring it down to living? Well, it doesn't include lying. There's an absence of fornication and adultery. It just brings holiness down into practical terms, to see the character of God as it would be demonstrated in human lives.

So we can see His character, His standard, what blesses Him and what doesn't, what is an affront and what isn't. His will for us can be seen there. Do this and don't do that.

Okay, that's the will, the preference, the desire, the mind of God. One way to think about the Pentateuch and the Sermon on the Mount in the extent that it deals with the law of God is the ability of the law of God is to be like a spiritual yardstick. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Why is it that everyone doesn't measure up? Well, the glory of God is a pretty long yardstick. How glorious is He? How holy is He? Well, look at all the commandments. You sum them up, they're saying, be perfect.

How are you doing? Well, I'm just trying to stretch right up there. Measure me God, how am I doing? All of us on our own righteousnesses, there's filthy rags. We're spiritual pygmies measured by that yardstick.

The law is like a yardstick. It measures holiness, love, godly perfection. Demands it, says, here's the standard.

You measure up, here's what God's measuring you by. When our kids were little, our kids are pretty big now, they're 25, 26, and 27. When they were little, when they were running around the house, growing up was big stuff, you know.

Want to grow up, want to grow up. Boy, they loved to stand up against the doorpost and have us take, back in those days, we took a yardstick, you know. Now you shoot out a laser tape or something and measure them.

Back in those days, as my kids used to say, Daddy, back when you were alive, did they have... Back when I was alive, they had yardsticks. So we'd take a yardstick to our kids and measure them. And oh, how they loved to be measured, you know, and see how they're growing.

And boy, to hit that, into that yardstick, whoa, what progress, you know. And we'd measure them, make little marks there on the door, you know, and they loved that. Now, what if I measured one of them in the later stages of the progress and they were four inches short? And I go, oh man, you know, you're just not measuring up.

And I break off four inches of the yardstick and I say, here, eat this. Now see, you'd say, well, wait a second. You're confused there.

That yardstick can only measure them. That yardstick can't nourish that child and make it grow and go, bingo! That's the law of God. The law of God is the perfect standard.

It measures precisely and exactly. And He uses God as the reference. And the stick goes out of sight.

And the measurement's made and the Scriptures declare, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory. No one measures up. He's too glorious.

He's too perfect. He's too holy. He's too loving.

I'm not clear on that. Because Psalm 119 talks about how it is nurturing and how it does. Yes, but that's a completely different use of the word law.

Psalm 119 talking about the law of God is not talking about the commandments and throwing them out as our best effort. The law of the Lord there is just like all those other ones. The testimonies, the commandments is like 5 or 6 or 7 or 8. In total, they're talking about the word of God.

The message of God. God speaking to us words of spirit and life. You're saying the actual law doesn't nourish? The commandments of God cannot cause growth.

They show what a life should look like that's growing. But they can't produce growth. See, the law cannot perfect anyone.

The perfecting of the saints is the growing, the developing, the maturing of the saints. And the staggering truth is the law cannot do that. But if you're mature, you would be obedient? The more a person matures, the more they're obedient, yeah.

Oh yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. We'll spend a whole night in here eventually talking about New Covenant obedience.

Obedience isn't thrown out the door either. But the law cannot make anyone perfect. It cannot.

It can reveal the character of God, the will of God. You know, it can give us things that are valuable to know. But it cannot make us like what it's talking about.

It cannot justify which is related to birth. It cannot give us new birth. But it also cannot sanctify.

But it's a great declaration of the character of God, the will of God, what pleases God, what doesn't please God. It's just that the law itself cannot make us what it's talking about. But we'll come at this from dozens of directions.

Hang on a little while. In fact, maybe even before we're done here, there'll be some clarification. Let's look at it a little bit more.

The ability of the law of God. What can it do? If it can't justify, can't sanctify, can't perfect, can't change our lives, what can it do? Romans 3, 19 and 20. Romans 3, 19 and 20.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Here's part of what the law can do.

The law can make people accountable to God. It can give the knowledge of sin. It can close every mouth ever created, ever birthed naturally.

For example, if we stood before God and God said, here's your life, here are my standards. Now, give an account of yourself. You know? Yes.

I mean, it just closes your mouth. On our own, it makes us accountable. We're guilty.

What can we say, God? We have violated your perfect will, your standard, your holiness. We have fallen short of your glory. It makes all the world accountable to God.

It gives us the knowledge of sin. It makes us answerable to God, gives us knowledge of sin. Romans chapter 7. Romans chapter 7. By the way, we're not saying that a Christian can never benefit from the reading of the commandments of God.

Not at all. We're just making a very radical but clear biblical point. The law can't birth you or grow you.

That's not saying that a Christian can never get any value from hearing the law of God. But we'll come to that a little bit later. I think I see what you're saying.

It's basically his standard. Exactly. Exactly.

It is a yardstick. It is. And it's real obvious with a child, you can't grow a child by that which you measure it.

You know? You can't say, oh, here, this shows your, you know, eat this. Just like you can't take people and give them only the law, and therefore only their best effort to match it, and never expect them to be birthed into the kingdom, or once birthed, to grow up in the kingdom. That's the point.

And it has a radical implication, too. Or many radical implications. In fact, I think we'll be looking at hundreds of them through this course.

Let's add this, Romans 7. Romans 7, verse 5. For when we were in the flesh, speaking back when we were just nothing but flesh-fallen creatures, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. Verse 7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not. On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.

For I would not have known covetousness unless the Lord said, You shall not covet. Verse 13. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not.

But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin, through the commandment, might become exceedingly sinful. The point of all these verses being that the law stirs up sinful lusts, provokes them, reveals them as a part of fallen humanity, and even of the flesh of a Christian, then reveals sin for what it really is. The law exposes sin, defines sin, reveals sin, prods it, pokes it out into the surface in lives, that sin might be exceedingly sinful, recognized for what it is, an abomination to God, a separation from God, something that God must be allowed to deal with.

And then the ultimate, the ultimate ability of the law, Galatians 3.24. Galatians 3.24. This is the ultimate ability. This is the greatest work of the law. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

See, there is a great ability in the law. It makes us accountable. It can, it is able to make us accountable to God.

It is able to close the mouth of sinful humanity without a defense before God. It is able to clarify for us what sin is all about. It is able to tutor us to be a schoolmaster, a teacher, an instructor, to take us from our guilt and sin and death to the remedy, Jesus Christ.

So praise God for the law. Just because the law can't justify and can't sanctify, doesn't mean it has no value, doesn't mean we throw it out, and we'll see along the way, doesn't mean that we who are justified by faith cannot find benefit and blessing in the law. But we cannot find in the law itself birth or growth.

The law is not a life giver, it's a life demander. The law is not a life provider, it's a life measurer. Here's God's life, it's perfect.

How do you measure up? You know, that's what it is. A witnessing tool from God to us and then us to others? Yeah. The law is a powerful work of God.

But the wonder of it all is, though it's so powerful, so effective, and so able and can do such great things, it cannot perfect lives. And it fades in its glory when compared to the glory of the new covenant. We'll see that along the way, too.

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