

How Christ Transcends the Law

by Catherine Booth

Christ transcends the Law by giving us power to overcome sin through faith and assurance of salvation.

Scripture: Romans 3:20, Romans 7:7, Romans 7:22, Romans 8:3, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:17, 1 John 5:13

Topics: "Christ And Law", "Assurance Of Salvation"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the surpassing power of Jesus Christ over the Law, emphasizing the vital point where the Law fails in giving power to fulfill itself. She highlights the importance of assurance of salvation, explaining that true faith brings a personal realization of acceptance in Christ, which the Law cannot provide. Catherine urges believers to trust in a living, present Savior who is able to save them from the power of sin, emphasizing the need for obedience and wholehearted consecration to Christ for true salvation and assurance.

Transcript

ROMANS viii. 3, 4.--"For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

I WILL try, by God's grace, as much as in me lies, to deal with this subject in a way that shall not provoke controversy. I do deplore this. I wish there was a way of improving the future without disturbing the present, but it is a misfortune, I suppose, that there is not, and, however carefully one may guard oneself in trying to lead the Lord's people higher, there is always somebody who will quibble and make objections and take exceptions. But we cannot help this. We must be true to our convictions of God's truth, and to what He has taught us, and revealed to us by His Spirit, for we speak the things that we do know, and do see, and do handle of the Word of Life. However, I will try to keep to ground on which I think all really spiritual people will be agreed. We may go a bit farther some day, but this afternoon we will just go so far as we believe every real disciple of the Lord Jesus will be willing to go with us, and, oh! may the Holy Spirit give us one mind and help us to see in His light, and if there is anything we do not see in His light, oh! that this very hour He may show it to us, for He knows that we are all willing to see, and only longing and desiring to know the whole truth, as it is in Jesus. Let every sincere soul put up this prayer for himself and for me, as I put it up for myself and for you, that the Holy Spirit may lead us into all truth, at any rate as far as it is important to our own salvation and our practical exhibition of the salvation of Christ to other people,

for a dying world is hanging upon our skirts. They are looking at us to find out what religion is. They will not come to this Book. They will not even hear about it, but they are looking to us to find it out; how momentously important it is, therefore, that we should be truly living Epistles, known and read of all men. We are epistles, whatever sort of doctrine our lives teach. We cannot help ourselves, for while we profess to be the Lord's, we are living epistles, known and read of all men.

Specially, then, I want first to look at the 3rd verse of the 8th chapter. Now, I thought it would, perhaps, be the most profitable way to look at this subject, and would meet the experience of some who I know are here, to try to answer the question, Wherein does the Law fail to save us? Then we shall be able to see wherein and how Jesus Christ transcends the Law.

First, then, the Law does not fail in giving a knowledge of sin, for it is by the Law, as the Apostle says, that I know sin. Without the Law I was dead, so dead in sin that I did not realize it at all. Its power was so complete over me that I did not realize it was sin, and, therefore, was asleep and comparatively happy; but when the commandment came, "sin revived and I died"--that is, to all hope of making myself righteous. The commandment showed me the awful chasm there was between me and it. The Holy Commandment, just and pure and good--and myself unholy, impure, and unrighteous. A light from Sinai flashed upon it, and I died in despair and utter helplessness. Thus, I say, the Law does not fail in giving knowledge of sin, for it is by the Law that I get the knowledge of sin.

Secondly.--Neither does the Law fail in begetting a sense of guilt and condemnation on account of sin, for it is by the Law again that I get this. I not only get the knowledge of sin by the Law, but I get the sense of guilt and condemnation for sin by the Law, for the Law comes in and condemns me. It is the spirit of death and condemnation to me: it says, "you should have done this; and because you have not done it, you shall die." I feel that the Law is just and good, and yet I feel that I do not keep it; and, therefore, I have the sentence of condemnation upon me because I do not keep it. Then the Law does not fail in begetting a sense of condemnation and guilt on account of sin.

Thirdly.--Neither does the Law fail in producing desire after righteousness and effort to attain it. The Law begets in me the desire after righteousness, by contrasting my condition with the purity and holiness of God's law. I see the Law to be good and holy, I see it to be desirable, and I desire to attain the righteousness of the Law. I am speaking now of a convicted sinner, as the Apostle did when speaking of the same character. A convicted sinner sees the righteousness and beauty of the Law of God. He sees that it is holy, just, and good. He sees that it is intended to make him holy, just, and good, for the Law is not sin, as the Apostle says, but is ordained unto righteousness, which the sinner has failed to attain because of weakness, but struggles to attain. The first thing is to set himself to strive to attain the righteousness of the Law by his own efforts. This was the case with the Apostle. He longed to do what he could not, and he constantly did what he would not; and, as it was with the Apostle, so it is with every convicted sinner on earth. We were constantly longing after righteousness. We could not help looking on the beautiful, pure, and holy law of God, and we longed to keep it, and tried again and again, until we were tripped down again and again, and died in utter despair, never being able to attain it for ourselves and of ourselves. So you see the Law begets first a knowledge of sin; secondly, it begets guilt and condemnation on account of sin; and, thirdly, desire after righteousness and effort to attain it.

Thus far I think we must all be agreed. Wherein does the Law fail? It does all this for me. It brings me right up, as it were, my schoolmaster lashing me right up to the cross, opening my eyes, creating intense desire after holiness and efforts for it, and then it just fails me. Where? At the vital point. It cannot give me power.

That is where the Law fails. It cannot give me power to fulfil itself. I am strengthless through the weakness of the flesh and the sinfulness of my nature to keep it, and so I struggle and wrestle for power to keep it, but I have not power. "What the Law could not do, in that it was weak, God sent his Son to do," and I maintain HE DOES IT, and that is the one vital point where the Son transcends the Law.

Oh! but there is a Gospel nowadays, a Law-Gospel. A great deal of the Gospel of these days never gets any farther than the Law, and some people tell me that it is never intended to do so, and then I ask, Wherein does Christ Jesus advantage me? What am I better for such a Gospel, if my Gospel cannot deliver me from the power of sin? If through the Gospel I cannot get deliverance from this "I-would-if-I-could religion," this "Oh!-wretched-man-that-I-am religion," wherein am I benefited by it? Wherein does your Gospel do more for me than the Law? The Law convinced me of sin, and set me desiring and longing after righteousness; but wherein is the superiority of Jesus Christ, if He cannot lead me farther than that? And I say, "Very well; your faith is vain, and Christ died in vain, and you are yet in your sins, if that is all it can do." If that is all Jesus Christ can do, His coming is vain, and I am yet in my sins, and am doomed to hug this dead corpse to the last, and go down to hell; for death will never do for me what the blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ cannot do for me. If Christ cannot supersede the Law, then I am lost, and lost for ever. Wherein then does this "Oh!-wretched-man Gospel" supersede the Law? Will anybody point, it out to me?

Oh! but the real Gospel does. The Gospel that represents Jesus Christ, not as a system of truth to be received, into the mind, as I should receive a system of philosophy, or astronomy, but it represents Him as a REAL, LIVING, MIGHTY Saviour, ABLE TO SAVE ME now.

I said to a lady once, who was seeking this deliverance, and who was struggling and wrestling, as I kneeled by her side, 'Wait a minute. Suppose Jesus Christ were here in His flesh, as He once was. Suppose He were to come to your side now, and put His hand upon you and say, 'Hush! I know your desire; I see your heart; I know what you are longing after. You are longing to be delivered from everything that grieves Me, upon which My pure eyes cannot look with allowance. You are wanting to be brought into full conformity to My will, and that is what I have come to do now. I have come to live with you. I am taking up my abode under this roof, and I will never leave your side. I will be with you by day, and I will be with you by night. I will sit at the dinner-table and tea-table with you, and walk out with you, and go to bed with you, and rise up with you. Don't be troubled. I will never leave you and never forsake you.' Do you think if He were to come and say that, you would be able to trust Him?' 'Oh! yes.'

'You would not be afraid?' 'Oh! no.'

'Now, what would it be that would save you? Would it be the bodily presence of Jesus, which they laid in the sepulchre, and which was as dead and helpless as any other clay when the spirit was gone out of it? NO, it would be His spiritual presence, would it not? and His spiritual eyes seeing you, and His spiritual tongue speaking to you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then, this is just the presence that He has promised to be with everyone of His people, and now He is here and able to do this, and will abide with you and enable you to abide in Him, if you will just trust Him; now, just trust Him.' And the Lord, by His blessed Spirit, did take and reveal this truth unto her, and just then and there she did leap into the arms of her Saviour and realize that He did save her.

Oh! friends, some people do not think we make enough of Christ. We make all of Christ, only it is a living Christ instead of a dead one. It is Christ in us, as well as for us. We believe in Christ for us, and we should not have been here at all, but for Christ for us up there for ever and ever, and nobody will hasten to throw the crown at His feet readier than I shall; but we believe in order to do it we must have Him in us, and if He is not in us, then it is sounding brass and tinkling cymbal to call upon Him for us. He must be in us. Christ in us as well as for us, and those whom He is not in He will not be for. If He dwell not "in you," ye are "reprobates." But Christ in us, an everloving, ever-present, Almighty Saviour--is just able to do what the angels said He should do, that for which He was called Jesus, viz.: to save His people from their sin.

Then how does He this? Wherein does He supersede the Law? Wherein does Christ do for me and wherein is He made to me, what the Law could not do or be to me? We have seen what the Law could do and how far it could go. We have seen that it fails just at the vital point of power. Now, how does Christ become this power to me? How is He made unto me--not for me, up in Heaven; He is there too; but how is He made unto me down here--wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? How does He deliver His people from their sins? How does He save us from the power of sin? Now, you who are longing to get free, try and listen to me, and oh! may the HOLY GHOST TEACH US. He does this, first, by giving:

Assurance of Salvation. He saves and then He makes us conscious of the fact, which the Law could not do. All it could do was to set us struggling after it. It could not give us assurance. Now, by assurance, I mean the personal realization of my acceptance in Christ; my acceptance by the Father; by present acceptance I mean the inward assurance, which men and women find for themselves, or have revealed in themselves, which they know as a matter of consciousness. Not that which their minister tells them; not that which they learn from books; not even that which the Bible only tells them, for there are thousands of people who read the Bible, who are not saved, and who know they are not. You all know there are thousands of people, who believe it in vain.

I was walking down the Anxious Room at one of Mr. Moody's meetings, when two ladies came and said, 'Will you please speak to us?'

I don't know why they came to me, except it was my plain dress which made them think, I ought to know, even if I did not, how to deal with souls. We took three chairs and sat down. The youngest was a lady about 30 or 33, and very intelligent, evidently an educated person, and the elder was an old lady, gorgeously attired. They sat down; and as to the younger one there was no mistake about her earnestness. Mr. Moody had been preaching on "The Cities of Refuge," and showing how the soul who desired to be saved had nothing to do and nothing to suffer, but only to run into the Cities of Refuge and be saved--a beautiful sermon for convicted sinners--and this lady said to me, almost passionately, 'How is it? there must be something wrong somewhere; there must be a mistake somewhere. I believe all that Mr. Moody has been saying, every word of it. I have believed every word since I was a little girl; in fact, I believe the whole of the New Testament--all about Jesus Christ, and I believe, moreover, that He died for me, and that He makes intercession for me, and yet I'm not saved a bit. I have no more power over sin than other people, and I know I am not saved. Now, what can be the reason? I am afraid it is want of faith.'

That is the universal resort to fall back upon by all souls in that condition. I said 'Will you be honest with me. It is of no use coming to a spiritual doctor any more than to a physical doctor if you are not frank; you would only mislead him. If you really want to be saved, be honest with me, and I will try, by the help of the Spirit, to help you.'

'I do indeed want to be saved,' she said. 'I often go into my room, and weep, and struggle, and pray for hours. I try to believe. I think I have believed, and I come out and I am no better.'

'Oh,' I said to myself, 'alas! here is the experience of thousands.' 'Tell me, in these times when you say you go into your room, and struggle, and pray, and strive, and believe; tell me, is there anything that comes up before the eye of your soul as an obstacle and difficulty that has to be put away or embraced; anything that comes up and that the Spirit of God says 'you must sacrifice this, or cut off that, or do the other?' Just tell me that.'

She was quiet for a moment and speechless. She waited; then she drew her breath and said, 'Well, yes, I am afraid there is.'

'Ah!' I said, 'that is it; it is not want of faith, it is want of obedience. Now you may go on another ten years, going into your room, struggling and striving, and until you trample that under your feet, and say, 'Lord, I will follow Thee at all costs,' you will not be able to believe. I don't want you to tell me what it is; sufficient that you know it, and that the Lord knows it; but, after an experience of dealing with hundreds of souls just at this point, I tell you: you must give up that idol or embrace that cross, whatever it may be; I believe that here is the cause of your trouble.'

'Then,' she said, 'I will make no secret of it. I am the only member of an unconverted family that has any desire after God. My husband is a worldly, unconverted man, and I am in a worldly, unconverted, circle, and always when I come to the Lord Jesus, it comes up before me that I will have to confess Him and to live like a Christian and I am not willing to do so.' 'Then, my dear lady, it is the old story over again of the Young Ruler. Now, you know, I should be untrue to your soul, if I were to go on plastering YOU with untempered mortar. There you are; make your choice. You cannot be a Christian, and not confess Christ. You cannot be a Christian, and not live like one before your unconverted relatives; and, therefore, if you are not willing to take up the cross and follow Him, you cannot become His disciple.'

Then I went down on my knees with her, and we talked and prayed, and, at last, she said, 'By the grace of God, I WILL confess Him.'

Bless the Lord! and the light of salvation soon gladdened her eye, for it shone through her face. She found herself able to believe at once, and this is just the condition of thousands of souls. She got assurance then. She got saved. Before, she had been trying to believe she was saved, when she was not--quite a different thing to getting saved and then knowing it. People are told to believe this, that, and the other. As a gentleman said, at whose house I once stayed, 'I had a curious episode the other morning. I have had a gentleman here of some note in the evangelistic world for two or three days, and he came in the other morning at breakfast time and said, 'I am happy to tell you that both your gardeners are converted.' I was very thankful to hear it; and surprised to hear that the work had been so quickly and thoroughly done. Well, I was walking in the grounds, and saw one of the gardeners. 'John,' I said, 'I am glad to hear the happy news.' He didn't seem to know what I meant.

'What news, sir?'

'Well, I hear you have given your heart to God this morning. You are converted, saved?'

'Well,' John said, 'I could hardly say that, sir.' 'Then what has happened? Something has happened in your experience--some change taken place?'

`Well,' he said, `I don't hardly know that. The gentleman brought a Bible to me and read two or three verses, and asked me if I believed, and talked very nicely to me, and asked me again if I believed; then I said I did, and then he said I was all right; but I can't say I feel any different."

Now, I am afraid there has been sadly too much of that. There is all the difference between believing the letter of the Word and knowing that you are saved. I say, that man was not saved--was he? I say, the lady who spoke to me in the Anxious Room, was not saved--was she? And I say there are, alas, thousands today in just that position. They are not saved. They manifest it by their fruits. They confess it. They write it to me in their letters on the right hand and on the left. Members of churches ten, fifteen, and twenty years, some of them Ministers of the Gospel, and yet they tell me they are NOT SAVED!!

Thus, you see it is something more than the belief after all. It is something more than what my minister tells me, something more than what books tell me, and what the Bible tells me. It implies and includes this, but something more than this. It is believing in a living, personal, and almighty Saviour, and believing in Him now, and that faith brings the realization. The other brings nothing. When people believe thus, the Spirit comes into their hearts crying, "Abba, Father!"

To them there is no condemnation. They have the witness of the Spirit that they are in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of the Son comes into their hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" and they know by demonstration, by inward consciousness, that they have passed from death unto life. You see there is all the difference between the means of salvation and salvation itself. The means of salvation is not salvation. The means only brings salvation. "Thy faith hath saved thee." "By faith are ye saved," and when you are saved by faith then consciousness attests the fact.

Your own spirit attests the fact, and God's Spirit attests the fact, and you know it beyond controversy. You have assurance, and this is the first indispensable condition of power over sin, for while I remain unassured of my salvation, oh! what power the Devil has over me. `Oh,' he says, `you're not saved at all. What is the good of your standing out on this point, for you are not saved at all. You may as well go all the way. You are under the power of sin, and may as well remain there.

You have not got the witness of your salvation, and, therefore, what is the use of standing out here or there?' But when we have the witness of the Spirit in our souls of our acceptance with God, that He does now for Christ's sake pardon and receive us, what power it brings! This is what the old Divines called assurance of faith, a conviction wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ has given Himself for me, that God has accepted that offering in view of my sin and transgression, and for its sake, and its sake only, has justified me freely from all things by which I could not be justified by the Law of Moses, and that in Him God becomes my Father, and now accepts me and looks upon me well pleased--a conviction wrought in my soul by the Holy Spirit; for, as the Apostle says, "No man can call Jesus `Lord' but by the Holy Ghost."

There must be the spiritual realization of Him as Lord. Why, anybody can call Him "Lord." Tens of thousands of people call Him "Lord" nowadays, whom nobody supposes to have the Spirit. What did he mean? He must have meant a confession of Jesus out of a heart which has a revelation and recognizes its Lord; such a confession as Thomas made when the conviction of His Master's Deity shone into his doubting soul: "My Lord and my God." To this relationship only the Holy Ghost can testify.

Don't ever tell anybody he is saved. I never do. I leave that for the Holy Ghost to do. I tell them how to get saved. I try to help them to the way of faith. I will bring them up as close as ever I can to the blessed

broken body of their Lord, and I will try to show them how willing He is to receive them, and I know that when really they do receive Him, the Spirit of God will tell them quickly enough that they are saved. He will not want my assistance to tell that. I have proved it in hundreds of cases.

Nobody knows the soul, but God. Nobody can see the secret windings of the depraved heart, but God. Nobody can tell when a full surrender is made, but God. Nobody can tell when the right hand is cut off, or the right eye plucked out, but God. Nobody can tell when a soul is wholehearted, but God, and as soon as He sees it, He will tell that soul that it is saved; but, if God has not told you, be up and stirring, and strive to make your calling and election sure, for you are not saved yet, or you would know it.

What are you to believe unto? Hope? Oh, dear no! you don't believe unto hope. Effort? Oh, no! you had that before in the Law. SALVATION? Yes! and if you "believe unto salvation" you will get "saved," and if you are not saved, you have never believed unto salvation. Instead of trying to make yourself happy in this state of uncertainty and misery, for Christ's sake, get up and get saved. It is a great deal easier to get saved, than it is to make yourself believe you are saved, when you are not.

The one is a philosophical impossibility; the other is a glorious possibility at any moment, when you get low enough before God, and give up all, and take His Son as your precious and almighty Saviour. God's Gospel is beautifully adjusted to the laws of our mental constitution. He who wrote, framed, and conceived it, created us, and He has made it like a key to fit the lock, and knows just the conditions that are necessary, and He has conformed His Gospel to those conditions.

My Friend, if you want to know you are saved, this is the only response I can give, and the only way I know, and I have talked to hundreds of souls of all grades and conditions, to many Ministers of the Gospel, deacons and leaders, in just this state. For years my labours were exclusively carried on in churches and chapels, where, naturally, church members have come, and they have told me by hundreds with their own lips that they have been members so many years and were never saved.

I am not, therefore, speaking without experience in this matter. I tell you, when you "believe" in a Scriptural sense, you will get "saved" in a Scriptural sense. When you put out of your head all these newfangled notions about faith, and cease to credit any faith that does not save the soul and bring it into conscious union with Jesus Christ, and resolve to have such a faith as will do that for you, then you will get salvation. I never in my life knew a soul come to that resolve who did not get saved.

I have had people before me, who were worn almost to skeletons and were driven almost mad, and the first thing they have said has been, when I have asked the reason, 'Oh! I have no faith. It is want of faith!' This is the universal lament, and, when we have come to close quarters, I have invariably found it has been no such thing, but want of OBEDIENCE, which spiritual teachers have not had the wisdom to discern, as Christ did in the heart of the young Ruler, "one thing thou lackest."

He saw that young man's besetting sin to be covetousness. I do not know that He would have said the same to every rich man, but in the case of the young Ruler He saw that the love of his possessions was so paramount, that unless he let them go and made a clean sweep, he could not follow Him and be a consistent disciple; and so He said, "Sell all, and come, follow Me," and the young man went away sorrowful; and, mark you, Jesus Christ did not call him back, and yet he looked after him and loved him.

His great, benevolent, heart panted after him, and He desired to have him; but He saw it would be a greater evil to call him back and compromise the conditions of salvation, than to let him be lost. And yet,

methinks, if there was any case in which a compromise could be made, it would have been in this. He did not, do, as many would have done in our day--call him back and say, 'Here, young man, I think I have been a little too hard on you. You shall sell half, and keep the other half and come and follow me.'

Oh, no! Everybody would be saved at that rate. There would be no test of whole-hearted consecration to Him then. If you can let people into heaven on terms like these, they would be only too ready to close with them. But whether ministers teach people the truth or not, the Holy Ghost does; and He puts His finger on the sore spot, and says, 'If you want to follow me, you will have to renounce this, and give up that, or embrace the other,' and if the soul says, 'No, Lord. I would follow, but suffer me first to go and hug this idol'; then Jesus Christ says, 'Very well, go!' That is the sort of faith most people are resting in.

I see we shall not get any farther in this address than assurance of salvation. You are panting after it. You are longing for it. You may have it. God wants every one of His people to have it. Get saved, and you will know it. Use your Heavenly Father's letter to find your way up to Him. It is not the letter you are to rest in: it is the God who wrote it. Use the letter to get at the Spirit, for the letter will not save you--it is the Spirit that saves you. Hug this volume to your heart as the expression of your Father's will and the record through which you are to believe on His Son, but it is the Son who is to save you. People talk about exalting Christ. I think this is His glory, that He can save His people and make them know it, and make them feel it, and carry them as He did Paul and Silas through the prison and the stocks singing His praises and make them unspeakably happy in His love. Assurance of Salvation! All want it when they come to die. Why don't people get it while they live. Did you ever know a professing Christian come to die, who did not want it? Did you ever know one dare to die without it? or, if you ever knew such, you know what a miserable death it was. Then, I contend, that what is necessary to die with, is necessary to live with. Why not get it while you live? Assurance! Assurance! And you can have it just now. Hallelujah! Amen.

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