

LOVING THE BRIDE OF CHRIST: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Mark #7 – Loves the Law of God

I. A Love-Hate Relationship??

A. Chunk the Law!

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” (Rom 6:14)

“For [Christ] himself is our peace... abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances...” (Eph 2:14)

“Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face...” (2 Cor 3:7)

B. No, Keep the Law!

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.” (James 2:8)

“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (James 1:25)

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (Rom 7:12)

1. How do we reconcile the two sets of verses above? Should we chunk the law or keep the law?!?

“...if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness...¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good...²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Rom 7-8)

2. What did the law do for Paul (Rom 7:7-8)? How does the type of sin exposed in Paul speak to the purpose of the law?

3. What is one reason why God has saved us in Christ (see Rom 8:4, Eph 2:10)? How do we know what this should look like? Where does the power to do this come from?

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phil 2)

II. Setting the Record Straight: The Three Uses of the Moral Law

The New Testament uses the Law (moral law) in THREE ways. One of the leading systematic theologians of the last century, Louis Berkof, points out the three different ways the moral law of God is used in the NT:

1. Civil Use (Civil Law): The Law serves the purpose of restraining sin and promoting righteousness through God's grace in the world at large (i.e., basis of U.S. law)
2. Pedagogical Use (Tutor to Christ, Gal. 3:24): The Law serves the purpose of bringing man under conviction of sin, and of making him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of the law. In that way the law becomes his tutor to lead him to Christ, and thus becomes subservient to God's gracious purpose of redemption.
3. Normative Use (Guide for Christian living): The Law is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties (yes, duties) and leading them in the way of life and salvation.

These uses of the law do not conflict with the grace of the gospel, but are in complete harmony with it; for it is the Spirit of Christ who subdues and enables the will of man to do freely and cheerfully those things which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires. (WCF 13.7)

III. Are We a “Grace-Filled” Church If We Believe in the 3rd Use of the Law?

- Out of the fear of producing “moralists” and “little Pharisees”, many in the Reformed camp have distanced themselves from emphasizing the role of the law in Christian sanctification (3rd use).
- In some areas of our denomination there has been a gradual slide towards a more Lutheran view of sanctification. According to Lutheran theology sanctification is nothing more than getting used to your justification. (*“According to [Lutherans], the third use of the law is necessary only because, and in so far as, believers are still sinners; they must be held in check by the law and should be ever increasingly conscious of their sins. It is not surprising, therefore, that this third use of the Law occupies no important place in their system...[The Reformed] stand strong in the conviction that believers are still under the law as a rule of life and of gratitude.”* (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 615))
- Phrases like “preach the Gospel to yourself” and “Gospel-driven sanctification” are common in Lutheran parlance. In these phrases the term “Gospel” is synonymous with justification.

1. How do the following quotes by PCA ministers leave out some resources for Christian discipleship? Does sanctification merely consist of getting used to our justification?

*“...the very same message that converted you is the same message that will grow you as a Christian. **There is no distinction in the message of the gospel in terms of its evangelistic use and its discipleship use. It is one and the same message.**”* -PCA Minister

“I believe the classical Reformed view—that on the one hand, sanctification is not by ‘works’ but by a continuous re-orienting ourselves to our justification.” -PCA Minister

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. (WSC 33)

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. (WSC 35)

2. Does the “Gospel” entail more than justification? Is there more to be said once we’ve become a Christian?

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God... Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:24-27)

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God...” (Heb 6:1)

3. If we are truly growing as Christians, how should we be continually relating to the moral law of God?

“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. ⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. ⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. ¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. ¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. ¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! ¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.” (Ps 119:97-104)