

The Law Fulfilled
November 18, 2018

Last year was the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The main words of the reformation were these: **We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.**

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You should know that phrase. You should repeat it every morning. Say it now with me. Say it again. Now close your eyes and say it. I recommend you remind yourself of this each morning as you start your day. Pray your belief in it to God. It will shape your thinking about other ideas that come at you during the day.

We are in a series of sermons from the letter of Colossians. This is a letter written to Christians in the city of Colossae. It was written by an early missionary by the name of Paul. He is writing out of great concern for their welfare. Even at that early stage of church history there were people who were corrupting the good news of Jesus Christ. They did not accept the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ and modified it to fit what they wanted to believe.

The reason God saved this letter over all the centuries since it was written is that today we face the same problem. There are many people who do not like the good news of Jesus and so have modified it to fit what they want to believe. These people are a danger to us who believe the good news of Jesus. They would like nothing better than for us to buy what they are selling, which is a different gospel than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe this is why God led me to preach this series at this time. Earlier this year I preached from 1 Timothy. I had never done a series on 1 Timothy before. The Lord led me to do so. I HAVE preached a series from Colossians before, back in 2003. And while that is a long time, there are other books in the Bible I have not preached a series from. Even so, God said to do Colossians again. There are important truths in here that God has for us right now. So let's get to it.

Colossians 2:3-4, 8 (NIV) (I want you to fully know) "**Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.**

... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

This is the key point of the letter. There are human arguments and philosophies out there that sound good. They make some sense. But they corrupt and dilute the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to guard against any teaching by anyone that dilutes who Jesus is or corrupts what he did for us on the cross. If you add or subtract anything from Jesus, you are saying Jesus wasn't enough. He wasn't God enough. He wasn't human enough. He wasn't righteous enough. His death wasn't adequate enough to do the whole job of saving me. That corrupts or dilutes what the Bible teaches us about Jesus.

In the next few sermons we're going to look at some of these arguments that try to change how we are saved. The first one deals with the Law of Moses.

Colossians 2:13-14 (NIV) When you were dead in your sins and in the un-circumcision of your sinful nature (literally: flesh), God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

The phrase "un-circumcision of your flesh" means he is writing to gentiles. They were not Jews. The Jews lived in a covenant relationship with God. The Gentiles did not. So they were lost in their sin.

The phrase "written code" is not spy stuff. It isn't that kind of code. Instead, this use of the word code means a collection of laws. If you want to read the laws of Maryland, you have to go to a book that is titled **The Code of Maryland**. **The Code of Maryland** is the most current public record of all statutes in force in the State of Maryland.

Paul's use of the phrase "written code" is referring to the commands, decrees, and statutes that God gave Moses to give to the Israelites. They were to obey these in order to live right with God. This written code is called the Law of Moses about 20 times in the Bible. It is called simply the Law over 300 times.

Now look what it says about this written code in Paul's letter. The written code has been canceled. God nailed it to the cross of Jesus.

The written code (Law of Moses) was temporary.

Many Jews in the first century found it hard to believe this. We can understand why. They had lived under the written code for 1,500 years. That is a long time. During that time God had punished them with exile for lack of obedience to the Law. So we can understand why it was difficult for many to believe God had done away with the Law. That is why the conference was held in Jerusalem in the book of Acts, to determine whether Christians were to obey the Law. And in that conference it was determined that they did not.

The Bible books of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews all strongly support this conclusion. And yet some Christians, even today, still teach that Christians are to observe at least part of the Law of Moses. Which parts we will get to in a moment.

But first let's look at the purpose of the Law. Everything God does is for a purpose. God gave the Law of Moses for a specific purpose. And once it served that purpose, God canceled it and nailed it to the cross. Let's look at two verses that describe the purposes of the Law.

Romans 3:20 (NIV) Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

The apostles stated that no one ever lived it fully. It never made anyone righteous. Rather it made them aware of their sinfulness.

Galatians 3:24 (NIV) So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Paul describes the Law as a guardian to train us in holiness in preparation for the coming Messiah, Jesus. And once Jesus came and died on the cross, the purpose for the Law was fulfilled. It was not needed any longer. And so it was canceled.

Now, I still read the Law of Moses. There is valid purpose in doing so. Look what Paul wrote later to Timothy, another Christian missionary, about the Law.

1 Timothy 1:8 (NIV) We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

There are Christians today who are misusing the Law of Moses. Paul did see a continuing purpose in the Law of Moses. It is a purpose that will benefit us today. But it is not to obey the Law as a part of our required response to God. Rather, we read the Law of Moses for what it teaches us about God and ourselves.

In the Law of Moses we see the holiness of God, we see the concern of God for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the ruined farmer, the immigrant. In the Law of Moses we learn that all our possessions really belong to God. He owns the whole planet and every thing and everyone on it. We see that what we do with our bodies is not a personal, private matter, but is part of our stewardship to God. He gave us our bodies. He has a right to determine the sexual boundaries of our lives.

There is much more to learn about ourselves and God in the Law of Moses. But we are no longer required to obey its commands. It is no longer how we relate to God.

Now we relate properly to God through faith in Jesus Christ, depending on His blood alone for our salvation. The written code has been canceled. God nailed it to the cross.

So, since the written code has been canceled, look what he says.

Colossians 2:16-17 (NIV) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Law of Moses had commands about what the Jews could eat or drink and required them to attend proscribed religious festivals and to observe new moons and Sabbath days. But all of these were temporary.

The Law of Moses had a specific purpose and once it fulfilled that purpose, it was canceled. It is no longer an expectation of God on us. He does not expect Christians to obey them in order to be right with Himself. Our being right with God comes as a gift, paid for by Jesus dying on the cross.

Yet, some people can't let go. Christians, in order to be pleasing to God, you do not have to keep the 613 commands in the Law of Moses. Most Christians know this to some degree. Yet there are two commands from the old covenant that are most difficult for many Christians to accept as being gone. One is the Sabbath and the other is the Tithe.

Some Christians believe God expects Christians to observe the Sabbath or a Sabbath. You may have heard of Seventh Day Adventists. They are Christians who believe Christians are still held to observe the Sabbath of the first covenant. This Sabbath starts at sundown on

Friday and runs to sundown on Saturday. There are other Sabbath keeping groups, even a Seventh Day Baptist group. And there are others who hold to a Sabbath as an expectation of God but keep another day as a Sabbath of sorts. Some are very legalistic about it and others are not. For example, if they have to work on their usual Sabbath, they do so.

One reason some Christians hold to the Sabbath is its presence in the 10 Commandments. Some Christians want to make a distinction between the 10 Commandments and the rest of the Old Testament Laws. They do this simply because these 10 were written in stone. They say that these 10 are God's commands and the other 603 are God's laws.

There is no Biblical basis for that argument. God nowhere makes a distinction between the two terms law and commands. In fact, the ten commandments are never called commands in the Bible. In Hebrew they are referred to simply as the ten words.

Nine of the ten commandments do appear in some form in the New Testament. The one that is missing is the Sabbath command. It just isn't in there. While most Christians historically have worshipped together on Sunday since Jesus rose from the dead on that day, there is no command to do so. There is no re-emphasis in the New Testament on the Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was canceled. God nailed it to the cross.

The other problematic command is the tithe. This is the giving of 10% of your income to God. I know many pastor's who teach that tithing is required by God for the Christian. It comes up all the time. But you won't find such a command anywhere in the New Testament.

The Old Testament law could be divided into three categories. One category was moral laws. These were the anti murder laws, anti theft laws, etc.

The second category was civil laws. This dealt, for example, with how to treat your neighbor if his cow got out and was walking down the road. You were not to say, "Finders Keepers." No, you were to take the cow back to its owner.

The third category were religious rituals and systems. This was the maintenance of the temple, the livelihood of the priests, the daily sacrifices to God, and the system of benevolence for the poor. Both the Sabbath and the tithe were part of the religious ritual system of Judaism. These are not moral laws or civil laws. They are part of the religious laws God gave.

In the new testament neither Jesus, nor His apostles give us a similar religious system. We are not commanded to own land, build buildings, or hire staff. The Sabbath and Tithe have not been carried over from the Old Testament to the New. There is no command that churches should all own property or hire staff.

That doesn't mean God did not initiate either of those here at Emmanuel. I believe God led me to come here. You believe God led you to build this building and hire me. But just because Jesus does that some of the time is not the same as a command for all Christians to do it.

No, the burden of trying to live the Law of Moses is gone. Now, we serve God in freedom.

Don't let anyone place you under the burden of the Sabbath or the tithe or any other part of the Old Testament Law as a way to maintain your right standing with God.

I recommend you learn that you need times of rest and give them to yourself. I also recommend that, as a family, you make a commitment of giving to the Lord, an annual amount or a percentage of your income. But the amount or percentage is up to you.

Your relationship with God is based, from beginning to end, on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly fulfilled every command of the old covenant for you. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Yes, repentance is part of that. Yes Jesus has commanded us to do certain things. But we obey, not to earn salvation, but to celebrate the salvation we already have as a gift from God. And the commands of Jesus are not the same as a Law of Moses.

Today, are you ready for the freedom to serve God by faith in Jesus Christ?