

Discourses on the Law of God

Lesson 3: All are Transgressors, Jn 7.19; Rom 3.10-20, 23

- I. No man, but He who is both God and Man, ever did or can perfectly and exactly fulfill all that the Law of God requires, Rom 3.23; Js 3.2; Isa 64.6; Prov 20.9; 1Jn 1.8, 10. To these verses we could add all the exhortations which we find in Scripture to confess our sins, to repent of them, and to watch and strive against them—all which destroy the insolent pride of those who think themselves innocent or, at worst, self-righteous before God (Prov 30.12).
- II. “But are the laws of God then *impossible* to be fulfilled?”
 - A. The laws of God are in themselves possible as well as just. There’s nothing which they require of us which God didn’t endow us with strength in our creation to perform. In Adam, man was able to obey, i.e. able to not sin (Latin: *posse non peccare*).
 - B. But since the fall, by which all men became corrupt and depraved, perfect obedience to the law is impossible for any man (Latin: *non posse non peccare*).
 - C. And it’s not unjust of God to require of us that which is impossible to us when that impossibility is our own fault and doing. In other words, it’s not God, but we ourselves, who’ve made the keeping of His laws impossible. We’ve bankrupted ourselves, but God still may, and does, righteously require from us the debt of obedience which we owe Him as His creatures, Mt 22.37-40.
 - D. But although a *perfect* obedience is impossible, yet, through the assistance and work of divine grace, a *rudimentary* and *sincere* obedience *is possible*, Ezk 36.26-27; Eph 2.10; Tit 2.11-14; Phil 2.12-13. Thus it’s not impossible for us, by grace, to strive and reach after it. And every step we make in the way of it and toward it is not only satisfying and rewarding, but also encouraging and quickening.
- III. “To require more than it’s possible for us to perform seems like a discouragement to our Christian duties. For why would we even attempt that which we know is impossible?”
 - A. It’s true that it’s impossible for us to attain to the law’s perfection. But we need to understand the nature of the perfection we’re pursuing as Christians. There’s *a legal perfection* to which we cannot possibly attain because it requires our natures to be free of the stain and corruption of sin and all our actions to be in perfect accord with all the Law’s demands. *But*, there’s *an evangelical* or *gospel perfection* which is a state of personal righteousness and holiness which God accepts and rewards. And this evangelical perfection consists of three things (cf. WSC 85-87, 97):
 1. True and sincere *repentance* for our past offenses, by which we seek forgiveness from God and seek, with His help, to walk no more in those sinful ways.
 2. A true and lively *faith* in Christ, whereby we rely on the merits and satisfaction of Him alone for the remission of our sins.
 3. A sincere *endeavor* to live more holily and to walk more strictly before God, according to the Rule He’s given us.
 - B. When we do all this in the truth and sincerity of our hearts, we’re said to be perfect with an evangelical or gospel perfection. And this is all the perfection and righteousness that’s attainable by us in this life. It’s nowhere near unspotted before God, but being the work of His grace within us and given our union with Christ, God accepts it—for Christ’s sake, washes its imperfections in the blood of Christ, and rewards it as if it were perfect, Lk 1.6; Job 1.1
- IV. **Thus**...while gospel perfection *is* attainable in this life, and is *actually* attained by every sincere and upright Christian, *no one* can be saved by his own works since legal perfection neither is nor can be attained by any man for two reasons:

- A. The Law of God is infinitely spiritual and obligates us not only to the performance of its external duties, but also requires the perfection of inward dispositions. It commands not only the doing of a thing but how we do it, i.e. with what motive and affection we do it, Dt 6.5. Moreover, the Law gives no allowance for any failings—no second chances, no sliding scale.
- B. We're totally depraved, in every property and faculty of our being, Gen 6.5. Our *understandings* are darkened, our *wills* are perverse, our *affections* are impure and sensual, our *hearts* are hardened and insensible cesspools of wickedness, our *consciences* are defiled, and *we* are at enmity with God, Rom 8.7. And although this corruption in our natures *can* be healed by regenerating grace, as long as we're in the body it's only healed *in part*, Gal 5.17; Rom 7.21-24

V. Application

- A. Therefore let this truth serve to abase the pride and stain the glory of all flesh
 - 1. What are you, O man, but a mass of sin, rottenness, and corruption? Let your conscience bring in its accounts and you'll see yourself desperately indebted to the justice of God. Read over the black catalogue of your sins and see, with astonishment and horror, how much you owe.
 - a) Consider your presumptuous sins (Ps 19.13). Sins committed against knowledge and the check of conscience, with a deliberate and resolved willfulness. And have you not many times relapsed into those sins, against your vows, promises, prayers, and repentance?
 - b) Consider your sins of ignorance (Ps 19.12). They're numberless! Through ignorance, carelessness, and thoughtlessness, we go on from day to day with little thought of what we do, whether it be right or wrong.
 - c) Consider your sins of infirmity and weakness, sins which you've committed by the sudden surprise of temptation. They may not be willful and presumptuous, but they're gross and scandalous (cf. Peter's denial).
 - d) Consider all the swarms of your secret sins, vain thoughts, and sinful desires. Though the world doesn't see these, God sees them all and sees them as sinful in His sight.
 - e) Consider your omission of many holy duties. Neglect of prayer. Neglect of love. Neglect of service to others. Neglect of the means of grace. Neglect of worship. The number exceeds your ability to count them.
 - f) Consider all your miscarriages in the holy duties which you did perform. The dulness of your heart in duty. The waywardness of your thoughts in prayer. The sinful motives behind many of your Christian duties. The frowns behind your smiles, the anger behind your love, etc.
 - 2. Your guilt is so great, how can you possibly look God in the eye? If you don't feel this load now, then you certainly will later, when it'll be too late. *Let the Law do its *convincing* work while the gospel is yet being preached and mercy and grace is being offered to you in Jesus Christ.
- B. Are all transgressors of the Law? Then see a woeful shipwreck of the hopes and confidences of all self-justifiers
 - 1. An honest, quiet, civil life, free from the gross and scandalous pollutions of the world is an insufficient plea for heaven. Yet, that's all most men rely upon! Their lives are harmless, their dealings are upright, none can complain about them, and if God will save any, surely *they* will be among them. But this foundation is vain before a holy God, who sees the great number of sins of which such men are guilty, sins which blind them to what they truly are (Mt 23.37).
- C. See then what an absolute need we all have of Jesus Christ and a work of grace.
 - 1. We're all guilty and nothing can cleanse us of it but the blood of Jesus Christ, Heb 9.22; Eph 1.7; Rev 1.5
 - 2. One purpose of the Law is that the necessity and all-sufficiency of Christ to save us may be rendered all the more conspicuous. The Law wasn't given that we should seek justification by it, but that, finding it impossible to be justified by it, we would thereby be driven unto Christ's righteousness, who fulfilled it in Himself for us and who also satisfied for our transgressing of it, Gal 3.24. And when we use the Law in this way, we show we understand the gospel and have the saving faith which it brings.