

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 4–

- I. According to Scripture, there are two ways, and two ways only, in which a man stands before God: either in the first Adam or in Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. These two men stand before God as “common persons” in covenant with God, persons representing their seed, acting on their behalf, and by their actions determining their eternal lot and welfare and we are all in one or the other of them.
 - A. The covenant made with Adam at creation and the covenant into which Jesus willingly entered at His incarnation was the *same* covenant, namely, *the covenant of works*. This covenant promised life upon obedience and threatened death upon disobedience, Gen 2.17.
 - B. When Adam *broke* the covenant by his sin against God (Gen 3), he made himself and all his seed to be sinful and guilty of eternal damnation, Gen 5.1-3; 6.5; Ps 51.5; 58.3; Eph 2.1-3. In contrast, Jesus *kept* the covenant of works (both by his doing and dying: honoring it with His perfect obedience and satisfying it with the perfect sacrifice of Himself) and secured its promised life and justification for all His people, Rom 3.19-25; 5.1-2, 12-17; 10.4.
 - C. Therefore it ought to be our greatest concern and endeavor to come out of the first Adam and enter into union with the Second Adam, since to be in the first is death and eternal damnation and to be in the Second is eternal life and justification.
 1. This move from the one to the other is a work of divine grace in which we *admit* our lost estate in Adam, *abandon* all hope of reconciliation in ourselves, and *cling* in faith to the promises of salvation and reconciliation with God in the Second Adam, Jn 3.16.
 2. And it’s the glory of the gospel of God that it offers the Second Adam freely unto all men (Lk 24.47), promising that all who believe and trust in Him alone for salvation will have not only deliverance from wrath and reconciliation with God, but a joyful walk in holiness answerable to their new state, Isa 55.1-3; Mt 11.28-30; Rom 10.4; Gal 2.16; Rom 8.1-4.
- II. *Yet*, nothing is more difficult in the Christian life than to live in the full enjoyment of this free and full salvation, assured of our favor with God in Christ and walking joyfully in the light of it.
 - A. And the reason for this is because we’re naturally prone to the legalistic spirit we inherited from Adam. *Every single one of us is a legalist at heart*, and nothing reveals this more than the proclamation and display of the free grace of God in Christ, Mt 20.8-15; Lk 15.25-32.
 - B. While we profess with our mouths that we’re delivered from the covenant of works in Adam and have come into a covenant of grace in Christ, we’re ever prone to abide and continue in a works-based relationship with God. In other words, while we may be *evangelical in head*, we’re prone to be *legalistic in heart*. And this tendency reveals itself in *one of two ways*: in the direction of *legalism* or in the direction of *antinomianism*.¹
 1. We hear the gospel’s *imperatives* to walk holily, and we imagine that God’s not gracious to His people and that ultimately we have to earn everything from His hands. Hence we think along these lines: if we do good, God will bless us because of that good; if we pray

¹ Sinclair Ferguson points out in his new book (*The Whole Christ*) that legalism and antinomianism share the same root, namely, a legal heart. On the surface they seem to be opposing extremes and only in need of a little dose of the other to be brought back to center. But at root, they arise from the same error: the separation of the law of God from the character of God (Satan’s lie in Eden). *Legalism* involves a distorted view of God’s character (thinking He is only good to the workers) while *antinomianism* involves a distorted view of God’s law (thinking it to be contrary to God’s goodness). At the root of both, then, is the separation of the person of God from the law of God—which is why the cure and remedy for them is one and the same: the gospel. Legalism is essentially “any teaching that distorts the generous love of God and the full freeness of His grace. It then [in antinomianism] distorts God’s graciousness revealed in His law and fails to see law set within its proper context in redemptive history as an expression of a gracious Father. This is the nature of legalism. Indeed we might say these are the *natures* of legalism.” (p. 95)

well God will hear us according to how well we prayed; if we repent, God will forgive us because of the depth or sincerity of that repentance; and if we do badly, we can expect nothing from God but punishment and abandonment.

- a) These statements reveal a *legalistic heart* or *spirit* in which God's goodness and grace are judged to be conditioned upon our works. Despite his confession, this person's practice reveals the notion that he's not so justified by Christ's obedience that he doesn't still need to earn things from God by adding his own obedience to it. He still sees himself to be "under the law of works" before God.
 - b) On the surface, this person walks on heavily in the direction of *legalism*, lacking both the comfort and assurance of Christ's perfect righteousness and the joy of obedience *because God's character is distorted*.
2. **Or** we hear the gospel's *indicatives* that Christ has done all for us, and we imagine that God's law is not a display of the goodness of God to His people and that God's grace in Christ frees us from the law, thereby removing any obligation for us to obey it.
- a) This reveals the *same legalistic spirit* in which God's goodness and grace are seen to be conditional. But in this case, since the gospel teaches that Christ has already earned everything, this person abandons the law of God altogether and does *nothing* in the way of duty and lives a life of sin. Since there's neither a hell to fear nor a heaven to secure, he stands still like a horse that has no fear of the spur—which is a greater evidence of a legalistic spirit than in the former case.
 - b) On the surface, this person walks on rebelliously in the direction of *antinomianism*, also lacking both the true comfort of Christ's perfect righteousness and the joy of obedience *because God's law is distorted*.

III. Needless to say, the correct path between these two errors is a middle one.

- A. Jesus Christ must be truly received by faith (Jn 1.12)—this is overlooked by the *legalist*, who subjects himself to the law of God in a way that seeks to add his works to Christ's.
- B. *And* Jesus Christ received by faith must be walked in answerably by holiness of heart and life (Col 2.6)—this is overlooked by the *antinomian*, who abandons the law of God and lives in sin.

IV. The point is this: if we're to *receive Christ truly*, we must rightly understand the *gospel* by which He's proclaimed to us; and if we're to *walk in Christ answerably*, we must rightly understand the *law* by which He governs us—because it's the confusing of the gospel of God with the law of God that leads to error.

- A. The middle path between *legalism* and *antinomianism* can only be discovered and enjoyed by properly distinguishing the law of God from the gospel of God. Consider:
 1. The law of God has been *fulfilled* by Christ for His people; *but not annulled*. Instead, it's been reissued to us in a new form from His own hands as our Lord and Saviour, Jn 14.15
 2. The gospel of God proclaims *freedom* from the covenant of works for all who believe in Christ for salvation, *and yet* it calls every believer to *walk before God in perfect obedience*, 1Pet 1.15.
 3. Thus the law of God says "Do and live"; the gospel of God says "Live and do." The law of God says "Do or be condemned to die" while the gospel of God says "You are delivered from condemnation, therefore do"—*and yet* it's *the same law* that governs in both cases.
 4. The law of God shows us our sin and the gospel of God shows us that Christ has taken away our sin; *and yet* it's still possible for believers to sin under the gospel.
 5. ******The law of God was given to lead us to Christ and yet Christ was given to bring us under the law.

****Next week**: we'll join the conversation in *The Marrow* and learn from *Evangelista* that there are three laws mentioned in Scripture (the law of works, the law of faith, and the law of Christ—Rom 3.27; 1Cor 9.21; Gal 6.2). After learning what these are, we'll start to study the law/covenant of works in detail.