

## "Justification's Challenge to the *Early Church*"

**Christian Liberty**

Dr. Jonathan Watt

Galatians 2:15-21

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**Jonathan:** Good morning.

**Men:** Good morning.

**Jonathan:** Thank you for the welcome and for the invitation. I don't know if it originated with you, but whoever it originated with, I thank you for—

**Participant:** Jerry O'Neill.

**Jonathan:** Yes, but he didn't just call you up and say, "We've got somebody we're just inserting on your camp." (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** I don't know how he picked you.

**Jonathan:** I think it was a coin.

**Participant:** A coin! (*Laughter.*)

**Jonathan:** Before I forget, Mr. Sisala, we used to have two Sisalas the last couple years. You don't have any relatives that went to Geneva, do you?

**Mr. Sisala:** Yes. My daughter Alicia.

**Jonathan:** Yes, there we go. I wondered if you—

**Mr. Sisala:** For a couple of years she was there. She loves you.

**Jonathan:** She just graduated. That's great. I wondered if that was your daughter. Okay, very good. So I think we're going to start with some music. Is that correct?

**Participant:** Yes, yes. (*Music.*)

**Jonathan:** Thank you very much. Let's pray together, okay? Father, thank You for the life that You've given us today and the opportunities that the day holds. Everything's a gift. Every breath that we can draw, every involvement that we have, anything that we're about is a gift, not a right, and we thank You for it. And we know that while even though this world is a stopping point along a larger way, it is what we've known. It is what we hope we love in the right sense because it's Your world and Your design. But we also don't want to love it in that way that says that we need not to be attached, but be ready at the time that You designate to be able to step off into the eternity that You have awaiting us. I would like to pray for all these men here today, including myself, that what we have, what we are, the state of our soul, the orientation of our mind, the motivations that are so deep within us, sometimes they are almost invisible to ourselves. May all these things and everything that we're about come under the hand of Jesus, increasingly turned and molded and lighted by His life-giving and loving hands. And may this morning have a part in that. Father, You also know if there are particular burdens and other things that might be in the hearts of people today, whether it's concerns over health, over families, including children, including adult children, perhaps spouses, anything else. We know there will surely be people here who have these things that are weighing on them. And we ask together with them that You would hear their yearning and their pain, their disappointment, whatever it may be. And would You walk them through whatever it is that You have put before them, and help them to find Your purposes and Your goals in

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those things. May they find pleasure first in You. May we know our home with You. Everything else is secondary. In Jesus' name we pray that. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Jonathan:** When I was approached by Jerry O'Neil some weeks back, the suggestion was to do a couple of Psalms. And so I didn't do any work for it, but I chose three Psalms. I was going to hit one each for the next three weeks. And then as I was talking to Sig, he said that you've been doing a study in Galatians, and he suggested that I go online and see where you were at and try and plug in there. He very kindly gave me the choice, and he didn't threaten or anything like that. Well, he threatened a bit. *(Laughter.)* But it wasn't too bad. I'm bigger than him anyway, so I can handle it. *(Laughter.)*

So I happily bent. And I'm hoping I hit it right. I think you said that you're about in the middle of Galatians 2. And so I thought, okay. We'll pick it up there. I've got a little piece to look at with you this morning. And then I've got a target amount for next week to do, roughly the first half of Galatians 3, depending on where we are at the end of today. We'll see if we stick with that. And then, next week—Lord willing, of course; this is all contingent—if it seems to be about where I think we might be, we'll take one more chunk after that. So I think you have the outlines in front of you. They were printed for you, is that right?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jonathan:** And we're going to look at Galatians 2. Nature of the way I think is the best way to go through anything is for someone who is leading obviously to offer you some things along the way. Of course, I don't exactly know where you personally are at with Galatians, or what kind of other things are well planted in there, or maybe what kind of gaps are there, where you just say that there's some yawning gap I'd love to look at. Don't leave it till the end. You have lots of opportunities to raise your hand, make a comment, ask a question, engage in a conversation. We have that kind of flexibility. So please feel free to take that. I'm reading out of the New American Standard. I hope that's okay. I'm going to kick in with Galatians 2.

I'm going to kick in with verse 15. But I want to acknowledge that there has been a lengthy section that you've looked at already that is interesting both from the point of view of how Paul fits in with the other apostles and some issues with Peter, which are in a funny way probably encouraging to us. When you know that an apostle has a weakness or an inconsistency, you realize that well, if they do, it's not the end of the world if I do also. Those are not cardboard cutouts. They're real people.

It's also interesting from a historical point of view, because there are a couple of things where we're not 100 per cent certain about how Galatians notches in with the history of the early church, or a selective piece of the early church, which is what the book of Acts represents. Ultimately, it's not a huge issue. It just means that we're a little bit uncertain about whether it's this way or that way. You've been through that. So I just want to acknowledge that.

And when he says where you guys have been, when he struggles back and forth with stuff that Cephas or Peter was waffling with and so forth, he's actually going to step into a kind of argument. I'm going to interpret what's here. By the way, it's very much a

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mainstream interpretation. I won't give you anything weird. But I'm going to interpret it from the point of view of Paul as if he were almost dialoguing or sort of arguing with someone we don't see. But it's as if this person were standing in front of him.

And so he goes in verse 15. "Look, we're Jews by nature." Now who is he speaking to? Before I go any further, who is he speaking to? Himself? Barnabas? Peter, Cephas? They are raised Jews but are believers in Christ, okay? So we might call them Jewish Christians or believing Jews. You can use different labels. That's the *we*, okay? We're Jews by nature.

And I think the next piece is what we call *scare quotes*. And we're not "sinners from among the Gentiles." There's a good Biblical reason to use that terminology.

*"Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law, because by works of the law no flesh"—that means no human being, no natural in the flesh, normal person—"shall be justified."* Not one of them, you see.

*"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin?"* Now you've got to say, "God forbid it!", or "May it never be!" We'll come back to it, of course. *"For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly."*

Right from the outset, let me acknowledge that there are a number of tricky little terms that we're going to have to navigate as we go through what actually is a very short piece. And I'm going to take them one at a time along the way. Most of them are fairly navigable. There is one verse we're going to hit that is really hard. I'm going to make a suggestion that might be what it's getting at. We'll see. So if you're really going to find out why he said something along the way, we're going to go in order here, as you can see down below. I promise we'll get there, and that may trigger more interaction.

I'd like to give you a term. I didn't come up with the term. It's a very helpful one. It's from two writers, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart, who have written a number of things together, including a book on hermeneutics. For those of you who love big words, what is hermeneutics?

**Participant:** The science of interpretation.

**Jonathan:** Got it! He said "science." I prefer to use the principles of interpretation. We're guided by these principles, which is the kind of thing all of us do all the time. However, we're not conscious of it.

When someone talks to you and you talk to someone else, you are always assuming a certain set of things that you're referring to that in a different context or conversation might refer to something else in some different kind of way. We're very context sensitive.

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Fee and Stewart called the New Testament letters in particular "occasional documents." And what they're getting at is that when we interpret the letters, we want to realize that they are for particular people, particular times, particular locations, particular issues. At times we get to see the issues. At times the issues are hidden. Now we can infer them, but they're not directly in front of us.

And I know it goes without saying. But let me just acknowledge it here: that here we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two thousand years is a long, long time. We are two thousand years removed from that situation. Galatia is located where?

**Participant:** Turkey

**Jonathan:** Turkey, yes, roughly central Turkey. And you've actually got multiple cultures, even though Turkey is one country today. And as you know from the news, it's going through terrific anguish these last couple days. And in that day it was many people groups. I won't go into all of that. But it was quite diverse. And Galatia is a little left of center. It looks like a big rectangle, a little left of center. And even there it has at least a couple regional and ethnic differences within it. And we just need to be aware of that, whether we're those people or not. So we can still draw stuff for us today, but the messages were not initially to us.

I also want to acknowledge this. Did you guys talk at all as you dealt with chapter 1 with what is called the Northern versus Southern Galatian theory? Did that come up at all?

**Participant:** No.

**Jonathan:** Okay. I'm going to give it to you in about a minute. And in fact, it's not a big deal. But when we try and inter-notch what the background is of the time of the writing of Galatians, is it just before or is it just after the Council of Jerusalem, which is in Acts 15? So the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 dates to around A.D. 50. It's very convenient. It's in the middle of Acts, and it's also, timing wise, in the middle of the first century, which makes it very easy to remember.

And the letter to the Galatians is either just before or just after that council. If it's just before, it's probably dealing with churches in the southern part of Galatia. If it's just after the council, it's probably dealing with churches also in the northern part. There are reasons for that which I won't go into. But the good news is that the way we handle it isn't going to change things significantly. So since you guys didn't get into that, let me not trouble you with it. I just want to acknowledge a little bit of the rich background of what's going on with this letter.

Now I want to talk about a very important thing. This is extremely important. What Paul is dealing with in Galatians is a big problem that can be summarized in one word with a J. What is that? He's dealing with people known as—

**Participant:** Judaizers.

**Jonathan:** Okay. That's the important part.

**Participant:** Not justification.

**Jonathan:** Well, it pertains to justification. I guess there are two j's, aren't there? This is J. Justification is j. (*Laughter.*) That makes all the difference in the world in terms of

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the scholars. (*Laughter.*) Yes, capitalization matters. Don't mess with it. You will be hurt by people who get mixed up with that. (*Laughter.*) So that's absolutely it. (*Unclear.*)

The issue is that you've got people who are converts to Christ, at least ostensibly. Whether they really are or they really aren't, I'm not judging that. Maybe there are some of both in there. But having come from a Jewish background to faith in Christ, they are then turning around and they're saying, "I see all these non-Jewish people coming to faith in Christ." And this is what the Judaizers are saying. "I want them to become, in a sense, ritually Jewish as part of their package of coming to Jesus." And that's why the justification issue is absolutely wrapped up with the Judaizers issue.

Additionally, and this is kind of interesting—the literature abounds with this, but you should know this—there is not one, monolithic Judaism of Paul's day, okay? There isn't today, and there wasn't then. There are different stripes, different sects, different political leanings, lots of different things going on.

Just a hundred years before the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as you know from the New Testament were two Jewish sects. They show up in the New Testament, and they are so much at odds with each other that they literally have battles. And about 120 years before Jesus was born, Sadducees trapped and crucified six hundred Pharisees.

**Participant:** Whoa!

**Jonathan:** It's a little known documented fact. That's how bad the conflict was there. That also means—a little aside here—that if you look at Judaism today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you should be very much aware that there are many, many stripes of Judaism.

So I was brought up believing that Jews were people who were looking for God's Messiah. When I was about eight years old, I went to a good friend of mine named Adrian. He was from South Africa. He was Jewish.

I said, "Adrian, you must be waiting for the Messiah, right?"

And he said, "What's that?" He hadn't even heard the concept.

**Participant:** Wow!

**Jonathan:** And according to a recent poll that was taken last year,—this is a poll, so all I can do is report the numbers; I can't affirm that it's necessarily right—today, (and I'm talking 2015), as many as half of the Jews living in Jerusalem are secular Jews. They are known as traditional ethnic or historical Jews, but are either agnostic or atheist. So I just want to say this. Be aware that there is a huge diversity as there is with Christianity, as there is with whatever religion or culture—you name it!

Why do we say that? Well, because I'm going to come back to the text now. There were in Paul's day—and we know this not only from Galatians, but also from outside material—that there were people who were believers in Christ. And they are wanting to say that not only should Jews continue to keep on practicing the rituals of the Old Testament, but they want incoming Gentiles also who are not part of the Jewish perspective to do that. Now they are not speaking for either the majority of Jews or of Jewish believers in Christ. But they're there.

And just pause and think about it. Think about their leverage. It's a strong argument. I'm going to play the role of one of these people. "Paul, come on! We're Jews! We've been

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observing Moses' law for something like fourteen hundred years. And you're going to tell me that because of some rabbi who comes not even from Jerusalem, but from a remote place up north in Galilee, that we're going to scrap Moses? Come on!" Moses is the button pusher; he's the big guy. Moses is the law giver. "I like what Moses says. I like what Abraham says. But Abraham, Moses, and some guy from Galilee? And you're going to change all this?" You can see the leverage, the believability.

So let's take it a verse at a time at this leverage now. And I'm going to suggest to you, and we're going to end up in just a few minutes after we've meandered through some of these verses, that we're not actually dealing with a Jewish problem alone, but a human temptation. So I'm starting from a Jewish context. But just so you know where we're heading here, so you don't feel like I tricked you—I don't mind tricking you. I'll lie to you too if it serves my purposes. *(Laughter.)* But I don't care about those things. So now you've got a little taste of the living context, and you're going to see where we turn around and say, "Hey! Woe to them!" But here we are, and here are some issues.

So let's pick up. So we're Jews. This is addressed, as we said, to people like Peter and Barnabas. He's playing a role. Now it's a real role because he is a Jew, of course. But he's playing a role, and he's doing what we call—I didn't make up this label!—he's arguing with someone called an imaginary interlocutor, meaning that he's got in his mind—I think it's safe to say this!—he's imagining somebody who is a Judaizer standing in front of him, as if he's writing a letter or possibly dictating a letter, okay?

And he's saying to this person, "Look! We as well, we're Jews by birth. We're not those 'sinners!' We all know that Gentiles are sinners, all right? We're not like that." In other words, he's going to find an ID with the guy first, which makes sense. Start with what you have in common with someone, all right?

"But nevertheless." You always wait for the other side, right? My mama used to say, "You wait for the penny to drop," which means, I think, that you have a hole in your pocket, okay? *(Laughter.)* "Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law."

Let me pause for just a second. Don't assume that when Paul says this, don't assume that he's assuming that this speaks for every Jew of his day, because it doesn't. Let me give you a modern-day window into it in a very short account, a tender one. I'm not holding this man up to ridicule, but with sensitivity.

By the way, maybe this is not fair. I teach full time at Geneva. I'm in the Bible Department there. I teach part time at RPTS.

**Transcriber's Note:** Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

**Jonathan:** I'm just schizophrenic. *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** There's medicine for that, you know.

**Jonathan:** I know. *(Laughter.)* Maybe one of these guys has some. It's called coffee, right? *(Laughter.)* I've taken a lot of that medicine.

So don't assume that Paul is speaking for everyone. Now here's the story. I took some Geneva college students to a synagogue some years ago. I took them to a synagogue just to see what it was like, and they were very, very good to us. And a rabbi up in Beaver

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Valley was very gracious in welcoming us, talking to us and presenting stuff to us because I invited him to do so.

And in one of his presentations he looked at us, knowing our college and what we stand for. He was very direct. And he said, "Look! We Jews don't need a mediator." He was very polite, but pointed. "We Jews don't need a mediator. We have the law. The law is our mediator with God."

Then he added—and he meant spiritually, not physically—"I'm a proud descendant of the Pharisees." He said with a smile, "I know in your book"—the New Testament—"they're the guys that wear the black hats. But in my book," he said, "they're the guys that wear the white hats."

Now I'm not practically speaking for every Jew today. There are fourteen million Jews in the world, a little over seven million who live in Israel today. By the way, for the first time in two thousand years, just in the last couple years, there are more Jews living in Israel than in the rest of the world. The numbers have just turned in the last one to two years, a little over seven million of the fourteen million in the world.

Okay. Anyway, so take him, this gentleman today, this dear gentleman—although I believe he's since passed away—as representing the person that Paul is talking with. Now let's go back to this. Let's follow the line.

*"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law."* As soon as Paul says that, -- Yes?

**Participant:** Would he not be anticipating a Messiah anyhow, even though he saw the law as a mediator?

**Jonathan:** Maybe. In other words, he could see the Messiah as restoring the glories of Israel, which at least it seems the apostles were anticipating.

**Participant:** But doesn't Paul write to that effect in Galatians about the law being given until Christ came?

**Jonathan:** As a guide and a teaching point, that's forthcoming. But that's the next chapter.

**Participant:** But the rabbi's not referring to that, though.

**Jonathan:** No, not at all. He's not referring to that.

**Participant:** Okay. Thank you.

**Jonathan:** He just sees it as "how do I get right with God? I observe God's law."

**Participant:** Wow!

**Jonathan:** I think I'm doing him justice. He was very direct about it.

So what Paul is going to do is this. First, the challenge is not to Christians. The challenge is to Jews. Now look. As soon as Paul says that a man is not justified by the works of the law, it's going to invite a challenge back from the imaginary Judaizers who is standing in front of him. Let's follow it through a little bit, because Paul elaborates that it comes through faith in Christ Jesus. *"Even we have believed in Christ that we may be justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law."*

We're all comfortable with that because we know that. We've read Romans, which of course hadn't been written at this point.

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All right, it's the next piece that's critical. Your Bible may or may not mark this. So let's do it. If it hasn't, you can edit it if you'd like. Have you ever edited a Bible? Today is your opportunity to do so, okay? (*Laughter.*) Oooh, yeah! You've just got to edit it the right way. You can't just make it up. (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** No lightning bolts?

**Jonathan:** No, no. You've got to do it the right way. He says this at the very end of verse 16. "*Since by the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified.*" This phrase "no flesh shall be justified" is lifted out of Psalm 143 verse 2.

**Transcriber's Note:** Psalm 143:2, NKJV. "*Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous.*"

**Jonathan:** You may have already said, "Boy, it sounds like the message of Romans." And if you said that, you would be quite correct. You're absolutely correct. But remember, Romans hasn't been written yet. Furthermore, he's arguing not with you, me, or people in Rome. He's arguing with this imaginary interlocutor, this Judaizers in front of him, reminding him. He says, "Look! You may think that the law is your mediator before God. 'I'm going to do the law and God will love me.' But remember, your own Bible says, 'No flesh justified.'"

And just so you know, that little word—and I'm glad the NASB put in there "no flesh." That is actually the literal word for that. And it's almost guaranteed to be influenced by the Greek word *sarx*, meaning human beings apart from God's redeeming influence. To be fleshly does not simply mean to be human. There's nothing wrong with being human. We're made in the image of God, but fleshly in the sense of nothing more than human and not yet experiencing the redemptive effects of God's grace. That's what this is getting at. So actually, I'm glad the word is in the NASB, because it's getting at the Semitic or Jewish/Hebrew connection from the Psalm he is lifting this phrase out of.

So now by the way, one more quick thing. In a dialogue we had a couple of years ago in Jerusalem with our Geneva students—and every two years we go to Jerusalem and Israel' we take our students to Jerusalem—we were talking with some very interesting Jewish guys. And one of them, a very, very articulate Jewish man, said, "Look, Judaism isn't about justification, and Christianity has missed the boat."

Now he was speaking very articulately and very strongly. And in my mind I'm thinking, "Well, if that's true, a lot of Jews have missed the boat, because they're telling me that they've looked up justification, as opposed to the New Testament."

So Paul is narrowing the focus here, as he also then says, "Look. If you're trying to do stuff by the law, you've got to watch out."

Let's elaborate on that. Let's go on to the next couple verses. So we come down next to verses 17 and 18. "*Now if, while we are seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin?*" Now why would he ask this question.

Now just take a second. This is Paul. "*If, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we are found to be sinners.*" Almost certainly, what he is reflecting is the same thing that has probably been said to believers in Christ for thousands of years. You've heard it, or you've



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said it. I know Christians who act worse than pagans. Have you heard that said?  
(*Laughter.*) Or have you said it?

**Participant:** Or are you one? (*Laughter.*)

**Jonathan:** I might be. Whether I act worse than pagans, I don't know. At the very minimum, I know for a fact, and I hope you know for a fact, that even on my best days I am absolutely vulnerable to doing almost back to back some of the best things and some of the worst things. We're very interesting creatures, aren't we, because we're able. And by the way, sometimes in just being human and being good to other humans, we try to summon up within us some immense power to do some really amazing things, even down to the giving of our lives to save someone else.

Do you know that we have a foundation in Pittsburgh called "The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission?" A good friend of mine for many years has been the chief researcher/writer for that. If you don't know about it, it was founded by Andrew Carnegie. And it gives awards to people who are civilians—not military, not police, but civilians—who saw a terrible situation and risked their own lives to try to save somebody else's life. And Paul actually says something very similar, interestingly, in Romans. Once in a while, someone might dare to risk his own life to save someone else who is a good man. So some of us human beings do amazing things.

However, we are frighteningly vulnerable, breakable, misleadable, and may do fifty things very, very well. But when we hit the 51<sup>st</sup>, or for any number of reasons we're not exploring today, we go the other way. And so he's recognizing that reality.

And so presumably somebody is saying to Paul, "You know, you call yourself an apostle. But, bla-bla-bla-bla-blah, I know all these Christians who call themselves believers in Jesus. But, bla-bla-bla-bla-blah, they talk about forgiveness and being made whole, victory in Christ."

But that stuff, that script, which I'm not debunking, because sometimes we're incredibly disappointed at the way other Christians have treated us. And then there are some times with the way we realize, "Boy, I can't believe I said or did that." It's towards that, but it's also toward us.

So surely he's observing that kind of criticism. In that circumstance, is Christ somehow ministering more sin? Well, God forbid! That's not where he's going. God forbid it! May it never be!

Now this is interesting. Verse 18, which I'm just going to spend a moment on, but let me tell you. Verse 18, which I have always kind of wrestled with, and I decided that I needed to go to one of the really heavy hitters to find out, because I just can't—This always glitches for me when I come back to Galatians. I look at it in the Greek, and I can read it backward in the Greek. Greek's the easy part, okay? It's the English I'm having trouble with. But you know, Mark Twain was once asked whether he was troubled by the parts of the Bible he didn't understand? And his response was that he was troubled by the parts of the Bible he did understand. (*Laughter.*) But this is one of the parts.

So I went to one of the heavy hitters, one of the greatest theologians from a previous generation, Hermann Ritterbos. And he says, "The significance of this verse 18, in the logical context, is very obscure."

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I thought, "Great!" (*Laughter.*) You know, we're lost before we've said anything. He says that there are a lot of suggestions about it. Well, I'm going to make a suggestion that I think fits with the flow. I may be right, I may be wrong.

But Paul says, "*If I rebuild what I once destroyed.*" I'm hearing in that what I call *desecration language*. Most religions have some sense of holiness. Even fallen human beings have some sense of holiness, called the *sensus divinitatus* in them. If you've got some religious building, don't mess with it. Don't destroy it. Not everyone abides by that, but generally people are at least hesitant to damage something that is considered holy.

So I think Paul is using that kind of language, as if to say, "Look! If I once destroyed all of the Jewish traditions, commands, laws, regulations of the Old Testament, which I'm accused of violating." Yes, he's moving away from them and beyond them, but he has not destroyed them. "But if I'm accused of that, and then I try to rebuild them, I'm just proving what a transgressor I was. If I try to renegotiate them, I'm admitting that I shouldn't have destroyed them in the first place."

Now that may be it. If I'm wrong, it's not a big deal. We can still catch the flow of the totality of the piece. I'm just going to give you a suggestion that may be there. So he's going to rebuild, but he's not ready to rebuild because he wasn't really destroying anything in the beginning anyway.

Let's move on to verse 19. This we can get because he talks about it at length in Romans. "*For through the law I died to the law.*" That same thought in very, very similar words is in Romans 7, verses 4 and 9, about dying to the law.

What does he mean by dying to the law? Through law, I died to the law. Is it Law, as in God's Law, or law lower case, in the sense of human law? I kind of lean to the God's law thing, and most of us do. But I just wanted to acknowledge that it might just be law in general.

Let me show you what he's getting at here, in my words. On the one hand, we need law. We desperately need law. I can tell you that if you're not sure you need law, I can tell you very simply how to be convinced of it. Here is what happened with me. It happened with a lot of people.

You find yourself in a situation where your life is on the brink. And you realize that if the other person wants to act lawlessly, he could obliterate you out of existence and no one will ever stop them from doing it. No one will hold them accountable. And if you stand at that point, if you realize that this could be my last moment, and no one will stop this other person if he wants to act lawlessly, then you realize that you need law.

How else do I need law? Well, if you perceive law as the character of God translated in a life, then you have a positive view of law. Let me say it one more time. You need law because it's the character of God translated for daily life.

It's the character of God in how to respect and not desecrate holy things. "You shall not take My name in vain." It's the character of God in avoiding idolatry—no graven images. If you reduce the infinite Divinity to something that you can hold, that's terrible.

It's the character of God translated to how you relate to your families. "*Honor your father and your mother.*" It doesn't stop there, but it starts there. "*Honor your father and your mother.*"

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The character of law will regard how you relate to other people's marriages, other people's property, other people's reputations, among other things. Do you need law? Absolutely! A society with no law is deadly. And Dostoyevsky, in *Brothers Karamazov*, has a statement in there, something like this, said by the priest. I have it almost verbatim. Without God, anything is possible. He means it negatively.

**Participant:** Permissible.

**Jonathan:** Is that the exact quote?

**Participant:** "Without God everything is permissible."

**Jonathan:** Permissible. Everything is permissible. Okay.

**Participant:** Except, of course, Christianity, right, in our day and age?

**Jonathan:** Meaning?

**Participant:** Meaning that without God anything is permissible, except anything that God says.

**Jonathan:** Oh, that's right.

**Participant:** Society has turned its back on it.

**Jonathan:** That's right. So I just wanted to say this. For a moment you saw it. You thought that you didn't need law. Not so. Does Paul think we don't need law? No, not so. He thinks that we need law.

I would just give you a quick reminder. In Matthew chapter five, in the Sermon On the Mount, Jesus says, "*Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it*", meaning to show how to live it out.

Okay, let's go back down to our text. You will say, "Then why does he say, 'but through the law I died to the law?'" The answer is that we can't live without law. But in living with law we're shown to be lawbreakers. That's the problem. And when you're shown to be a lawbreaker, you are showing this deep strain that runs in us to go against God's will, God's character, God's pleasure. And so as a society we need it. But it shows us for what we are, and that's not a good thing.

So what's the answer? We know where he's going to go next. The next part is the familiar part. I wanted mainly to negotiate the difficult part, the next part, verse twenty. "*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*"

I can tell you that it's not a physical thing. It means that the spiritual power, the spiritual life, the spiritual hope, the spiritual anticipation of anything good for now and for the future, is all coming not from me. It's what Luther called "an alien righteousness."

You know an alien, right? An alien is someone who comes from outside your zone. That's a generic definition of an alien—someone or something that comes from outside of your zone, comes in, and does whatever it's going to do.

So that's what it is. I don't live by my own power. But Christ crucified is helping me to do this.

You know, here's the good side. I hope you've experienced this. Sometimes, as we said a few minutes ago, we are terribly disappointed that we did what we knew we shouldn't do, and we felt that we couldn't do that, but we did it anyway. We're terribly disappointed in that. But can I tell you the good side, because there is a good side. The good side is that sometimes we're convinced that boy, if a certain opportunity or temptation is put

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before me, I just know I'm going to buckle. And then sometimes you don't. It's very interesting.

And you surprise yourself by the steadiness and the wholesomeness and the joy that's there that you didn't realize that was actually in there. It's very interesting! It's fun! That's good. Anyway, that's part of the taste of the victory. So I've been crucified with Christ. Yes, sir?

**Participant:** Yes. Going back to verse 19.

**Jonathan:** Okay. Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** When it says, "*But through the law I died to the law*", obviously you're not saying that we die to the law in the sense that we don't need it anymore for anything.

**Jonathan:** Correct.

**Participant:** Is Paul saying that we died to the law in the sense that we died to it as relying on it to justify us?

**Jonathan:** Correct.

**Participant:** Or that we died to it as we are no longer condemned by it?

**Jonathan:** This is a big discussion, by the way. Probably both of those, depending on where you're going in Romans, Galatians or other books. He may be getting at different angles with the things that you mentioned. Because again, I could guarantee that when you walk out of this classroom, or when you're in this classroom or in this place, you're living lawfully, right? You come here and you respect each other. There are no pickpockets in here. You're not stealing each other's property, right? You don't go out here and intentionally drive through red lights, hit people and property, go to work and steal from your boss? I'm sure you're able to do it. You may have done it. But I'm just saying that as a habit of life, you live lawfully.

It's very interesting. You know, even in lawless societies, to some degree there is a basic point where people say, "I'm going to live normally." Anyway, yes to your observations there.

And then he comes—he always does!—he comes full circle to the last verse, verse 21. "*I do not nullify the grace of God, because if righteousness came through law, Christ died needlessly.*" We all know as believers that that's not the case. We realize what law could do and we realize what it can't do.

So just kind of bringing this all together today, law is the character of God. And human law is modeled in a right way. They're not always, but they often are. They reflect in some way the character of God.

And that's because we have this deadly obsession, as I call it. You know, we're really stuck in a corner. We need law to live by. But we can't live by it. That's the weird thing.

And by the way, a little aside here. A misuse of law is what we call *legalism*. There are lots of legalisms in lots of different religions. *Legalism* is this idea that if I translate God's big laws into lots of micro-laws, then I'll be God's man or God's woman. And that's a Jewish problem.

And Jesus faced this. You say, "Why is He struggling with the Pharisees? They loved God's law, at least ostensibly." Well, the answer is because they were translating it into micro-laws. If your Christian faith is lawless, you've got problems, big problems. But if

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your Christian faith is nothing but that which is translated into micro-laws, you've also got problems of a different nature. Not this (antinomianism) on the far left, or this (legalism) on the far right, but something else is, of course, what's important.

So what is grace? Well, grace, as you all know, is getting the good that you don't deserve. To some degree, law is a gracious thing, right? It tells us to know your left hand from your right. We often need that reorientation. By the way, we may have had that orientation, but we've lost it in many ways.

So there's a little bit of grace in law. But also, there's a little bit of law in grace. In being gracious to people, there are good and not so good ways to be gracious. In the name of graciousness and grace-filled behavior, we're tempted constantly to let things go. But sometimes there is a certain accountability or regularization that we need, because accountability is something that is very good for human life. So it's kind of interesting. Please?

**Participant:** I have a whole bunch of thoughts. I'll just go with the last one that you said. There's a little bit of grace in law. I made that same statement not too long ago and someone disagreed. So could you explain how there is a little bit of grace in law. Can you explain that?

**Jonathan:** It provides us with sanity.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Jonathan:** It provides us with sanity. And, you know, we've gone through an era in which evangelicalism has been known, unfortunately, for its micro-laws, for being too legalistic. But I want you to know that the pendulum has gone the other way on the spectrum.

**Participant:** Yes.

**Jonathan:** And we're seeing more and more people saying, "Who are you to judge me? How can you tell me not to do this or not to do that? You have no understanding of me. You can't tell me what's right or what's wrong. You can't judge how right and wrong come into *my* life, which is not your life." And that's the other direction. So we need grace in law. And increasingly, we need law in grace at the other end of the spectrum.

**Participant:** And can't we take it back, even prior to the Law? You know, I was just thinking that by God's grace, He gave man the Law. I mean, isn't that grace as well?

**Jonathan:** Absolutely true, because it's also our relationship to God. You know, Psalm 15 asks the question. Who is going to live intimately with god? It's not those exact words. But who is going to dwell in God's holy hill? Who is going to live knowing God? The answer is that the person who lives in these various kinds of ways—does this, does this, does not do this, does not do this. It means that there is a package.

And Jesus does something similar in the Sermon On the Mount. What are the standards of the Kingdom? It's not hard to find that out. It's no secret that Jesus claims that it has standards. It has both standards to do as well as standards to think. So I think it's a very relevant thing in the perception of everybody. And that includes believers who are either too far this way or too far that way. You know, extremes in life are always tempting, because they're safe.

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You know, Richard Foster, if you've ever seen his book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, he says about legalism, "Law of the wrong kind gives a false sense of security." Have you got a question?

**Participant:** To me, I see grace and law as the law being a schoolmaster to show us our need for Christ.

**Jonathan:** Absolutely.

**Participant:** And this discussion in the Scriptures is where do we put our trust, in what we have done or will do, or what Christ has done for us?

**Jonathan:** Exactly. Yes, please?

**Participant:** I have a hypothetical question about that. If Adam hadn't sinned, would there have been a need for the law?

**Jonathan:** I think every day of their lives was in law, because it's out of the character of God. By the way, notice the nature of the stipulations of their life in the garden before sin. You can eat this; you can't eat that.

**Participant:** Right.

**Jonathan:** You should be managing stuff this way, which implies "don't neglect these things."

**Participant:** So would it be implicit as they follow it? He wouldn't have to specifically say, "Here's the Law. Here are the Ten Commandments." If they would not have disobeyed, wouldn't they follow them?

**Jonathan:** I'm assuming so. I wasn't there. I don't know. (*Laughter.*) I kind of guess maybe.

**Participant:** Was somebody else going to speak?

**Jonathan:** No.

**Participant:** First of all, I know that the Westminster Confession isn't Scripture. I realize that. But it does say that Adam and Eve had the law written on their hearts. And then the second point is that I think that a good case can be made that when Adam and Eve sinned, every one of the Ten Commandments was violated in that sin.

**Jonathan:** They are interconnected.

**Participant:** Yes, they are. I would say that they are connected.

**Jonathan:** Yes sir?

**Participant:** This is Kerry. I'm saying that I have a specific problem. I go and open my mail. Okay, the law. Now we're doing a beautiful study. And then I struggle with God's righteous anger. So if I died to the law, and if I don't open the mail, there could be a problem. And now, that's the right thing. If I don't open my mail, for some reason, then I'm ignorant. Now, the next thing I know is (*unclear.*) Because they shut it off. Now I'm kind of okay with that.

**Jonathan:** Yeah?

**Kerry:** Yeah, I'm kind of okay with it. So I know there are things out there that keep me in check. Gosh, if I wasn't in check in some ways, I'm a very blessed man. If I lived anywhere else, I wouldn't have no arms, no legs. They'd all be cut off. What a blessing it is! I say, "Well, that's okay." You know, it's righteous to have these certain things to keep me in check.

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**Jonathan:** Absolutely. Amen, brother.

**Kerry:** So I'm okay with that. But I also argue with it, because I think it's too much for me! It's a simple thing for others. For me, it's a mountain! And I can't deal with a lot of things. And boy, am I getting burned! I'm getting burned to the point where I really can't enjoy anything, because I've allowed myself to get in this trap. So then, without me misusing a study to say what it says—God's righteous anger—I accept that I did this wrongly. I'm not going to say that that dag-gon policeman was hiding behind the tree. He caught me. Then I hate the law. And I don't want to hate the law, you know? So I am constantly trying to come to terms with it. There's a problem here. It's not their fault. I don't think it's my fault, because I'm just simply overwhelmed too much, you know? So what do I do now?

**Jonathan:** There are, in day to day life, a lot of natural checks and balances to keep us doing the right things, not because we're particularly motivated to do them for their own rightness, but because we realize the negative consequences would be much worse. Yes?

**Participant:** He's starting to describe Romans 7. St. Paul was in the same bind. And we all are. And the only answer is when Christ comes in glory and we get perfected. Till then, we wrestle with this. All of us.

**Jonathan:** Well, let me pray. I don't want to abuse your time. Let me pray with you, and then we'll call it a wrap.

Father in heaven, this is exactly where we have rightly been brought. The fact is that we realize that the things of our daily lives are to some degree hemmed in, in a good way, hemmed in either that we're prevented from doing things, or we're motivated to do things that otherwise many of us agree that we would not have done, or we would have done and shouldn't have, because there are just natural consequences that are difficult. And we don't want to face those difficulties. But we also would like to pray that more of the motivations and the godly imaginations of our hearts would grow, and just brighten and beautify. May that happen, especially in our doings today and in the days ahead. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.