

“God With Us” (part 3)

Galatians 4:4-5

Most people probably consider themselves law-abiding citizens. They don't kill, steal, or drive without car insurance. But people do break a law here and there, sometimes flagrantly and other times without even thinking. There was an article that came out on Business Insider a couple of years ago that listed the laws that are most often broken. Either from ignorance or nonchalance, people commit these infractions with frequency:

- Connecting to unsecured Wi-Fi

Because of vague language in the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA) — phrases like "without authorization" and "obtain information" — connecting to an unsecured WiFi network or violating a company's or website's online terms of services could technically get you charged with a felony. Almost all states have basic computer-protection laws, too. But you probably won't get arrested for nabbing a free connection when you pass a coffee shop. Then again, a Michigan man was arrested for using the wireless connection from a cafe while in his car.

- Singing Happy Birthday, or Christmas songs, in public

Depending on the circumstances, singing popular songs in public might constitute copyright infringement. Back in the 1990s, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) asked the Girl Scouts to pay royalties for teaching campers the Macarena. True story.

Also, if you have an Internet connection and use said connection to download a movie, song, book, or some type of copyright-protected work, you've violated federal copyright law.

- Speeding

Anybody who's ever gotten behind the wheel of a car has probably driven over the speed limit.

- Using your cell phone while driving

Thirty-one states ban any cellphone use by novice drivers. Forty-one ban texting while driving. All but four have primary enforcement laws (which don't require any other infractions for a ticket). Six more ban texting for novice drivers. Twelve states ban all drivers from using hand-held cellphones. All of them have primary enforcement laws. Even if some of us don't talk or text while behind the wheel, we at least use GPS apps. Admit it.

- Not getting a dog license

Some people may think licensing your dog just makes it easier to find it if it runs away. Almost all states, however, require that you register dogs of a certain age with your municipality.

- Jaywalking

Jaywalking is ubiquitous in cities and suburbs alike. Although no federal law prohibits walking across the street without a crosswalk, most cities do occasionally ticket the infraction.

You may be breaking the law without even realizing it!

When it comes to the law of God, every single one of us is a guilty lawbreaker, whether we realize it or not. The Bible says that there is none righteous, not even one.

God is righteous and perfect, while man is unrighteous and imperfect. God's law demands righteous perfection, and as sinful human beings, we have no righteousness on our own. Because of sin, human beings are born alienated from the life of God. This means that if a relationship with God is to ever be restored, God is the One who must take the initiative. He must come to us and rescue us from our helpless condition.

This is what God did according to Galatians 4:4-5:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

We find in these two verses the “theology of Christmas,” which simply means the truth behind why Christ came—who He is, what He came to do. Over the last couple of weeks, we have dealt with these verses phrase by phrase. This passage reveals Jesus Christ to be:

- The PREEXISTENT Son from God the Father
- The PROMISED Son of prophetic fulfillment

There is yet another truth about Jesus that we see in these verses:

3. Jesus is the PERFECT Son in whom we have faith

“...born under the law.”

The incarnation means that God became one of us to live with us in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Christ was born under the law, which means He became subject to His own perfect standard.

No one ever lived like Jesus lived. He lived a perfect life of obedience to His Father. In 1 Peter 1:19, the Bible refers to the “precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” It is a reference to Christ’s sinless perfection.

The law of God demanded perfection.

James 1:10 - “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

Here in verses 4-5, Paul wants the church to understand that their salvation is not contingent upon their own ability to keep the law, but of faith in Christ’s ability.

Paul is making the argument in Galatians that no person is ever justified by keeping the law. We are not made righteous by our own works, but through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:16 - “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

Merrill Tenney - *“Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had [Galatians] never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers.”*

It was the truths taught in Galatians that changed the life of Martin Luther. Born in the town of Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483, Martin Luther came from a hard working family. His father, Hans Luther, was a copper miner who desired for his son to practice law. When he was 21 years old, after a near death experience involving a lightning strike, Martin Luther entered a monastery to become a monk. During those years in his life he became driven to find salvation

through his own efforts. However, he soon discovered that he could not do enough to earn God's approval. He became disillusioned with Roman Catholicism and many of its unbiblical emphases. He began to be a lecturer in Bible at the University of Wittenberg, where he taught the book of Romans and the book of Galatians for two years from 1515 to 1517. The more he studied, the more perplexed he became, for he could not understand how a sinful man could be made right in the sight of a holy God.

On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a list of 95 statements to the front door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg where he confronted the unbiblical practices of the papacy. This led to a firestorm of controversy that involved threats on Luther's life. It was sometime during this period that Luther came to a dramatic breakthrough. He became fixated on a passage of Scripture from Romans:

Romans 1:16-17 - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith."

By his own admission, it was as if a ray of divine light had shone into his darkened heart. Luther grasped the true meaning of the text—the righteousness of God is received as a gift by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, not through keeping the law.

Paul deals with this same truth in the letter to the Galatians.

We take for granted the truths that are taught in plain English, and we can read these words for ourselves. You need to keep in mind how difficult it was in Luther's day and even before the printing press in the mid 15th century. The Bible was kept out of the common man's reach.

Jesus Christ is the perfect Son of God in whom we have faith. Our righteousness comes from Him, not from keeping the law. Thus, Christ was born under the law so that He could redeem those who were under the law. Here in Galatians, the apostle Paul deals with our relationship to the law, Christ's relationship to the law, and our relationship to Christ.

Relying upon the law brings a CURSE

The Galatian believers were being exposed to a group of false teachers known as the Judaizers who emphasized that in order to become Christian, the Gentiles had to first become adherents

to Jewish law and customs. In the opening statements of his letter, Paul gets right to the heart of the issue:

Galatians 1:6 - “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”

Paul was concerned for the churches in Galatia because the very heart of the gospel of grace was being undermined by these false teachers and was being replaced by a gospel of works. So for 149 verses broken down into six different chapters, Paul shows us how the gospel is rooted in the grace of God found only in Jesus Christ, not in keeping the law.

In chapter 1, he briefly tells his own testimony of how he was saved from a life of relying on his efforts.

In chapter 2, he asserts his call from God to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ among the Gentiles.

In chapter 3, he emphasizes the truth that it is those of faith who are the children of Abraham. He then writes:

Galatians 3:10 - “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Why? Because no person can ever keep the law with perfection. To break the divine law is to be under the curse of God. That means all of us are lawbreakers because none of us can keep it perfectly.

This is the same point made by Paul in Romans 1-2. Man has just enough knowledge of God to condemn him to hell. The first chapter of Romans says that God has revealed Himself through the creation, and all men and women everywhere have seen it. This means that all are without excuse.

Then he says in chapter 2:

Romans 2:12-15 - “For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be

justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law unto themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.”

The idea is that the law cannot save those who cling to it. It only brings a curse to the one who relies upon it. If a person insists upon living by the law, it will curse them rather than save them because they cannot possibly live up to it.

Reason for the law is to CONVICT

The purpose of God's Law was never to save those who abide by it. Instead, the purpose of the law was to convict the sinner of his or her sin. It is the law of God that shows me my sin. The law of God is like a mirror. It reveals to us who God is and what He like as well as who we are and what we are like. The purpose of the law is to show, not to save. What does it show?

The law reveals God's holy character.

The law exposes our sin.

The law illustrates the futility of the flesh.

The law intensifies our helpless condition.

The law condemns us to judgment.

All of this shows how the purpose of the law is to reveal and convict men and women of sin. Forgiveness means nothing to a person who is unaware he has done anything wrong or is unconvinced the wrong he has done produces any consequences. Grace means nothing to a person who does not know he is sinful and that such sin separates him from God and damns him.

It is therefore pointless to preach grace until the impossible demands of the law and the reality of guilt before God are preached.

illus. of burdened Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress

The law reveals, but it cannot rescue. The law shows, but it cannot save. The law penetrates, but it cannot pardon. The points me to salvation, but it cannot provide me with salvation. The law diagnoses our problem and writes a prescription that only the Great Physician can fill.

Martin Luther - *“The principal point of the law is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it shows them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace.”*

Redemption from the law is in CHRIST

The purpose of the law, then, is to drive the sinner to the grace of God and faith in Jesus Christ. Why the law? Paul answers that question in verse 19:

Galatians 3:19 - “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come to whom the promise had been made.”

Who is the Seed? Jesus Christ. The law was given until Christ came.

Romans 10:4 - “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Jesus Christ obeyed the law of God that we could not, and yet He endured the wrath of God in our place on the cross. Notice what Paul writes:

Galatians 3:13-14 - “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the Spirit through faith.”

Christ redeemed us. The word ‘redeemed’ was often used in Paul’s day to describe the purchase of a slave in order to set him free. Such slavery is an accurate picture of the person who is lost. There we sit, chained by sin, cursed by the law, condemned before God with no strength to do anything about it. There is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. But then we look to Christ, the One who is perfectly righteous with no sin. He is a Lamb without spot or blemish.

Jesus Christ says, “I am One who has been born under the law, and no man can convict Me of sin. Yet I’ll take your curse upon Myself. I’ll pay the price for your redemption! I will die so that you may live!”

Christmas means that God came to live with us so that He could die for us. For those of us who were cursed by the law and in bondage to its penalty, there was no other way for our redemption. My salvation required the perfect life of Jesus Christ to be offered up in my place.

Have you ever noticed that throughout the days of His ministry on earth, Jesus' back was always against the wood:

- laying there in a manger as a tiny infant
- growing up in the home of a simple carpenter
- sleeping in the bottom of a boat in the middle of a storm
- suffering with arms outstretched on a cruel cross

What does all of this mean for us?

To begin with, we love to live our lives by lists. "Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that, and God will accept me." Those types of things are attractive to us because they are measurable. They appeal to our pride. The gospel shatters all pride and self-reliance.

This truth also dispels all legalism and its various forms. Legalism is:

- working in our own power
- living by our own rules
- trusting in our own merit

I love the rich theology that is taught in many of the carols we sing this time of year. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King! The hymn "The Ancient Law Departs" is a lesser known Christmas carol, one that was written by a French hymn writer named Sebastian Besnault in the early 1700's:

*The ancient law departs,
And all its terrors cease;
For Jesus makes with faithful hearts
A covenant of peace.*

*The Light of Light divine,
True brightness undefiled,
He bears for us the shame of sin,
A holy, spotless Child.*

*His infant body now
Begins our pains to feel;
Those precious drops of blood that flow
For death the victim seal.*

*Today the Name is Thine,
At which we bend the knee;
They call Thee Jesus, Child divine!
Our Savior born to be.*