

Philippians 3: 1-11
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Series on the 10 Commandments – Law and Gospel
June 7, 2015

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them 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. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Totally sinful and perfectly righteous at the same time!

Today we are beginning a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments. You might be thinking, "You mean we are going to get the LAW all summer long?" Of course we are. We preach the law in every sermon. But you are also going to get the gospel all summer long as well, because we wouldn't be true to our calling if we gave you just the law.

Really, the law is not a bad thing. Paul said in Romans 7 that the law is "holy, righteous and good." The problem with the law is not on God's side, but on ours. We don't like the law because we are rebellious at the core of our sinful nature. We don't like to be told what to do and not to do. We want to decide for ourselves what's right and what's wrong. So our sinful nature likes to "tame" the law in three ways.

First, we treat the law like something we can use to make up for the bad things we've done. If I have tipped the scales of justice against me by sinning, I'll do something to make up for it, like putting a few more dollars into the collection plate. I once had a man come into my office and confess a sin he had committed. Before I could even tell him that God forgave him, he reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and wanted to give the church something. His face got red when he realized that all he had was a five dollar bill, which wouldn't come anywhere close to covering up his offense.

Do you sometimes use the law that way? Have you ever thought in your mind that if you just were able to get that one sin out of your life, you would be so much closer to God? Sure you have. That's the legalistic sinful nature inside of us telling us we can do something good to make up for our wrongs.

Second, people like to use the law to make themselves look so much better than someone else that they know. "God, I thank you that I am so much better than other men are. I go to church every week. I say my prayers every night. I am a better Christian than the man next door!" Does that sound familiar? Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee who prayed something like that. Our sinful nature

would like us to believe that we can somehow be closer to heaven if we just keep a few commandments really, really well – or at least better than our neighbor does.

Third, sometimes we like to look at the law as if it's a mountain we have to climb. Maybe we aren't very good at keeping the law right now, but if we try really, really hard, someday we'll get up that mountain. The higher we get up that mountain, the better we feel about ourselves. There may even come a point when we can look around and we'll hardly even need Jesus in our life at all, because we will have become the perfect, model Christian. Well – almost. And that's the problem. The law doesn't give us any wiggle room to be "almost" perfect. The law demands perfect holiness.

So how should we be using the law? Using the law is not like climbing a mountain. Using the law is like going spelunking. Do you know what that is? Spelunking is exploring caves. Only the cave we are exploring with the law is our heart. And when we use the law correctly, we will find the most horrible sins you can imagine tucked away in the recesses of our heart. Imagine if we could have a spiritual microscope focused on your heart, and we could all watch a video to hear and see all the terrible thoughts that you had on your mind this week. I can tell you that you wouldn't want to see what's in my heart and I probably wouldn't want to see what's in yours. But God sees that every day. The law makes us aware of our total depravity before God.

That's what we are going to do in this sermon series, and we are going to shine the light of the gospel into all those horrible corners of your heart, because only the gospel can wash away those sins and only the gospel can motivate you to stop sinning and start living for Jesus instead.

I. Before the law we are **TOTALLY SINFUL**

In the first verses Paul tells the saints at Philippi to watch out for certain false teachers that he calls "dogs" and "mutilators of the flesh." There were false teachers who were telling Christians that faith in Jesus was not enough to be saved. They insisted that some of the Old Testament laws like circumcision were a mark of "true Christianity." These false teachers were legalists in the true sense of the word. They were looking to the law to be sure of heaven when only the gospel can give that assurance. And as most legalists do, they hold up certain laws as being more important than others.

How does Paul respond? He says, "If you want to brag about being circumcised as if that means something, I can do better than that. I was **circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.**" Paul had been a blue blooded Pharisee all the way. He was not only an Israelite, one of God's chosen people. He could actually tell you what tribe he was from. He was a Pharisee in regard to the law. Pharisees actually added more laws to the laws of Moses. They not only gave ten percent of their money. They even counted out their garden seeds and gave ten percent of that! They not only kept the Sabbath. They counted the number of footsteps they took on the Sabbath so as not to exceed 999, which was number they made up. Paul did all these things, and he used to be proud of it. He actually thought that he could keep the law so well that it could earn him a place in heaven!

Do you have any pride in the things that you have done in your life – as if these things mean something before God? What things come to mind if I were to ask you what in your life shows that you are a true Christian? My first response would be, "I go to church every Sunday." Of course, that's not

fair because you pay me to be here! But let's just take a moment to peel back the layers on that act of righteousness – going to church. You see the law not only examines outward actions, it also examines your thoughts and motives. So how many of you are almost mentally asleep right now? Jesus chided his disciples about not staying awake for an hour. But twenty minutes? Can't you pay attention for twenty minutes? How about that hymn we just sang. Did you listen to the words or just mouth them with your mouth? I am always amazed at the power of inattention that our mind has. We can be reading and singing and thinking about something else all at the same time!

And that would be true of every single good work that you can think about in your life. That's what Paul means when he says, **“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them 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.”** Do you see what Paul says? The good things I thought I was doing I have to consider in the loss column. In other words, even my good works are evidence of sin in my life – the total depravity of my sinful mind. My worship is sin. My prayers are sin. My offerings are sin. None of these things can rise to the perfection that the law demands. Paul uses an even more explicit word. He calls his righteousness “rubbish.” That's a milder term than what the Greek word means. The Greek word is the stuff you throw on the manure pile. That's how much our “righteous acts” are worth.

Friends, if we look at the law the right way and use it for the right reason, it will always leave us humbled before God. It will leave us desperate to find a way back to God. It will leave us starving for something that will satisfy our longing for being right with God. It will leave us in complete despair of ourselves, because there is nothing we can do or give that will make us right before God. Is it fun to do that, to go spelunking in the sinful recesses of our hearts and minds? Of course not. Even though that doesn't feel very good about ourselves, it prepares us for this wonderful gospel that Paul shares with us in our text.

II. Before the gospel, we are PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS

Listen. **“I consider them 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.”** Do you know how perfect Jesus is, how completely righteous he is? I want you to think about how far the sun is from the earth. It's 93 million miles away. The next closest star is 39 trillion miles away. The size of our galaxy is 25,000 times that. And we are only one of many galaxies in the universe. Jesus' righteousness is many times greater than that compared to ours.

How righteous is Jesus? When he was baptized, God the Father said of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” He said that about Jesus who made it through his infant years and his growing years and his teen years without sin. We get to examine his life under a microscope during his ministry, which is recorded in the gospels. At the end of those years, God the Father said the same thing on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Jesus never whispered a lie. He never forgot to pay attention to the sermon in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, which explains why he

could answer all the professors' questions in the temple when he was twelve. He never sang a hymn or prayed a prayer he didn't mean. Even on the few occasions when Jesus got angry, it was a righteous anger, a godly anger. Jesus never did anything wrong and he always did everything right, not just outwardly but from the heart.

Do you want that righteousness? Paul said in Romans 10: **"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."** That means that Jesus kept the law all the way through, all the way to the end, for your sake. So throw away the garbage righteousness. Don't even think about the good things you've done, because they don't rise to the level of perfection. Just trust in Jesus. Just believe in Jesus. You will have a righteousness that is from God and comes through faith. You are totally sinful and perfectly righteous at the same time.

Then Paul says something strange. **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."** Paul says he wants to know Jesus. Why would he say that? Surely Paul knew Jesus. He met him on the road to Damascus. If anyone knew Jesus, Paul knew Jesus. Paul also knew that his faith in Jesus must be renewed and grow every single day. In his sinful nature, there was still the legalist, which always falls back to the law. Paul could easily have become a new kind of Pharisee. "I'm not like those old Pharisees. I've changed. I'm better than that. I spend all my time preaching the gospel. I'm an example to the flock. I don't make up new laws or demand that the old laws have to be kept. I thank God that I am not like other men are, especially like those Pharisees. I even suffer for Jesus!" Paul knew that he needed to experience what he experienced on the road to Damascus every day of his life.

How do we keep from slipping back to becoming legalists? Paul says: **"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."** He's talking about a daily life of repentance in which he experiences an earth-shaking, eye-opening, road to Damascus change in his life every day. That happens to us when we take that journey down into the deepest corners of our hearts and shine the light of the gospel on those stubborn and closely held sins. That happens when we wash ourselves daily in the waters of our baptism by dying with Christ and rising with him again.

I want to *know Christ*. There was a movie out a number of years ago called "Fifty First Dates." It was a love story about a woman who falls in love with a man, but has this condition where she wakes up every morning forgetting what happened the day before. So she has to fall in love with the man all over again every single day. Sometimes when we think of a life of repentance, we think, "Do we really have to do that every day?" Think of it this way instead. You get to fall in love with Jesus all over again every single day of our life. You get to celebrate your forgiveness. You get to rejoice in your salvation. You get to look into the window of Jesus' heart and see his unconditional love.

I am looking forward to our sermons series on the Ten Commandments this summer. Because we know Christ, we can be honest with ourselves and with God about our sinfulness, because we know that we are completely sinful and perfectly righteous at the same time. Amen.