

“The Law and Me”

Devoted to God

Matthew 5:17-20

Pastor Jeff Stivason

July 28, 2017

Jeff: All right. You know, I'm not sure what this Bible study would be without Sig. Equally so, but on a more serious note, thankfully, is Don, as Don leads us into prayer.
(Music)

Our heavenly Father, we are thankful for the many blessings that You give. And Father, we are thankful for the ones that we take for granted, like our very lives and the breath that we breathe, and for the night of sleep that we had. We're also thankful for family and for the friends that we enjoy, and for a place like this to come to. Lord, we're thankful for our church, and we're thankful for the way in which You feed us upon Your word. We pray that You would continue to grow us strong.

Father, as we think about Bruce, we're thankful for the good news that he received, and pray that would be to good effect in his life and that he would be able to come back soon and enjoy the company of these Brave Men.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Father, we pray, we ask that You would bless us today and strengthen us as once again we look to Your word. Help us, Father, to grow in grace and depth of insight. Help us to become more and more of Christ and help us to grow in His image, that we might be a glory and an honor to You and not to ourselves. Father, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Well, why don't you open your Bibles? I've got it up today, but it's fairly small print. So it's Matthew chapter 5, and we'll get to that reading in just a minute. But hold that open on your lap so that you'll have it open when we get to that. Matthew chapter 5.

Well as we think about sanctification and growing in grace, one of the things that we've talked about a little bit but not very much by way of comparison is the law of God. And so today we're going to think about the law of God. We're going to think about the moral law, the Ten Commandments, not in any detailed way. It's not as if we're going to go through each commandment. But we're certainly going to think about how it is that the Law impacts us as believers.

So I've got an outline for today. And the outline goes something like this. We're going to be thinking about some introductory things with regard to moving into a discussion about the law. And then we're going to think about Jesus and the law.

That's really important, because if Jesus kept the law for us, then is there a need for the law to be kept today at all? And what was His relationship to the law? What did He come to do with the law? We're going to address those kinds of questions today.

And then we're going to think about the law and the Christian. And then we're going to think about the Christian life and the law. We're going to think about a couple of things

“The Law and Me”

that Ferguson mentions throughout the chapter, and I’ll just summarize them in the end. So we’ll get to those things then.

First of all, let’s get to our passage. It’s the passage that the chapter focuses on today and I’m going to read it for us. It’s verses 17-20 of Matthew chapter 5. Who knows what part of the Scripture that finds itself in, that famous part of the Scripture?

Participant: The Sermon on the Mount.

Jeff: The Sermon on the Mount, that’s right. This is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. So let’s turn to God’s word and listen to it as read.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Now let’s get to thinking about this, and let’s first of all turn to our introductory points. How are we to understand the law?

Well if you know anything about John Newton, you know that he wrote “Amazing Grace.” One of the things that he also did throughout his life was to pen letters. One of the things that a person does as he works throughout his life is that he realizes his niche, and he works it. And one of the things that Newton did was to write other things. But one of the best things that he wrote were his letters. And he realized that his letters were a significant part of the church, and how he was ministering to the church.

And in his letter he has this statement about the law. He says, *“Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes.”*

He’s not the only one to say that. Someone before him by the name of Martin Luther said this about the law. *“Whoso then can rightly judge between the law and the gospel, let him thank God and know that he is a right divine.”*

Now when you have two significant and two important men like that, who say to you that the law is a difficult thing to understand and that it’s hard to parse out, then you’d better pay attention to him, because he’s going to help you. He’s going to be a guide to you. And these men are, in many ways, a good guide for understanding law and gospel.

But I want you to understand that we already have some building blocks in place that will help us to understand the law and the gospel. For instance, one of the building blocks that we have that we were introduced to early on was the *duplex gratia Dei*, the twofold grace of God. And all that is just a fancy way of saying that when we are saved, we are both justified and sanctified.

Now let me explain what I mean by that. We are justified in Christ by faith. In other words, we are forgiven all of our sins. We have all of Christ’s riches at His expense imputed, counted, reckoned to us.

But we have experienced *definitive sanctification*. And by that I mean—or the Scriptures mean—that we’ve been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and put down

“The Law and Me”

into the kingdom of light. And the *progressive* aspect of sanctification is that we grow into the new relationship in which we find ourselves.

But the point that Calvin wanted to make is that we never enjoy one without the other. If we are in Christ, you can never say in Christ that I’m a justified man. God just hasn’t sanctified me yet. No, no, no! If you are a justified man, you have been definitively sanctified. And your behavior will catch up to who you are in Jesus Christ. Those two things go together. You can’t have one without the other. That’s an important thing to remember.

Now automatically that ought to say to you, “Oh! The law has some importance in my life as a guide, as a direction for me,” and we’ll get to what that is. But that alone ought to say something to you about the importance of the law.

I want to revisit an illustration that I gave you earlier because I want it in the backdrop of your thinking before we think about today. Christians will oftentimes fall into one of two errors. They will either fall into legalism, or they will fall into antinomianism.

Let’s think first about antinomianism. Antinomianism means *against the law*. In other words, they’re against any form of saying that the law has some sort of bearing on my Christian life. And let me give you an illustration of that.

I talked to you about Johnny one time, and I said that Johnny was being left at home by his dad. And his dad said to him, “Johnny, this is what I want you to do while I’m gone. I want you to clean your room. And Johnny affirms what his dad says.

His dad walks out the door and Johnny says this. He says, “Why do I need to clean my room? My dad loves me whether I clean my room or not. I’m not going to clean my room.”

That’s an antinomian mindset, a mindset that says, “Who cares? I’m saved by grace.” In other words, I have ½ of the *duplex gratia Dei*. It becomes a uni.

Participant: *A uniplex gratia Dei.*

Jeff: I only have one thing. I only have justification. And that’s okay with me.

But then there’s legalism that people often fall into. Legalism says something like this. Johnny’s dad says, “Go clean your room while I’m gone, Johnny.” And Johnny says, “Okay.”

Johnny’s dad walks out the door and Johnny says, “I’d better go clean my room so that I can ensure my father’s love for me.” In other words, Johnny thinks that his doing will secure his father’s love.

Now that’s legalism. When we begin to think in any way that our works contribute to our pleasing God in any salvific way, that’s legalism. And I want to tell you something. Usually, typically, Christians fall into one of those two errors.

And usually Christians will self-correct by adding a little of the one error to the other error. You know what they think. They’ll think, “Oh, I feel guilty! I feel like I’ve been living a little loose. So what do I do? I need to inject a little legalism.” And then they’ll think, “Well, I’m being a little too legalistic.” And so they’ll inject a little antinomianism into their lives. And that’s not the way to do it at all.

The way to understand the Christian life is not the two extremes. The way to understand the Christian life is *union with Christ* and *the twofold grace of God* that we

“The Law and Me”

enjoy as a result of that union. That’s the way to understand the Christian life. I am justified and I am being renovated. And it’s the renovation aspect that we’re going to think about as we think about the law of God. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes. I have a two-pronged question. #1. I’m thinking of people who are of the Reformed persuasion. Do you think that legalism is more of a danger for us than antinomianism? And #2, following that, is it legalism if I really, truly, out of love for Christ, which is always imperfect on my part, is it legalism if I want to obey His law out of love? Is that legalism?

Jeff: Right. So first of all, the answer to your first question is, in my opinion, Don, that I think you’re right. I think that’s what you’re reaching for. I think people in the Reformed faith do have a tendency to be legalistic, or can at least move in that direction. And I think they can move in that direction in things they really enjoy, right?

I always think that the Lord’s Day is really important to Reformed folk. And I always find it amusing when Reformed folk think they need the grace of God for every other day except for the Lord’s Day because they’ve got the Lord’s Day down. *(Laughter)* Everybody needs grace for every day. I think there’s a tendency in that direction.

I also think that in the evangelical church that there is a tendency toward antinomianism. There’s such a reaction to any sense of I’ve got to do, I’ve got to obey. And I think it comes from a disjointed theology that doesn’t understand how grace and law fit together. They’ve fallen upon the rocks of Newton and the Luther comments, you know. And so one overemphasizes what the other underemphasizes.

I think that in answer to your second question,—if I’m loving God, does that constitute legalism if I’m loving Him by obeying His law?—the short answer is no. But I’m going to get to that in the end.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: So let me put that off until the end. I have a funny story about myself in a class with Sinclair Ferguson. So if you remind me, I’ll tell you that story. It’s not very flattering for me, but it’s funny nonetheless. *(Laughter)* Okay.

Participant: Go ahead and tell us. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I remember, I’ll try to do that. Oh, it’s time for a drink of coffee! *(Laughter)* All right, so—

Participant: You could always tell it twice.

Jeff: Yeah, I could; that’s right. Moving right along,— *(Laughter)* Now you’re tempting me. Anyway—*(Laughter)*

So let’s think about Jesus and His relationship to the law. Those things are going to be important for us as we come back to them, thinking about the law and the Christian. But for right now we need to think about Jesus and the law.

I want you to look at your text. You have in front of you Matthew 5:17-20, and look at what Jesus says. He says, “*Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets.*”

Now that word *abolish* is an interesting word, a neat word. *Catalusi* is the word. It’s made up of two words. It’s made up of a preposition—*cata*, which means *down from*, and it’s made up of a verb—*luo*. Down from, to loose, that idea. It can be translated and is translated in other parts of the Scripture to mean *destroy*. In fact, when it’s used in the

“The Law and Me”

Jerusalem temple with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, that’s the word that’s used.

So Jesus says, “I did not come to loosen the law so as to destroy the law, so as to bring it down.” In other words, I didn’t come to loosen the stones in the wall of the law so that the wall of the law would come crumbling down.

Now that’s really important. You have to remember that, because He’s going to talk later and apply that to us. So let’s just keep that in mind.

What did He come to do? Well He didn’t come to abolish the law. He came to fulfill the law.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves—and Ferguson spends a lot of time on this section. And we’re not going to spend a lot of time. We’re going to spend one slide. But what does it mean to fulfill the law?

Well I’m going to give you this definition. To fulfill, at least in the sense that we’re thinking about it, means *to bring out the fullness already inherent in the principle in something else*.

So, for instance, a seed is a good example of what it means to fulfill. In that seed there’s all that information that seed needs to grow and to become the plant that it will become. So there’s a sense in which the seed just simply exfoliates or unfolds that which it already is, or already possesses in terms of the information.

Now think about that with regard to Jesus. What does it mean that Jesus came to fulfill the law, came to exfoliate the law? Well, in many ways.

He fulfilled the law by His obedience. Now when you think about that, Jesus had to fulfill that because He had to be the perfect spotless Lamb. So He fulfills the law by His obedience.

He fulfills the law by His teaching. Remember what the people say about Him. Here is One who comes and teaches not with the authority of the Pharisees, but with a different authority.

How about in *His curse bearing*? When you think about the law, not only did the law have those positive precepts that needed to be obeyed, but it also had curses. And Israel inherited the curses of the law found under the Mosaic covenant.

So when the Redeemer comes, not only must He be a spotless perfect Lamb. But somebody has got to bear the curse for those people. And so Jesus is not only obedient, but He becomes the curse-bearer. He fulfills the law in that sense.

And He is enabled by the Spirit to do it. Now this is important when you think about how it was that Jesus did these things, how it was that He kept the law, how it was that He bore the curse. He did this by the enabling power of the Spirit. That translates over into our Christian life.

Does Christ’s fulfillment of the law then mean that I no longer have to obey the law? That’s really the question. If Christ fulfilled the law in all of these ways, then the question that I have to ask myself as a Christian is this. Do I have to obey the law? And if somebody says, “Yes,” then I have to ask why, because it looks to me like Jesus exfoliated, unfolded, fulfilled the law in all of its aspects better than I could. So do I have to fulfill the law in some sense? Do I have to keep the law? Do I have to obey the law?

“The Law and Me”

Okay, so that’s what we’re going to do when we get to the next segment. But let’s pause for a minute. Go ahead.

Participant: Is there a distinction in what Jesus refers to as the Law?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Because I know the difference between the Mosaic and the moral. But sometimes He doesn’t really directly say. So I need to define Mosaic and moral, when He said, *“I did not come to abolish it but to fulfill it.”* What does He mean?

Jeff: Yes, what does He mean? So when you think about the law given to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, there is one law. And when you think about the one law, you can think about it in one of two ways. Typically you think about that one law divided up into three sections. There’s the moral law, which is the Ten Commandments, and that is an aspect of the law which Jesus came to fulfill. When you think about the next part of the law, it’s the ceremonial part of the law.

And that is an aspect which Jesus came to fulfill. And the ceremonial aspects of the law are things like the priests and the sacrifices and the vestments and all of that sort of thing.

When you think about another aspect of the law you think about the civil aspect of the law. And that is an aspect of the law that Jesus came to fulfill. So Jesus comes to fulfill the law in its entirety.

Why do I say that He fulfills the civil aspect of the law? Because He’s the true Israel. He is the true Son of God. He is the Israel of God to come. So He fulfills everything in the law in its entirety.

Now there are some things that are fulfilled in such a way that are not taken up by us again. For instance, the civil code can be used by states to make laws. But you cannot say as a nation that we are Israel, and so therefore we’re going to take the civil law and apply it to us wholeheartedly. You can’t do that, because you’d be misapplying the Scriptures.

The ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ, and it can’t be lifted up and dumped into the New Testament either. It’s fulfilled in such a way that there is now the last sacrifice offered in Jesus Christ, and it cannot be replicated.

Now there are churches that do that. What church does that? Well if you look at the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church takes the ceremonial law wholesale and dumps it into the church.

But what is there then for us to obey? There’s the moral law. The moral law stands from the beginning and it will stand to the end. Why? Because it’s the character of God revealed in propositions.

Participant: How do you make the distinction between moral and ceremonial, because the moral goes beyond the Ten Commandments. There are things that are written in Exodus that are moral, not ceremonial.

Jeff: So here’s how I would talk about that. It’s the second way of understanding the law that I mentioned. It’s to say that here are the Ten commandments. Now everything else in the Old Testament plugs into that in some way or another. For instance, everything morally based plugs back into the Ten Commandments. Everything ceremonially based plugs back into those Ten Commandments.

“The Law and Me”

For instance, how is it that I’m to keep those first four commandments in terms of my relationship with God? The ceremonial law tells me how. But now that particular way of relating to God has passed away. Now it’s fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Now I come to those first four commandments through Christ, but not through the ceremonial law.

How is it that the civil law fits into that? Obviously with the last six. This is how you are to run a nation. This is how you are to relate as brother to brother. And again that application of the civil law has now passed away because Israel as an economy has passed away.

So you see how everything plugs back into the moral law. So I would say that the moral law becomes the hub by which everything else plugs in. Does that make sense?

Participant: Sort of. (*Muffled laughter*)

Jeff: Do you have a follow-up?

Participant: Well I’m thinking of specifics. A lot of times we speak to nonbelievers about points in the Old Testament.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: And they say that homosexuality is only found in the Old Testament.

Jeff: Right.

Participant: And in the New Testament you don’t really see it. With Paul in Romans and things like that. it’s found in the New Testament as well. But you’re saying that the moral law is the Ten commandments, and that the ceremonial and civil law is outside of that. How do you relate the moral and civil law? Do you see what I mean?

Jeff: Well I like the second way of relating to the law because everything plugs back into the moral—the civil law, how I relate to Christ religiously, all those things plug back into the moral law.

Participant: There are things that go beyond the Ten Commandments that you’ll find that are moral.

Jeff: Well see, I think that everything plugs back into the Ten commandments in some way, shape or form, which we’ll get to. We’ll get to that, how that works out.

Participant: I don’t know how to explain it. But isn’t there an unwritten law. As an example, Cain knew what to do and didn’t do it, and God told him that “*sin is at your door.*” Abraham knows that homosexuality is not right. But there was no law at the time. There’s a certain aspect of God’s character that righteous people follow, or at least try to follow. But it’s not written.

Jeff: Yes. Romans 2:14 or 15, I think it is, or 15 and 16, says that the law is written even on the hearts of the Gentiles.

Participant: Right.

Jeff: So the law which is written in stone is also written on the heart.

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: So men intuitively know, for instance, that it’s wrong to murder. Absolutely.

Participant: That helps us with our relationship to Abraham as his sons.

Jeff: Sure. Yes?

Participant: I think that the gentleman who was talking before meant that you hear people say, for example, “Okay, you condemn homosexuality. But you can’t have two

“The Law and Me”

kinds of fabric. You can't play football. Having two kinds of fabric is a sin. Eating certain foods is an abomination.” They fail to make a distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law.

Jeff: Right. Yes, you have to think about it and you have to interpret it. For instance, when the people say, “What do you think about the Bible when it says to take out your disobedient son and stone him at the city gate?”, I say, “Well look. Don't you interpret texts? And don't you interpret them contextually, and don't you interpret them in light of their own structure,” and those kinds of things?

And you say, “Of course.”

And so I say, “Well that was for the time of the Israelite economy, and it's not for us.”

And they say, “Oh, no, no!”

And I say, “Well, you know, whether you believe it or not is an irrelevant thing. That's the way you're to understand it. Yes, go ahead.

Participant: Yes. I just wanted to say that whenever he asked the question about the moral law and the ceremonial law, I just think that it's important, as we study the Scriptures, that I would say that even just reading Leviticus there is a distinction. And as we study the Scriptures and we know that the ceremonial laws are listed the way they're listed, and the moral laws are listed, and you had said that they tie back to one another. But it's just important for us to study the Bible through and through, and it's a process. But as we do that, we gain revelation of those things of the ceremonial law, the civil law, the moral law.

Jeff: And you're right. The Holy Spirit illuminates to us how those different applications are to fit within the different epochs of divine revelation. So, for instance, when I look at the commandment to obey father and mother, and I look at the application to take your rebellious son to the city gate and stone him, I understand that was for the economy of Israel. But I also understand that I'm not in the economy of Israel today, not in that sense, not in the sense that Israel as a nation was the economy of God. I'm that in a different sense. And so that application of that commandment does not apply in that way to me today.

Participant: Jeff, could you explain the word *economy*?

Jeff: Yes. It's just the way that God works. Economics is the way that God works in that particular time.

Participant: Jesus summarized the law in terms of loving God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. One thing it seems to me that unfolds the meaning of the law is that He becomes in one sense our Interpreter of the Ten commandments.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: In the Old Testament, if it doesn't pass muster with Christ in His example and His teaching, I have to be very cautious with it.

Jeff: Absolutely. That's an excellent point.

Participant: I'm trying to figure out—and maybe you can help me to try to figure this out—how Ephesians 5:22 and 23 would fit into these laws that you're talking about.

Jeff: Can you read Ephesians 5:22 and 23?

Participant: Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands—

“The Law and Me”

Jeff: Oh, yeah yeah yeah! Well that’s a great verse. What are you talking about?
(*Laughter*) Aren’t we Brave Men? So let’s try to get to that at the end. (*Laughter*) I’m not dodging, I’m not dodging! I’m looking at the clock. (*Laughter*)

All right. So let’s think about the law and the Christian for just a minute. Jesus goes on to say, “*Therefore, whoever relaxes*”—the word is *luo*—“*whoever loosens one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.*”

Now think about what we just said. Jesus just said that He did not come to loosen the law so as to tear it down or destroy it. And then He goes on to say, “*Therefore, whoever loosens one of these laws.*” Now what were the Pharisees doing? They were looking to loosen the law and create loopholes so that they could obey the law.

Now think about that. There’s an incredible difference between trying to find loopholes in the law so that I can always be saying, “I obeyed the law,” versus the striving to keep the law but failing to do so, and knowing that I am forgiven in Christ because He was the only One who could keep the law perfectly. So I’ve got to keep going back to the resource of grace in order to stand up and face the law again.

And so Jesus is saying, “Do not be like the Pharisees and create loopholes.”

I love this cartoon. I love it. Calvin is looking at a test. And the question is explain Newton’s first law of motion in your own words. He has a smile on his face, and he says, “Yaca boo ma krug publiu zinc wattum segura jubbles buzz.” And then he sits back, satisfied, and he says, “I love loopholes.” (*Laughter*) Do you get it? Explain it in your own words. I love that. (*Laughter*) Isn’t that great?

All right. Now how is it that we’re going to obey the law and not allow the Pharisee in us, or the residue of Adam, to create loopholes in the law, because we will do it. Brothers, we will do it! How is it that we’re going to avoid it?

Well, the Westminster Larger Catechism gives rules for keeping the law, rules for a right understanding of the law. I’m not going to list all of them. And I’m not going to list them in the words of the Westminster divines. I’m just going to give some of them to you in a distilled way because I think they’re helpful.

One of them is that *the law is perfect, and we’re obligated to keep it fully*. Now some of you are saying, “Wait a minute! Really?” Yes, really! If you are saved by grace, you are also in receipt of what? Renovating grace. If you are justified, you are sanctified. You are definitively sanctified and you will grow into your definitive sanctification.

Look, take your dad. I don’t know about you. If he did this, you had the greatest dad in the world. But my dad never said to me, “Hey son, as long as you can do thirty per cent of the work around the house, it’s all good.” No! No, my dad said, “These are the chores. This is what you’re expected to do.” I was expected to do all of them.”

When I failed to do them, I reaped the consequences of not doing them. But I never lost his love. My dad never stopped loving me because I didn’t do everything that I was required to do. I received the consequences of not doing them. I had to go to my dad and I had to say, “What are the consequences? I didn’t get everything done today.”

And he usually said, “That’s all right. Get it done tomorrow.” But you see, the point is that I’m required to do everything that the moral law, the Ten Commandments,

“The Law and Me”

commands and requires me to do. I’m to love God and love my neighbor, to put it succinctly.

Secondly, *God demands obedience from the whole man*. I love this because this goes back to what we talked about when we talked about the fragmented dispositional complex, and how grace brings unity to the complex of emotions and mind and will and behavior.

I love this at the end of the chapter. At the end of the chapter, Ferguson says, look. It’s Casey Jones’ old engine, right? The steam is needed. The Holy Spirit is the steam that’s needed. But the train needs some tracks to run on. And what are the tracks? The law is the track. I may be energized to do by the Holy Spirit. But I need to know where to go. And the law tells me where to go.

Participant: When you had the parentheses there, was it fair to put the spirit and the soul in there?

Jeff: Well that’s what they put in there.

Participant: But I’m just saying from just thinking about will, mind, affections and behavior, that spirit and soul would be two words that would just go in there nicely. Would you agree or disagree?

Jeff: Well, I think that what our minds, our wills and our affections do is indicative of where our souls are headed. So I think those would encapsulate that. You could cut some of them out and just say *soul*, but in terms of understanding it somebody could say, “What do you mean by *soul*?”

And I’d say, “What you think, what you choose, what you feel.”

Thirdly, *one sin or duty encompasses all similar sins or duties*. This gets back to your earlier question. There are things that don’t fit in. I think that if you look at the Larger Catechism, and you see how it is that the Larger Catechism unpacks each commandment, you begin to realize that in some way or another all transgression and obedience goes back to the Ten commandments in some way, shape or form.

It’s really a good exercise to go through the section in the Larger Catechism on the law of God because it’s really challenging. It’s encouraging, but it’s really challenging as well.

Fourth, *when a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden*. And so also with promises and threats. When there’s a promise given, the threat is also there. When the threat is given, the contrary promise is also there.

And *we’re obligated to be helpful to others in their obedience*. So it’s not just me and God. It’s me and others in Christ and God. It’s me and my brothers and sisters and God.

Those are just a snippet and a simplification of what we find in the Westminster Larger Catechism. I would commend it to you because it’s a great way to keep yourself in check so that you don’t try and create loopholes with regard to your obedience to the law.

Here, look. You say to me, “But Pastor Jeff, what if I fail? What if I fail to keep the law?” What would you say to somebody like that?

Participant: We’re not surprised.

“The Law and Me”

Jeff: That’s what the grace of Christ is there for, right? When I fail I go to Jesus Christ. In order to succeed I go to Jesus Christ. I can’t do this endeavor without Jesus Christ.

Participant: Isn’t another way of looking at the law as being the character of God the Father?

Jeff: Oh yes, absolutely.

Participant: Because it’s unwritten; it’s written on your heart, and you know what not to do. And you think that it has to start with the Ten Commandments. Well there was a Sabbath before the Ten Commandments.

Jeff: Absolutely.

Participant: Hey Jeff, can you help me understand antinomianism and legalism?

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: I can explain that to Johnny really well right now.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: How do you simply explain to Johnny what you’re talking about, because I can say to Johnny, “I love you, but you have to go and clean your room.” And I can say this to Johnny. And he can think, “Well if I don’t clean up my room”,--legalism —“then you won’t love me, Dad.” How do I explain to Johnny right now, simply, what you’re talking about?

Jeff: Yes. I’d just say this to him. So for instance, in this regard, somebody says to me, “Well, you know, what does it mean for me to help others? What does it mean for me to interact with others in this whole endeavor?”

And I’d say, “Well, you honor your parents. And that commandment goes beyond that to all authority. Are you honoring the authorities in your life?” And then, you see, you begin to unpack it.

So I begin to ask myself these questions that the commandments of God just unfold for me. So for instance, you go back to Johnny. Johnny comes to me and says, “Dad, you know, you told me to clean my room, but I don’t understand what you mean.”

And I say, “Johnny, come on, you know. Make your bed. Put your clothes in the laundry basket. Pick up your toys so your mother doesn’t stub her toes when she walks through your room. You know, at least those three things I’m talking about.” You know what I mean?

“But Dad, I don’t know what clothes.”

“No, no, no; there we go. You know what clothes.” You get the idea.

Participant: Going to the question he had, I remember that when I was a new Christian I remember hearing that God loved me. Christ died for me. But then I would hear that I needed to keep these things. And I would think that if I didn’t keep these things, does that mean that God doesn’t love me? And I think that it’s a hard concept to get, until you really grasp that He has saved you. And if He has saved you, He will help you to do these things. And if you don’t do them, it’s not because He doesn’t love you. You may never have been saved.

Jeff: Can you realize that this is why good earthly fathers are so important?

Participant: Yep.

“The Law and Me”

Jeff: Because good earthly fathers give us a little bit of a glimpse, imperfectly, of the Father’s love. If I don’t do exactly what my father says, my father still loves me, right? And I go to him and I repent and I say, “Dad, I’m sorry for that.” Or I may need punishment. I may need corrective discipline. And a good father gives that to me because he cares about the direction of my life.

And so, you know, when you think about how it is to get across the idea that all of these things have been kept for me, but I need to obey them, I think the reason why the Scriptures often go back to family and fatherhood is because a good father helps us to understand how that works out.

Participant: Doesn’t God love the souls that go to hell? Or does He?

Jeff: Does God love the souls that go to hell? I’ve got two minutes left, and you ask me that? *(Laughter)* Hold on just a second. Go ahead.

Participant: I have a little Johnny at home, a little Jackson. But I think it’s important to ask. Do you love the Lord is a big part of this. In other words, the motivation in both regards, as you’re saying that my father loves me and therefore I don’t need to clean my room, or I need to earn my father’s love, so I’d better do x, y and z,--

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: When you ask the question of how I engage the law, what needs to be done and what doesn’t need to be done? Christ was asked what the greatest commandment is. He said it was to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself. It’s love. If your motivation is to love Christ, there will be a desire to do those things to please the Father and to honor Him in those ways. Without that piece of it, it all becomes undone, no matter how you slice it.

Jeff: Love is the motivator, the law is the guide. Absolutely.

Participant: It’s not so much that if I love God I’ll have the desire to do that, but if I’m in union with Christ, I will have the desire to do that. Abraham loved Isaac, but he was ready to kill him. He would have plunged the knife even though he loved him.

Jeff: So what it is is this. It’s that God loves me, and therefore I am motivated to keep the law because He loved me.

Participant: But even more than that, it’s union with Christ that generates all of that.

Jeff: But the fact that God loves me is an indication of that union, right? It’s a fruit of that union. Actually, it’s not a fruit. It’s the cause and source of that union.

Participant: It’s normal.

Jeff: Yes. So love is the motivator. Ferguson says that the law is love-shaped, and love is law-shaped. I mean that’s what you find in John 15, for instance. Love becomes the motivator and the law is the guide.

I love what Ferguson says about the law as our in-law. Did you see this? You can’t leave. I know we’re at the time. But you can’t go to work without hearing this. You just can’t. Let me read this to you.

“How does someone become your in-law? Not by your marriage to that person directly, but by your marriage to their relation. In the same way the Christian’s relationship to the law is not direct. We are no longer married to the law, but to Christ. But He is the One who both loved the law and embodied it. Marry Him, and we become

“The Law and Me”

connected to all that is His, including the law given by His Father. Thus the new covenant believer’s relationship to the law comes through marriage to Christ. It is a faith relationship.

“Furthermore, we now share one Spirit with our husband Jesus Christ, and He enables us to love what our Husband loves, a love expressed in Old Testament words applied to Jesus in the New Testament.”

Now I’m not going to read those words there in Psalm 40 verse 7. But let me just read this.

“We love the law because we love our Husband, Jesus Christ. Yes, there are times when our in-law may not be best pleased with our Husband’s bride”—us. (muffled laughter) “But since the law is an in-law, and not itself our Husband, it has no authority to condemn us. So long as we are loved by our Husband, it cannot break up our marriage.”

Oh, man! That’s good, that’s good! Is that good or what? I’m telling you! *(Laughter)* I love that illustration. That’s great! Well listen, I know we’re at time. Yes, Don?

Don: Real quickly, verse 20. What is your understanding of what Jesus is saying about our righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees?

Jeff: Okay. So this is really important. What does He mean? I meant to go back to this. Thanks, Don. What does He mean when He says that your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees? Most people say, “Oh, the Pharisees were so stringent and kept the law in such minute detail. We’ve got to do that.” But that’s not what He’s saying here. What He’s saying here is that the Scribes and the Pharisees loosened the law, created loopholes in the law, and you need to be more righteous than that. In other words, your law keeping needs to be better than theirs.

Don: He’s not talking about imputed righteousness.

Jeff: No. I think He’s talking about actual obedience there. Bill?

Bill: Well, if you look at it, the Pharisees were not having a heart condition with the law.

Jeff: That’s right.

Bill: For all intents and purposes they were having a heart condition that was directed to their own abilities and their own devices. And what He’s saying is that you need to be superior, realizing once again that I’m your Husband.

Jeff: Yep.

Bill: And you will by definition have a love situation there. Therefore you respond accordingly. It’s easier to see that contrast. And what He was doing was that He was condemning the Pharisees who ended up with no righteousness.

Jeff: Yes, that’s right. And lest we think that that’s a wrong interpretation, just read on into the Sermon On the Mount, and you’ll realize how much is required of you. It’s not just “don’t commit adultery.” It’s “don’t even lust”, right? It’s not just “don’t murder.” It’s “don’t be angry.”

So there’s a real sense in which He is saying, “Don’t create loopholes.” There’s a law to be obeyed here. And there are resources for you to obey it. And when you don’t obey it, there’s forgiveness to be had in Christ. And that’s really the thing to remember. Yes?

“The Law and Me”

Participant: Are you going to tell your story?

Jeff: Oh, man! Tell the story! If you’ve got time, hang out for the story. Let me say first of all about Ephesians 5:22. I think that goes back to commandment seven, marriage. “Husbands, love your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands.” All that flows back into commandment seven. That is what I would say.

And that’s the reversal of the curse in one sense. You know, the curse was that—well, what was the curse. “*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*” What’s the reversal of that in Christ? “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church.*” “And wives, submit to your husbands.” That’s the reversal of Genesis 3:16. And I think it’s a proper application of commandment #7.

So here’s my story. So I was in a class with Sinclair Ferguson on the Westminster Confession. And we were talking about personal covenanting before God. And I had read Guthrie, the Puritan’s book. I had read his book on—I can’t remember; it’s the only book he ever wrote. *The Christian’s Great Interest* is what it was.

And I said to Ferguson, “There seems to be a legalistic bent here.”

And he just paused and he looked at me. And he looked down and he said, “I don’t think that there’s so much legalism in Guthrie, so much as that’s an autobiographical comment about your relationship to the law.” (*Laughter*)

Whew, that stung bad! (*Laughter*) You know, he had that way about him. But he really cut to the quick. He was good that way. I learned my lesson well.

Well anyway, thanks a lot. It’s good to be with you. (*Applause*)