

I Fought the Law & the Law Won

Text: Galatians 3.10–14

Theme: God's law was never intended to save us but to point us to the One who does.

Introduction — I want you to help me with something here for a moment

- some of you will remember the words to complete this epic poem
- Breakin' rocks in the hot sun, I fought the law and the ... [law won]
 I needed money 'cause I had none, I fought the law and the... [law won]
 I fought the law and the... [law won]

Now, let's see a far more spiritual and, I think, heavenly version of this truth

- Galatians 3.10–14

Paul's great concern for these Christians is this: the truth of the gospel

- false teachers have crept in, practically unnoticed
- they have confused these new believers with a lie
- the lie is this: grace is wonderful, amazing, marvelous
- but it just isn't enough: you need to add a little law to that grace to make it work
- faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace alone just sounds & feels too easy
- yes, we love Jesus and we love us some good grace, but...
- and everything, anything they added after that is wrong, says Paul

Now what the great apostle must do is help his people see something divine

- they need to see, to comprehend the distinction between law and gospel
- both come from God, both have their God-intended purposes
- but if you blur the lines, try to blend the together, they don't work
- Paul labors intensely over this in the verses before us
- this text is wound tight with so many great truths, I fear I won't do it justice
- but may the Lord help me as I try

The problem with the law is not the law

- the problem is within each of us: our hearts
- the problem with each of our hearts is sin
- therefore, we cannot keep the law which God has given
- and since we cannot keep the law, we are under its curse: the wrath of God
- the law cannot bless us, it can only curse us

Paul now moves to reveal...

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF THE LAW

- how can we receive God's blessing if we can only be under the law's curse?
- how can any one of us stand in right relationship with God?
- how can God accept me?
- what must I do to gain His favor?
- in a word, what Paul has been trying to show us is this: how can I be justified?

1. Two possibilities

- either I am justified by works of the law—pure, gut-wrenching obedience

- or I am justified by faith alone in Christ alone because of God's grace alone
- Paul's answer—indeed, the entire Bible's answer is: by faith alone
- **Galatians 3:11-12 ESV**
11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”
- we cannot be saved by our own attempts at doing good works
- so we must be saved by faith alone

2. Believing or doing

- if we live by faith, we trust God to justify us through Jesus Christ
- Paul once preached this truth in Galatia, on his first missionary journey there
- **Acts 13:38-39 ESV**
38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.
- if we try to live by the law, works of the law, by our own sheer obedience...
- it's as if we say to God, “I will make my own way to you, no matter what; Your way is not my preferred way.”
- but the two ways cannot cohabit with each other
- you cannot have both faith and law
- in this case, believing and doing are mutually exclusive
- either we trust God to justify us or we trust ourselves to do it

3. One foot on shore, one foot on the boat

- you've seen this before, either in videos or maybe by personal experience!
- as boat starts to pull or slip away, man has to make a choice
- either I leap, by faith, into the boat; or, I keep trying to make it only to end up wet!
- John Calvin said: To be justified by our own merit and by the grace of another are irreconcilable

4. Habakkuk 2.4

- this verse reveals that even during the time of the law people were justified by faith
- a right standing before God did not come by obedience to the law
- it couldn't because no one can keep the law, personally, perfectly, perpetually
- therefore, all are under the curse, under the wrath of God
- if the Judaizers of Paul's day would have lived during Moses' day, this would be evident
- their fundamental message was & is wrong because they miss the point of the law
- the law exists to point out our sin and to show us our great need of a Savior
- we must have One who CAN keep the law, and Jesus is the only One who has ever done that

5. It is evident

- Paul knows this is the case and so should anyone who knows the law
- even before the law of Moses came down from Mt Sinai, this was the case
- the law written on every man's heart only condemned him
- it could not purify, cleanse, or make a person whole or right before God
- the plain and clear truth of all Scripture is this: the law does not make you right before God
- only a mediator of a better covenant—Jesus, the Christ—can do this in your place

6. Martin Luther and this truth

- Martin Luther left law school and became a monk, hoping to appease God's wrath
- in trying to find a way to be pleasing in God's sight, he nearly drove himself insane
- he had come across these words in the Bible, but they were of no help to him
- he did not yet understand what they meant...but he would
- while in Italy, Luther grew very ill; when he recovered he travelled to Rome
- he visited the church of St. John Lateran
- if any would climb the long, high staircase, pray on each step & even kiss each step...
- the pope had promised an indulgence: the remission of some of the payment paid in purgatory
- the steps were rumored to have been moved from Pilate's palace in Jerusalem
- they would have been stained with the very blood of Christ, supposedly
- so Luther went there, crawled up each step, praying and kissing each along the way
- he witnessed other poor wretches like himself doing the same thing
- just shy of the top, the words of Habakkuk came suddenly to his memory
- he immediately ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg to teach
- and this singular truth became the bedrock of all his teaching
- Luther had become convinced nothing he did would gain God's favor
- **“Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with Him.... But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words—‘The just shall live by faith!’ ‘The just shall live by faith!’—then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God.**

In v. 12, Paul tells us...

II. WHAT COMES FROM LIVING BY LAW

- you want to live by the law? Then you cannot be living by faith
- if you want to live by the law, just know this: law & faith are incompatible
- they each have radically different consequences
- the law will condemn and curse you for trying to be right by it
- only faith...the gift that comes through God's grace, the gift that enables us to see Jesus...
- only faith can save you, make your standing before God right
- otherwise, the only alternative is law: your own attempts at obedience
- and it simply cannot work
- Paul knows this by experience, and by Scripture
- **You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. Leviticus 18:5**
- now, by this time, at this point in this letter to these Galatian Christians, you & I know the problem
- you and I can't keep the law perfectly all the time
- only Jesus Christ the perfect Law Keeper has
- and it is to Him we must look, to Him we must run, to Him we must cling
- there is no hope of salvation apart from Jesus
- which is what Paul tells us next in v. 13, as we saw briefly last week
- Jesus, the perfect Law Keeper became like a lawbreaker for us
- He suffered the curse of the law, the wrath of God upon sinners
- in doing so, He redeemed us—He paid the price demanded by the will of the Triune God
- Jesus was the substitute, dying in our place, suffering what we rightly deserved
- when we believe upon His name, when we receive Him, He frees us from the bondage of the law

Only death comes from living by the law, but in Christ's redemption, there are...

III. THE BLESSINGS OF FAITH

- Christ redeemed us...what delightful words, wonderful words of life
- ordinarily a ransom price—redemption—is paid by the highest bidder
- a slave is purchased at a great price indeed
- and in the case of each of us, slaves to sin, the price was the highest ever

1. An ancient hymn

- Venantius Honorius Fortunatus (AD 530–609) wrote these words to sing the glory

1 The royal banners forward go,
the cross shines forth in mystic glow;
where he in flesh, our flesh who made,
our sentence bore, our ransom paid.

2 There whilst he hung, his sacred side
by soldier's spear was opened wide,
to cleanse us in the precious flood
of water mingled with his blood.

[skip if no time] 3 Fulfilled is now what David told
in true prophetic song of old,
how God the heathen's King should be;
for God is reigning from the tree.

[skip if no time] 4 O tree of glory, tree most fair,
ordained those holy limbs to bear,
how bright in purple robe it stood,
the purple of a Saviour's blood!

5 Upon its arms, like balance true,
he weighed the price for sinners due,
the price which none but he could pay,
and spoiled the spoiler of his prey.

6 To thee, eternal Three in One,
let homage meet by all be done:
as by the cross thou dost restore,
so rule and guide us evermore.

2. Redemption's high cost

- NT Scripture speaks of this cost:
- **"...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28**
- **"...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." 1 Peter 1:18-19**
- this meant that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God had to bear the Father's curse
- hanging upon a tree demonstrated publicly that the man was under God's curse
- so Jesus, put on public display, bore the wrath of the Father
- and yet, this was the Father's will

- **Isaiah 53:10 says, “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt...”**

3. What a stumbling block

- to the Jew, this was unfathomable
- the Messiah could never be cursed like this, to suffer such shame and dishonor
- it was blasphemous to a Jew, but there it is, in black & white on paper
- Christ became a curse for us...by hanging and dying upon a tree, a cross
- and stumbling block though it may have been, it was the only way
- to the Gentile, it was just foolish...how could one die for another's guilt?
- and yet, here it is, God's divine wisdom, His only begotten Son
- a perfect substitute, crucified in our place
- the death penalty each of us deserved was heaped upon Christ

4. The power of those two words

- “for us”
- **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21**
- Christ should never have hung on that cross: as Pilate said, He is innocent
- and yet, there He was, our sin imputed to Him and His righteousness imputed to us who believe
- this great exchange is so marvelous, pen & ink will be exhausted before all is ever said about it
- songwriters will fail to help us sing all the praise due to the One who died for us

5. From whom all blessings flow

- the blessing of Abraham comes to Jew & Gentile alike
- the blessing of salvation by faith alone
- the Jews thought they had it, but missed it by trying to adhere to the law for this gift
- the Gentiles can now have it...by faith, not by works of the law
- so, to you this day who have believed upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
- you now have an eternal inheritance
- that was lost when Adam sinned in the garden, but the blessing of Abraham can be & is ours
- sins forgiven, wrath appeased & removed, guilt pardoned, sinners redeemed
- all by faith in our Perfect Law-Keeper

6. But that's not all!

- the gift of the Holy Spirit comes too
- in fact, it is through the coming of the promised Holy Spirit that we receive any of this at all
- God the Holy Spirit comes through the preaching of the Word
- He puts a new heart in each one God has chosen
- that person's eyes are opened to see reality: I am doomed in my own efforts
- only in Christ can I be redeemed and made right and whole before God
- and when we believe, that very same Spirit of God takes up permanent residence within us
- He becomes the guarantee of our inheritance, sealing us with the mark of Christ for eternity
- oh, to the praise of God's glorious grace

Conclusion – Christ Jesus came into the world, taking on flesh

- He died in our place upon the cross, taking upon himself the dreaded curse of the Law
- yet this has enabled God's blessing to flow freely.

- God has cleared the way for His blessing.
- And he's done so because of Christ and only in Christ—in Christ alone.
- So I must exhort those who have not already done so to flee to Christ and hide themselves in Him as their only hope!

To all who looked to Christ for their redemption...

- I must exhort you to never stop looking to Christ
- your obedience absolutely depends upon it
- when you sin, look to Him who was the perfect law keeper for you
- and when you do well, be sure to return all thanks to Him who redeemed you first
- let all blessings and praise go to Him who died in your place

And then, stand amazed in the presence of Jesus...

Let's sing, at least one verse of hymn #348, stanzas #1 & #4