

## The Law and the Gospel, Part 2

Deuteronomy 4:15-40

My last sermon from Deuteronomy, two weeks ago, was entitled “The Law and the Gospel,” and I made every effort to describe plainly the connection between those two things, including both the motivation and obligation for our law-keeping in the context of all the promises of God’s grace in the gospel. That same theme will continue today as we look at the second half of Deuteronomy 4, the law and the gospel, part 2.

In the broadest sense, that’s always the subject of every text in the Bible, the law and the gospel. In the broadest sense, that’s all that the Bible contains, the law and the gospel. It is everything that the Bible teaches. Do you remember the answer to the third question in our Shorter Catechism, “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” Answer, “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” In other words, the law and the gospel. The gospel is what we believe. The law is how we live, the duty God requires of us. And understanding the connection between those two begins with the recognition that the gospel comes first. Thus the law is given to the people of God who are already saved, they are already redeemed—such that their law-keeping is the response of loving devotion to a God who has first loved him. And that’s what we have before us this morning, the law and the gospel, part 2.

Let me start with the law. With a very clear and specific point, namely, that,

### **I. GOD’S PEOPLE ARE URGED TO OBEY HIS LAW.**

I can almost hear the accusation of legalism. In some places, in some situations, as soon as you start talking about the need to obey the law, especially with an urgent appeal to do so, people scream legalism.

I talked with a good friend this week, who had been a member of the church in Atlanta. He remained a good friend, and has always been kind and faithful to me. He had joined another church a few years ago where he was happy and prosperous, growing in faith and in fellowship with God’s people. And he was grieving because the church had just recently begun sponsoring a meal on Sunday after church which they catered professionally. And when my friend expressed his objections because of the requirements of the fourth commandment, he met open hostility. He was, in effect, driven from the church, accused of being a legalist because of his interest in keeping the fourth commandment.

That’s a common reaction. Any exhortation to obey any law is identified as legalism, and that just isn’t true. I always wonder about people who cry “legalism” when the issue is the fourth commandment but would still require faithful obedience to the seventh commandment. In other words, when you urge people not to commit adultery, no one seems to view that as legalism.

Let me define legalism for you, so that you can rightly understand it. Because it is dangerous. And that is the focus of our study on Sunday afternoon in the book of Galatians. Paul is objecting to the legalism of the Judaizers. This is what they were doing, they were requiring external obedience to the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament as the ground upon which people could be made right with God. In other words, you had to do something, namely circumcision, in order to be a Christian. Your action was necessary, in order to be reconciled to God. That’s legalism, when any action, any good work, is required to be saved. And this afternoon we will study freedom that we have from such legalism. The truth of the gospel is that,

Eph. 2:8 “...by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest

anyone should boast.”

So legalism is the requirement of obedience as the ground upon which you are accepted as righteous before God. And there is a second definition of legalism too, a second form of legalism, quite common. And that is adding requirements to the law of God that God does not include. Man-made laws and traditions that go beyond the laws of God, but still imposed upon God’s people as a requirement. We are free from that sort of legalism, too, and with regard to anything which God’s own law does not either condemn or require, we have what is so rightly called Christian freedom.

Col. 2:16 “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ...20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using— according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

So that’s legalism. But, we are still urged to obey the laws that God has given. In fact,

**A. We must give careful and diligent attention to obedience.**

Just look at the language of our text.

v.15 “Take careful heed to yourselves...”

The NASB, “So watch yourselves carefully.” The ESV, “Therefore watch yourselves very carefully.” The idea is diligence. Effort. Commitment. The same idea is repeated again

in,

v.19 “Take heed...”

We live in an age that is very careless about the law. We live in an age that is easily given over to antinomianism, or a philosophy of anti-law. We live in an age where exhortations unto obedience are often immediately judged to be legalistic. And little or no effort is given to obedience. So even my message here this morning is an uphill battle. The exhortation to careful and diligent attention to obedience.

That emphasis would be repeated to Joshua when he assumed leadership among God’s people,

Joshua 1:7 “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

That’s where the Psalmist is able to sing,

Ps. 119:97 “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts. 101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word. 102 I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. 105 Your word is a lamp to my

feet And a light to my path.”

And that’s how David can sing,

Ps. 19:7 “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple...10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.”

So take heed to obey. Watch yourselves carefully. Do not turn away from the law of God to the right or to the left, because God’s laws are to be sweeter than honey and worth more than gold.

Moses gives specific examples.

### **B. There are specific commandments requiring faithfulness to God.**

v.15-18

That’s the second commandment, the law that requires us to worship God in spirit and in truth, not identifying him with any physical likeness. It is a corruption of the true God to represent him as a physical creature, as an idol. And it is violation of God’s law to give the service of your worship even to those great bodies of light which God has placed in the sky,

v.19

We are urged to obey specific commandments, written-out and self-defined commandments. God has given us ten of them. They are the definition of our faithfulness to God, the definition of our love for God. And Jesus’ own exhortation to obedience is pretty easy to understand as well,

Mat. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the

Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Let’s move on to my second point, the motivation. One of the ways that you can be sure to avoid the dangers of legalism as you stress obedience is to emphasize that,

## **II. THERE ARE GOOD REASONS WHY GOD’S PEOPLE SHOULD OBEY THE LAW.**

And the first reason is a repeated emphasis from previous sermons, and if I repeat this so often that it becomes obvious and self-evident to you without me having to say it every time, then I will consider my preaching successful. And I will keep repeating it. We should obey God’s law, first of all,

### **A. Because God saved us to be his own people.**

We obey BECAUSE God saved us, not in order to be saved. He saved us because he loved us, in order to make us his people. And the law always begins with the word “therefore.” The law is always the application of the gospel, the result of the gospel, the effect of the gospel upon your lives. He saved us in order that we might obey him.

v.20

We’ll see it clearly in the next chapter, when the law is given a second time, beginning with the preface to those ten commandments,

Deut. 5:6 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 7 You shall have no

other gods before Me.”

God saved us, called us to be his own special treasure, and redeemed us so that we would obey him in our grateful response to his grace. We find the same thing in the New Testament as well, of course.

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Second reason why we should obey God, closely related to the first,

### **B. Because God is jealous for his own honor.**

We usually think of jealousy as a bad thing, a product of our human, sinful fears and insecurities. But the root of the word means a zeal to protect something that is rightly your own. And God has that zeal to protect, promote and advance his own honor, and to proclaim the honor of his own name. And that’s why we should obey, because our duty as Christians is just that, to promote his honor by means of our obedience and faithfulness.

Just as a godly husband is zealous to protect the sanctity of his marriage relationship, to protect and preserve that holy union God establishes between one man and one woman, so is God jealous for our faithfulness to him. Moses learned that in his own life experiences, not being permitted to live in the promised land.

v.21-24

Do you see the reasoning? God is a consuming fire. In other words, a jealous God, jealous for his people to serve him alone. And don’t think this is just an outdated Old Testament portrayal of God.

Heb. 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may

serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

There is a third reason, and while I don’t want to present this as the only reason, nor even the most important or dominant reason, it still must be identified. We should obey his law

### **C. Because God will judge those who are disobedient.**

v.25-28

Now, having emphasized our obedience thus far, having stressed the law up to now, let me proclaim the main point of this whole event. And I do mean the main point. That main point is not simply the law, but rather it is the interplay and interaction between the law and the gospel, what we believe concerning God and what duty God requires of us. And that main point is the harmony of the law and the gospel. They belong together.

### **III. THERE IS NO CONFLICT BETWEEN OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW AND THE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL.**

I read up through verse 28 just a minute ago, stressing God’s judgment upon the disobedient. But what really stands out in this chapter in the transition from verse 28 to verse 29. Verse 28 is the disobedient Israelite serving and worshiping their false gods, objects of “wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.”

But from there, verse 29, from that point, from that place of sin and unfaithfulness to God, from there comes repentance. So the point of focusing on the sin of the people of God was not to leave them in the state of condemnation, but rather to lead them out of that state of sin by means of repentance.

v.29

Isn't that amazing? Moses stresses the disobedience of God's people, so he can stress the grace of God in response to our repentance.

**A. True repentance always brings you to God.**

v.29-31

This is so very practical. For example, when we prepare for the Lord's Supper, we stress the need for self-examination, to look for sin. And to confess it. To turn from it. To repent.

Even when I preach, there are many times where the focus is our failure, our shortcomings, our sin. But the point of that emphasis is the call to repentance! Sincere, genuine repentance.

v.29

And repentance, in faith, gives to us the confidence of God's mercy.

**B. God remains merciful and will not forsake you.**

v.31

Now, let me be personal. Let these thoughts be personal for you. It is appropriate to focus on sin, your sin. And I don't want to downplay that focus. There are times, in preaching and in reading the Bible, when the very point of the passage is to show just how much we sin and fall short of the glory of God.

That's the point of the law, as well. That's the benefit of preaching on the law, studying the law. So we can come to recognize our sin. And confess it. And to seek the Lord! And to find the Lord!

Paul calls the law a schoolmaster, a tutor, to lead you to Christ. And I hope it does. I hope the law shows you your sin. I

hope my preaching on the law enables you to see and identify your sin. And then, from there, from that point, seek the Lord and you will find him!

Sincerity, of course, is needed. This isn't just a formula or some sort of external ritual.

v.29

But beloved, when you seek the Lord when confronted by your own sin, you will find him!

Ps. 103:8 "The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. 14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So we read in,

Ps. 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

Ps. 34:18 "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit."

So search your own heart, so that you will be able to see more of your own sin. Ask God to search your heart and show you that sin. Read the law, meditate upon it so that you will understand all the more fully what God requires of you. And when you fall short,

where you fall short, “seek the Lord your God ...with all your heart and with all your soul.”

v.30 “...when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice 31 (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”

God remains merciful and will not forsake you. For good reason,

### **C. God has chosen to love his people.**

Many people think, falsely, that God will not love us anymore if we sin against him. And I would say in response that if he loved you in the first place because of your obedience, then maybe he would stop loving you if you stopped obeying him. But God does love his people because of their goodness or righteousness, or anything in them. He loves his people because he chose to love his people. Period.

v.37-38

In the language of the Apostle Paul,

Eph. 1:4 “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

God has chosen to love us, and as the objects of his love, we respond to that love with obedience to his law. That’s how the law and the gospel fit together. With one final point, that could be the single emphasis of an entire sermon,

### **D. God has made known his unique glory.**

And that’s why we ought to obey him! Not out of any sense of legalistic slavery, but in the full awareness of that unique glory.

v.32-36

And then,

v.39-40

The law and the gospel. “The Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.” That is the gospel.

v.40

There is nothing of legalism there. And there is nothing oppressive or burdensome there. But rather, the more you know God, the more you know of God’s love for you, the more you know of his eternal glory, the more you will be able to understand the call and the blessing of obedience to his law.