

God's Law in the Godly Life

by J. Glyn Owen

The gospel of Jesus Christ recognizes the regal majesty of the law and fulfills its demands in the cross of Christ, leading to the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in believers.

Duration: 45:07

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17, Jeremiah 31:33, Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:3-4

Topics: "Godly Life"

Description

In this sermon on Romans chapter 8 verses 3 and 4, the preacher discusses the role of God's law in the God-honoring life. He emphasizes that the law of God is objective and has absolute authority, but in the flesh, humans are unable to fulfill its demands. Therefore, God sent his son, Jesus, in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin and fulfill the righteousness of the law. The preacher highlights that the law cannot save or sanctify sinners, but the Gospel establishes the dignity and authority of the law through the Savior and the salvation it offers.

Transcript

Romans chapter 8 verses 3 & 4. The subject we have billed as God's law in the God-honoring life. Let me read then. 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. Now we are living in an age when law, order and discipline are certainly at a great discount. One doesn't need to pause even momentarily to prove that.

I think we would all concede the truthfulness of the statement without any further ado. The spirit of the age is against every concept of an objective law that is inflexible, that has absolute authority over anyone. The fashion of the age is in the directly opposite direction from that.

Not only that, because of this probably we find in our day and age that quite a number of professing Christians have tended to stress even certain Christian doctrines in such a manner that they dishonor the law of God. I suppose this is one of the most subtle dangers for a young Christian. And we've all been there at one time even if we are not there just now.

Sometimes we attempted, attempted to believe what is not biblical. Then there are other times when we can lay hold of a biblical doctrine and so blow it up out of all proportion that the truth becomes untrue. The very doctrine that is based upon the Word of God eclipses some other doctrine, some other teaching, which in the pattern of God's Word needs to be seen alongside the one that has become so central in our thinking.

All the doctrines of Scripture are like the various hues of the rainbow. They match, and they belong to one another, and the one moves into the other, and together they make a whole. Beware of that Christian who is always nibbling away at one passage of the Word of God, or one thrust of Scripture, or one doctrine of Scripture, or one theme of Scripture.

The probability is that he's never seen the wood for the trees. Because when one sees the wholeness, the panoramic wholeness of Scripture, then one ceases to stress the one over against the other. Now may I just refer very briefly to two doctrines of Scripture which have been so stressed in recent times that they have done disrespect to what the Scripture says about the law of God.

The first is the great doctrine of love. Not so much the love of God for us, but the doctrine of Christian love for God, and for one another. Now you have read about it and you've heard it.

People have gone so far as to say it quite bluntly like this, love God and do what you like. Of course this was said many a long year ago by others before us, but we've we've caught hold of the slogan, we've we've resurrected it from the past, and there are many people who say that today. Now you notice what that does.

If you live according to that principle, then you have no objective point of reference. It doesn't matter what you do, if you can say well I'm doing it out of love for God, it passes. Now the doctrine of love for God is absolutely vital.

Paul tells us that when we are justified, that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. And every Christian man and woman should know something in this. We should be serving the Lord and worshipping the Lord, not just out of duty, but because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

We want to do it, we rejoice in it because we love him. But this doctrine has been so pressed that the doctrine of the law has been lost sight of. Take another one.

There are those who in recent times have said so much about the doctrine of Christian liberty, that they are bound to nothing. In other words they have stressed what is an unquestioned doctrine of Scripture. The liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

Of course he sets us free. Paul rises to heights of ecstasy to say we are no longer under the law. Sin shall not have dominion over you.

This is one of the most blessed things that we can preach about. A Christian here tonight, however young he is, however mature he is, it makes no difference. But if you're a man or a woman in Christ, sin can never never send you to hell.

It can never master you. It can never bully you and send you to perdition. It can't do that.

Sin shall not have that dominion over you. It's no longer that kind of tyrant. It can't be.

But the same Paul who preaches that doctrine says that the gospel does not do away with righteousness, but establishes the law. The last verse in Romans 3. There is a sense in which we are free from the curse of the law. But that does not mean to say that the law has got nothing more to say to us.

It is so important therefore to see these biblical truths in perspective. And I have felt constrained tonight to dwell upon this theme. I believe it's important.

The place of the law of God in the life of the God honoring or the godly man. What place should the law of God have in my life? Now I'm taking it in this context because here is a background for the Good Friday and the Easter message. That's the context from which my text is taken tonight.

It is God sending forth his Son. Sending forth his Son to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. And the purpose of it all? Mark it.

In order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. God expects that men and women who profit savingly from the coming of his Son should be law abiding and law keeping and law honoring. That the righteousness of the law might be forgotten by us.

No. Minimized by us. Not on your life.

Fulfilled. Fulfilled. Filled to the full in us.

Now I want to bring out what is laid upon my heart in terms of three main statements. And the first is this. We start at the beginning.

The gospel of Jesus Christ recognizes the regal majesty of God's law. The gospel recognizes the majesty of the law. We must never think of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a way to circumvent the law.

To get around it. To get out of it. I'm afraid it is possible for those of us who are preaching to suggest sometimes something akin to that.

And the law of God corners us and the gospel kind of gets us out somehow. Now it does that. It saves us from the tyranny of the law.

But in a way that meets all the requirements of the law. Therefore it doesn't circumvent it. It faces the challenge of the law and it meets it.

And having met the last demand of the law in the cross on which he died, Jesus opens up a new and living way out of hell in this present life. Into the hell of God's pardon and God's peace. The Christian does not circumvent the law.

God in Christ deals with the demands of the law in virtue of which we are saved. Now let's look at it. First of all in this respect, the gospel recognizes the regal majesty of the law in its power to condemn the transgressor.

What is the background to the gospel of Christ? Well the background is essentially this. Mankind is in danger. Why did God send his son? Why Bethlehem? Why Calvary? Why did God send forth his son into this world? Well the answer is simple.

You can take it from anywhere you like. It's the same. Let me quote John 3 16 again.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. You see the truth is this. God saw the world in danger of perishing.

Our world was in danger as God saw it and therefore in order to meet the situation he sent forth his son. Now the question is this. Why was the world in danger? Why was any man in danger? Why is any man in danger tonight? Well the answer is because of the majesty and the demands of the law of God.

The need of the world arises because God's law tells us what God requires of us and none of us are able to meet it. On the contrary we've broken it. We've slighted it.

Some of us have it and we read it and we can even repeat large areas of it but we don't keep it. We know enough of the law to say that so-and-so is wrong and so-and-so is wrong but we don't apply it to ourselves. The reason why men are perishing is this.

We have the law of God first of all in our natures, the light that lighteth every man that comes into the world and then we have it in the Word of God but despite the fact that we have it inwardly in our consciences and externally objectively in the Word of Scripture we have not kept it. So you can bring the Scriptures together like this. Sin is the transgression of the law.

Add to that the great dictum of St. Paul, the wages of sin is death. And you have the human problem. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

What is the sin? It's the transgression of the divine law and the wages of sin is death. Therefore the whole world is lost before God. Have you noticed therefore that when Jesus Christ came into the world and he came to quote my text for sin to be a sin offering, never on one single occasion do we read of him turning to the Father and saying, look Father there's no need to be quite as hard upon sin.

There's no need to judge all men and to condemn all men because of sin. Your judgment is harsh, your judgment is cruel. Let's cut it down a little bit.

Don't let's be too hard on men. You know you never hear the Lord Jesus Christ say that. Even though he was the one who was to take the curse of sin and its consequences in his own body, he accepted it as right and as necessary.

In other words he respected the regal majesty and sovereignty of the law. Come a step further. The gospel recognizes the same regal majesty of the law when it expounds the pattern of behavior that is expected of believers.

It takes many people by surprise. I hope it doesn't take you good people tonight by surprise to be told that when we come to the New Testament and to the ethical teaching of the New Testament, fundamentally what we have in the Gospels and Epistles is an expansion of the Ten Commandments. Now I have found that people have been more surprised by this statement than about any other statement that I've ever made.

But this is not my statement at all. This is true. When you come to the ethical teaching of the New Testament, be it in the Sermon on the Mount or in the Epistles, what do you have? I believe it is true to say that 75% or so can ultimately be referred back to an expansion of the Ten Commandments on the law of

God in the Old Testament.

In the Ten Commandments, for example, with reference to man, we have the principles of filial respect for parents, Exodus 20 12. The principle of respect for life that we must not kill. The respect for moral purity we must not commit adultery.

For other people's property we must not steal. For other people's good name we must not bear false witness against our neighbor. And then respect for the providence of God in the ordering of our life.

Now I can't pursue this point, but I want to make the dogmatic statement once again. When you come to the ethical teaching of the New Testament, what we have fundamentally is the taking up again of these principles and applying them to Christian men in the light of Christ and in the light of Pentecost and of our privileges. Now if Jesus Christ does anything, he makes the law stronger in the case of the Christian than in the case of the Old Testament believer.

As when, for example, he turns a man to a man and says, I'm not simply telling you not to commit adultery. I'm telling you that. But he that looketh after a woman to lust after her has sinned already in his heart.

That's not abrogating the law. That is intensifying the legal requirement. That is making the standard higher.

That is building upon the law and saying your righteousness will have to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. In other words, a man who knows something about the salvation which Christ works is a man whose motives become godly and God-honoring. Not only the deed, not only the act, but motives.

Those principles of course can be simplified in terms of the two great commandments. Or they can be expanded in terms of the Sermon on the Mount or applied in various ways. So you see the gospel honors the law.

And then in this respect the same gospel respects the majesty and divinity of the law by its avowed purpose of so changing sinners that they cease to be lawbreakers and learn to keep the commandment. Just as Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. My text says that it is the purpose of the gospel that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.

There are two things that always need to be distinguished in the New Testament. The debt accruing from our inability to keep the law in the past has been paid for by Jesus Christ dying for us. We couldn't pay that.

He's done it. You and I had broken the law. He came in as the sinless one and he paid the consequences of our breaking the law of God.

In other words he died our death. He died for us. Right.

He met the righteous demands of the law in our place in his body to the tree. That's one thing. Now if you trust that Christ he is pledged to fulfill the righteousness of the law not more not now for you.

He's done that but in you. In me. And it's that little preposition in which is the key one in my text.

Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law for us on the cross. He is now pledged to be the kind of Savior who will carry on with us and deal with us and chastise us and comfort us and feed us and shepherd us

and what else in order that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us. Now if you want me to be doctrinal tonight the biblical name for the first is justification.

We are justified because Christ died for us to take our sins away and he is risen again to impart his righteousness to us. But the name for the second is sanctification whereby the law of God is fulfilled in us. In other words we become like the Christ who said my beat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.

So much then for our first point the gospel thus recognizes the regal majesty of the law. Now we must all do that. Second main statement I want to make is this.

The gospel which recognizes that the law has such sovereignty such majesty is nonetheless realistic concerning the inability of the law to make men right with God. The power of the law is great. I want to hurry over this.

The power of the law is tremendous. It is tremendous to illumine the mind. If you had lived all your life without for 50 years shall we say without knowing the content of the Ten Commandments.

And you simply imbibed what men know and can tell you without any reference to the teaching of the Ten Commandments. And then you suddenly came against up against these. You will discover that you're in an entirely different world here.

Armed only with the Ten Commandments a man has a most remarkable key to knowledge. I don't think that the Christian Church has ever realized the wealth that we have in in those ten statements. And their power is tremendous to illumine the mind.

If I only had these I would know how to worship God. You know really there is no statement in the New Testament that compares with the opening verses of Exodus 20 about the worship of Almighty God. But then so it is concerning my attitude to my fellows.

Armed only with these I would have the key to the ethical requirements of God. A power to illumine the mind. But the power to arouse the conscience.

It's a remarkable thing this word. Most remarkable. You know I came to Christ under the welter of one sermon preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But that one sermon taught me the power of God's law to convict. For the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life.

How is it that that can come over to a pagan and communicate the sense of urgency and of shame and of guilt that runs for refuge to the cross of Christ? There's only one answer. It's the power of the law. I have known strong men and so have you I'm sure.

Who have spent weeks and months unable to sleep, unable to eat under conviction of sin because of what the law said to them. Unfortunately this is not as evident in these days when the gospel is so watered down and people can't listen to a real exposition of the gospel today. We can't take it in.

We are being taught not to think. Our thinking is being done for us and we are imbibing pre-digested ideas. We do not think for ourselves.

Time was when in our churches there were people who could think theology and talk biblically and delve into the depths of the great truths of scripture. You know those times are gone. But when the law is recognized for what it is it churns in the soul and it makes a man aware of the might of God and the condemnation of God.

It has power all right but it can't save me. It hasn't got the power to save. The law can condemn me.

The law can illumine my mind and arouse my conscience, send me to my knees and make me acknowledge that I'm but a worm in the sight of God. But it can't lift me up again. It can bring me down from my arrogance but it can't lift me up.

But now you notice my text says that that's not due to any weakness in the law nevertheless. Oh how a correct understanding of scripture is important here. Notice what it says.

For what the law could not do. Well why not if it's as powerful as we have said. Aha read on.

What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh. Now let me explain that. In order not to spend too much time with it I thought what illustration can I give of this truth.

And I found one of my fellow countrymen a man who's now in the glory and to my mind the best conceivable illustrations of this. And I hope you don't mind if I give it to you it's not mine. He was preaching on this text or rather on the whole passage.

And in course of his dissertation it was to students. He said yonder is a man of robust health, constitution strong and arms muscular. In the spring months he goes to the garden to dig up the soil.

But the handle of the spade is cracked. What avails the strength of the man with that cracked handle. The strength of the man for digging purposes is not an atom more than the strength of the instrument in his hand.

His strength is converted to weakness in the crack. In like manner says he human nature is cracked by sin. Torn and warped from top to bottom.

What availeth it that the law itself is strong. Its strength is turned to weakness because of the perversity of the flesh in man. Then he uses another illustration which puts the capstone on it as far as I'm concerned.

Yonder says he is a young man eminent for the beauty and elegance of his handwriting. Now there aren't many of these around so you understand that this fellow was living a long time ago. Penmanship used to be something to be proud of.

People scroll these days they don't write. Yonder is a young man eminent for the beauty and elegance of his handwriting. Give him white paper tolerably hard and his writing is a delight to the eyes.

But give him blotting paper rough and soft and the ink runs wild. His skill is turned into an ugly blot in the softness of the paper. Thus says he the law was designed to write the character of God in human nature.

But the moment it comes into contact with the depraved hearts of sinners the ink spreads and it all becomes a smudge. Can you see it? All the power of the law is there. But the law cannot save me not sanctify me because of the smudge and the sin and the weakness in my nature.

Therefore the law cannot save a sinner. It cannot justify. It cannot sanctify.

Its power is there but it cannot affect what God would do in saving and sanctify. That brings me to my last point which is this. The gospel establishes the law and its dignity and its authority by the very Savior it announces and the salvation it imparts.

The Savior presented in the gospel and the salvation proclaimed uphold the righteousness of the law and its requirements. Now the gospel introduces us to a Savior who according to my text condemned sin in the flesh. Now there is a positive statement but it has reference to this subject of fulfillment of the law.

Jesus Christ condemned in the flesh all law-breaking. Everything that was a transgression of the law. Everything that was short of the fulfillment of the law.

Jesus Christ condemned. Now how did he do that? You see the statement is very far-reaching. Jesus Christ says in effect that anything in my life anything in yours short of that which the law requires is to be condemned.

How did he do that? Now can I just refer to my text without going beyond it for a moment. In the first place he did that in this way. By refusing to be born of sinful human nature.

That is sinful human nature which had broken the law and depraved itself. Jesus Christ refused that kind of flesh. You notice in what we have here in verse 3. God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Now will you please notice that word likeness. The Bible does not say that God sent forth his Son in sinful flesh. It doesn't say that.

In fact the Bible says the opposite but let me pursue that for a moment. Jesus Christ did not assume sinful flesh. That's heresy.

He was conceived of the Holy Ghost in a virgin's womb who was overshadowed by the Most High God himself. So that no taint of her maternal sin and nature should impinge upon the holiness of the fetus. Now if you don't believe me let me quote to you from Dr. Luke.

Luke 1 verse 35. The angel said to her the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born of you will be called holy, the Son of God.

Of course this is a subject all its own and I can only refer to it in passing. But can you see the two points? Jesus Christ is not the Son of a man. He is conceived of the Holy Ghost.

He was not tainted by his association with the virgin in her womb because of the power of the Most High overshadowing her and overshadowing him. So that the fruit of the virgin's womb is said to be holy. He refused to be born as an ordinary boy to an ordinary father and take human flesh to his deity.

He condemned sin by saying no no no I must come into the family and I'm not coming that way. I'm not coming that near to sin. Our Lord nevertheless came in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to condemn sin in the flesh.

And you say why then did he come in the likeness of sinful flesh? For this reason he had to come so near to us in our sin as he possibly could in order that knowing our experiences from the inside he might be a

sympathetic high priest and be able to serve to the uttermost. So he assumed to his deity, he took to his deity a humanity like ours sin apart. And he did that because he would come into our human situation living in a in a body like unto ours with this one exception.

So that in this body he could condemn sin in the flesh. The Son of God then inhabiting such a body did precisely that. He condemned sin in the flesh.

How did he do it? First of all by refusing to yield to any of its temptations. He would not yield to anything that came to him, any temptation of Satan from any area whatsoever. He refused to yield to temptation and thus he condemned it.

He had nothing to do with it. But he condemned it in a very special way in and through his cross. Sometimes we tend to forget and there is a very slick theology abroad which somehow doesn't want to remember that part and parcel of the work that our Lord did in his death was to condemn Satan.

Paul says that in his death our Lord Jesus Christ exposed Satan and condemned him. Jesus said now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out. In other words he's going to condemn him.

He's going to expose him and he's going to take the sting out of sin and master the enemy so that all those who follow in his train and have faith in him may live a life of victory through him. That's salvation. A Savior who condemned sin in the flesh by abstaining from it and ultimately by exposing Satan and by judging him when Satan thought that the one under judgment was none other than the Son of God.

And lastly and most important of all, the gospel imparts a salvation which demands righteousness in the flesh. Righteousness which is nothing more or less than the re-establishing of the divine law for godly people. Now let me put it like this, my text is clear.

So that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Two things I want to say about it. The first is this, just as the Old Testament Scriptures told us what kind of a Savior was coming so it told us what kind of a salvation we might expect.

We are told in many places in the Scriptures in the Old Testament what kind of a salvation to expect when the Messiah comes. One element in that salvation is this, the law of God say the prophets will be written into our hearts. Now I want to quote two of the classical passages and I'm near the end.

Let me quote from Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 33. God is here speaking of the days of the new covenant and this is what he says in in course of doing so. I will put, he says, my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts.

Now just imagine this is this is this is this is thrilling that it could be done at any rate. But this is the kind of salvation that God said he was going to bring about through the new covenant. Now that means this, here I have a Bible, here I have the law of God written in this.

The prophet Jeremiah says that part and parcel of the salvation of the new covenant that is coming through the Messiah and the benefits of which are going to be released through him resides in this principle. The law which is in here in the book of God written by the Holy Spirit will be written into the hearts of men by the same Holy Spirit. So that deep without calls unto deep within.

And wherever there is a man who is a genuine Christian there is something in his soul which says that book condemns me but it is right. Its standard judges me but I know it is right because the same Holy Spirit that brought this law in there has written it in my heart and if I am born again of the Spirit and indwelt by him deep calls unto deep and answers to deep. Now that's the Christian salvation.

It's not enough to say I love the Lord. It's not enough to say Jesus set me free. Unless the law of God has been written on your heart so that you have the highest possible respect for it and the desire to honor it.

My friend be careful you may have been caught up into an emotional cloud that has no content in it. Neither is Jeremiah the only one. Let me quote from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36 and 27. He says the same thing of course but in his own language. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

Now you can't be clearer than that. These are the benefits of the new covenant. I'll put my spirit within you and my spirit within you will cause you to walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances.

By the inscribed law and the indwelling spirit God says that he will secure obedience to his law from those who benefit from the new covenant grace and salvation. Now that is precisely the kind of salvation preached by the Apostles and written in this epistle to the Romans. But the law could not do him that it was weak through the flesh.

The weakness was not in the law but in man in human nature. The law couldn't do it. Well what must we be forever unable to keep the law? God has done something.

What has God done? He sent forth his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. And what has he done? In the flesh he has condemned sin. What for? That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who now as new creatures in him justified and saved no longer work according to the flesh but according to the spirit who dwells in us.

And thus the law of God is vindicated. You know every Christian man and woman ought to be an embodiment of the law of God being kept and thereby an honor and the glory to him who is unchanging and whose law is therefore equally fit. What does the Lord say to you tonight? Are you under it? Have you been redeemed from its curse? If not I want to tell you that Jesus met all its demands in your place and in your stead on the very cross of Calvary.

You cannot pay for what you have broken he's done it. Accept him as your Savior. Let him give to you, impute to you his own righteousness washing your sins away and you will be justified.

Neither can you neither can I in our own strength keep the law and sanctify ourselves. But if Christ is living in us by the Spirit teaching us to walk and directing us from within, then as we walk not after the flesh but after the instincts of the Spirit we may still do what otherwise we simply could not. We may keep God's law and even delight to do his will after the inner man.

Oh may God grant us the grace so to do for his name's sake. Amen.

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