

God's Law and Gospel are Good for Sinful People

{Introduction} then Setup:

When I was in school at a young age, I was bullied a good bit, and so I quickly made friends with my teachers so they would know me and stick up for me. I wanted to be on the right side of Authority for my protection. Their word carried the authority to punish or set boundaries against those who bullied me, and that word from the teacher was the Truth that would set a better reality in motion for me. I wanted to be on the right side of Truth for my flourishing.

Now consider the last two sermons we've heard from this book already – one about God's good authority and the other about God's truth and love. When we're on the right side of Authority and on the right side of Truth with God, it becomes easy for us to want to see others on the wrong side of Authority and Truth to be held accountable and judged by God. It's tempting for those who have had their sins forgiven by a gracious God to then agree that certain persons are deserving of judgment and to then desire for them to feel the wrath of "what they're supposed to get" or "what's coming for them." And as soon as we get to that point in our hearts, we've forgotten the gospel and the goodness of God, both to us and toward others.

Why do you think this is such a prevalent problem among Christians? → that we would be saved by God's gospel and grace but then desire for others who are sinful to be judged by God and for them to get the full cup of what they deserve? It's ultimately a heart issue where the gospel is still working out resident evil and sin in us, but I think this text exposes one way forward for us if anyone here struggles with having that mindset.

We need to see that God's Law and Gospel are both good and both agree with each other, and we need to see that they are good for the Church (saved people) and for the world (unsaved people). Those who are saved, although we still sin, are not friendly toward it but instead kill it daily. We are not identified as sinners, and we don't have to fear God's judgment. Those who are unsaved sin, and want to sin more and more; they are friendly toward their sin and want to keep it around as long as possible. They are identified as sinners, and they do have to fear God's coming judgment. Yet, both sin, and that's why the main idea today is this: **"God's Law and Gospel are Good for Sinful People." (Repeat)**

Pray and Read the Text: (1 Timothy 1:8-12)

⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. ¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service..."

Understanding the Old and New Covenant language

There are several "opposites" in the Christian faith that tend to be confusing to know how to navigate in thought and practice. One of those is God's sovereignty and man's responsibility when it comes to salvation and evangelism. Another is handling both truth and love when it comes to living faithfully as a follower of Christ. And still another is what we have in our text – the relationship between works and grace, between the Law and the Gospel.

Where do we see this in our text? Our entire passage is bound by these two. Verses 8-10 highlight the Law, while verses 11-12 highlight the gospel. Seen another way, verses 8 and 11 occur on either side of a sin list, meaning that the way we're supposed to think through that sin list is according to both the Law and the Gospel, and somehow, they accord with each other!

So, let's start by asking what each of these are, Biblically speaking. When verse 8 says, "the Law," what is that referring to? The Law, depending on the context, could refer to the entire set of laws God gave to Moses (613), or it could refer to the 10 commandments, or it could refer to the first five books of the Old Testament as a collective, or still it could refer to the Old Covenant that God had made with His people through Moses. Here, in this text, I believe "the Law" refers to the Mosaic Law, but specifically to the Old Covenant God had made with His people through that Law. Let's remember together what that Old Covenant was from the pages of Scripture:

Exodus 24:7-8 captures what Moses and the people commit to after the LORD gives the 10 commandments and various Laws from Mt. Sinai for all the people to hear: "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in

accordance with all these words.” And we won’t read all of it for the sake of time, but Deuteronomy 28 is a retelling of this covenant, and it was a conditional covenant. God would pour out blessings on His people so long as they obeyed His Law, but for disobedience to His Law, there would be consequences and judgments upon the people.

The Old Covenant, through the Law of Moses, was a covenant based on God’s faithfulness but also contingent on Israel’s obedience.

Did you know that one of the prophets, Jeremiah, speaks about the “New Covenant” that God will make with His people in the future? He says this from Jeremiah 31:31-34: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

The Old Covenant was able to be broken, not by God, since He would never be unfaithful, but by Israel, since they were sinful and disobedient from Adam. Because God is holy and righteous and good, He would never and could never break His Covenant with Israel, but because Israel is sinful and wicked, they repeatedly broke this Covenant with their God.

But we need to see this here: that covenant was set up to be breakable based on its conditional nature! The New Covenant that Jeremiah mentioned was actually not based on man’s obedience to God at all, but only based on God’s faithfulness to His people. Five times in that text God promises by saying “I will,” and not one time in that text did God require us to do or contribute anything to the New Covenant for it to stand. Regarding us, it’s unconditional, but regarding Christ, it is conditional. Praise the Lord, He met the conditions!

Now, the word “Covenant” means the same thing as the word “Testament,” and because Jesus Christ is the Messiah of God who fulfilled the Old Covenant’s prophecies, the books about His life, ministry, and Church (Matthew through Revelation) are sectioned off in the “New Testament.” That’s done to signify

that Jesus is bringing about what Jeremiah foretold in the Old Testament. So Jesus brings about the New Covenant that Jeremiah spoke about some 600 years after he prophesied it, and that means that a relationship with God is possible now for people from all nations, not just the Jews.

Here is how Jesus uniquely fulfills the New Covenant and is able by His blood to establish it forever. We know the Lord personally, not just based on information, because He has heard and responded to our cries for salvation, and His Spirit lives within us; all of our iniquities are forgiven because the Father has charged Christ guilty of every one of them on the cross; and those sins are not remembered or brought up again by God against us because that honors Jesus' death for us. And friends, that's the gospel in a nutshell!

The gospel is this New Covenant, and you're seeing for yourself that God prophesied it would happen through Jeremiah in the Old Testament!

Relationship between the Law and the Gospel

Now, it's interesting in our text that Paul decides to reference the Law and the Gospel on either side of a list of sinfulness. Why do you think he does that? What do we need to have in our minds about these two, the Law and the Gospel, at the same time? I want to lead us to take a moment to compare and contrast the Law and the Gospel, because we need to see this:

Compare – How are they similar?

1. **Same Source.** Both the Law and the Gospel come from the same God, who is holy, righteous, and good. We know the gospel is "good news," and we know from Romans 7:12 that the Law is "holy and righteous and good."
2. **Same Direction.** Both the Law and the Gospel move us in the same direction. They both make us keenly aware of our sin, our inability to please God, and our inability to have a relationship with Him on our own terms. And, through common elements like repentance, sacrifices, forgiveness, and grace, they both point us to the Messiah, the Christ, as the answer for our biggest problem – sin and separation from God.
3. **Same Confession.** Both the Law and the Gospel confess what is true about God and about us – about God, that He's holy and set apart from all sin, and about us, that we're sinful beyond belief and desperately in need of God.

Contrast – How are they different?

1. **Purpose.** The Law shows us our sin and God's holiness, but it doesn't offer us immediate hope or provide an answer to our problem. We know we can't perfectly please God, and the Law is there to tell us what God's standards are and how to know more of His character. In the Gospel, Jesus did perfectly please God as a man, satisfying God's holy standards!
2. **Scope.** Both the Law and the Gospel show us our sin and God's holiness, but in the Gospel we see both our sin and God's holiness in Jesus. On the cross, at the same time, Jesus is perfectly holy because He is God, yet your sin was put on Him as He took the full wrath of God in your place.
3. **Resolution.** The Law leaves us in our sin trying to please God the best we can, knowing we'll fall short and won't have that relationship with God; but in the Gospel, God sends our sin away from us and puts it onto Christ, exchanging our sin for His own righteousness. Jesus pleased God by His perfect life, and God credits His righteousness to anyone who repents from their sin and believes in Jesus.

So, they're similar in their source, direction, and confession, but they're different in their purpose, scope, resolution. I hope that's helpful as we understand how the Law and the Gospel relate to each other.

Connection to our Text

So in our text, it's an easy Biblical affirmation that Paul makes that any one of us in Christ should easily make as well – the Law is good according to it being used in God's design. The Law is not good if it's used to identify and conceal or excuse sin. If the Law is a representation, a mirror, of God's holiness and holy standard to us, then concealing or excusing sin in light of it would go against its purpose, since God doesn't conceal or excuse our sin; rather, He calls sin what it is but chooses to deal with it head-on in Christ.

In verses 9-10, Paul lays out a sin list. This is likely serving two purposes in the letter at this point: 1) to call sin what it is before God according to His law, and 2) to call the gospel to mind because it is the resolution for all the sin problems that the Law exposes in us.

When we mention specific sins, our hearts are stirred up against those sins in specific ways, maybe even to hatred, and that extends to the people who are under the Law but in need of God's gospel if we're not careful. Every sin, and

every one of these sins, doesn't just affect you individually, but other people around you too. The only category of sin that Scripture says affects one's own body is sexual immorality, but even then, that sin definitely spills over and affects others too. And in our culture specifically, it's necessary to verbalize that "sexually immoral" in the Bible is a catch-all for deviant sexual behavior, including anything that is outside God's design in creation from His Word to us. That's the connotation the word carries, and it addresses many questions and divergent thoughts today; it's not something we're making up to fit the times. This would include sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, pornography, affairs, using others for sexual gain, separating sex from lifelong commitment or from family flourishing, and the list goes on, and on.

But here's the deal. We can't be at peace, as Christians, relating others to God by the Law when we have come to be in relationship with Him by Grace.

When I'm driving down the road, and someone passes me going faster than they should be according to the speed laws, what's my gut reaction most of the time? "I hope a cop catches them and gives them a ticket!" When I know good and well that when they passed me, I was going at least 5 over the limit; but we ignore that because the grace of the system today is that we rarely get pulled over for going 5 over the speed limit.

What are we saying? The tendency is in every one of our hearts, because of our flesh, to highlight someone else according to the sins they commit and relate them to God according to the Law, setting them up to be judged by God. Our hearts actually crave to see wicked people get judged by God. And at the same time, we have the tendency to not only ignore our sin and not deal with it as we should – we should be killing it, or it will be killing us – while highlighting how we have come to know the grace of God and are so thankful that the Gospel is for us.

Do you see the issue?

For ourselves, we're ready and quick to highlight God's grace, because that's our good ending to our story. And for others, we're ready and quick to highlight God's Law, because deep down there's a part of our hearts that wants to see evildoers judged for their sins, not forgiven of them or saved from them. And I'm saying, if you recognize that, that's why the sin list comes sandwiched between the Law and the Gospel in our text. The Law condemns it all, everyone who is "lawless and disobedient," everyone who is "ungodly" and a "sinner." And unless we should tend to compare ourselves to others in what

sins we've committed or how many we've committed, James 2:10 is here to level the playing field and humble us: "For whoever keeps the whole Law, but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it."

And remember too, where we've come from in the letter already. God's authority exists for His glory and our good. His authority is good and trustworthy, and He uses it for our human flourishing in His good design. And God's truth exists to serve and protect us by leading us to know Him rightly, while at the same time leading us away from vain lifelong pursuits. And remember what verse 5 says: The aim, or end, or goal, of our charge [from God] is love, a love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere (nonhypocritical) faith.

If love is the goal of our charge, how are we going to love sinful people if we're relating them to God based on the Old Covenant, based on their ability to keep God's holy standard? We won't! But, if we see Christ charged guilty of those sins in the Gospel, then we will rightly be able to love them as God has loved us in our sinfulness when Jesus died for us! We need to instead see ourselves and anyone in the sin list rightly – guilty of sin but graciously forgiven through repentance and saved from that sin by the choice of God. We need to consider them relating to God by the New Covenant, where Jesus is righteous on their behalf, and where God is upholding 100% of that Covenant for them so they won't ever be able to lose that salvation or break the Covenant by their sin.

Where does that lead us with individuals that we may not know how to engage with or love well? We love them by showing them the love God has for them, through the New Covenant! Instead of keeping ourselves separated from "those people" because of "those sins" they've committed, we could share a meal with them and tell them about the Lord and His forgiveness. And that's how the goal of God's charge to us will actually be carried out – when we relate to them as sinners who have broken God's Law in the Old Covenant but also as sinners who can be saved by God's grace in the New Covenant.

Y'all, as Christians, we have to agree with God in our hearts about what He's doing and live as His representatives to others. The New Covenant is how God is relating to people from all nations who fit into the sin list, and I know that might upset you. You might really be struggling that someone who hurt you could be forgiven by God of their sins if they repent. And if that's you, please try to understand: the sin they've committed against God is far worse than what they've done against you, and that's not saying what they did didn't hurt or wasn't real or legitimate. But what we are saying is, the greater sin is

against God, not us, and God has chosen to forgive repentant sinners through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

There isn't one of us who doesn't fit into the sin lists or who doesn't break the Law in at least one place. If we want to claim God's grace for ourselves in the gospel, we need to also grow to be quick to want others to be claimed in that way as well, and not claimed according to their sins. That's how we'll love others without hypocrisy and with God's own love, because that's His heart for us! His desire is to be with us and be our God, and in order to do that, He had to address our sin and deal with it in Christ; having done that, He doesn't remember our sins anymore and doesn't consider our identity as a "sinner" but a "saint," a "holy one" to Him. We need His mind, His perspective.

And Paul, understanding this and living this out right in front of us on the page of Scripture, says in verse 12: "I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service," even though Paul was formerly a persecutor of God's Church – of Jesus Himself – a blasphemer, and an insolent opponent.

God wants His people, you and me, to love others as He has loved us, and that doesn't mean we let culture dictate what that looks like. This kind of love doesn't look like affirming sin, because God didn't act that way toward us in the Law or in the Gospel. And it doesn't look like redefining sin and downplaying it as an "unhealthy choice" from a "good person." No, sin is an intentional decision we make to assert ourselves onto God's throne in our own lives, and it is the bold declaration that we know better and don't need God. Sin is eternally punishable because God is eternally holy, and sin lies to us and deceives us and leaves every promise unfulfilled. God is the exact opposite.

So may we say: **God's Law and Gospel are Good for Sinful People**, and may we go to others God puts in our lives, putting both Covenant truths before them but urging them to have a relationship with God according to how He is relating with them – through the New Covenant of Grace and Christ' blood shed for them. Putting the Old Covenant before someone looks like identifying that you both are sinners in need of a perfect Savior, and putting the New Covenant before someone looks like repenting of our sin and identifying Jesus as that perfect Savior who we need to trust in salvation.

And I'm from South Mississippi, which in my experience so far isn't too different from where we are in Albany. So I hope this helps us have the conversation where we are in South Georgia about the relationship between

Law and Grace, and changing our mindsets, however they need to change from how we were raised or brought up, if it doesn't align with God's Gospel. This Gospel of God's Grace must be how we think about ourselves, and it must be how we think about others. I have prayed and am continuing to pray that the Spirit of God would work on us until those things are changed. This Gospel must be spotlighted, preached, and protected at all costs, in every generation, until Jesus Christ returns for His people from all nations and all people groups.

If we lose the Gospel, we'll lose our love; and if we lose the relationship between the Law and the Gospel, we'll lose our love too.

Prayer

Questions for Small Groups:

1. Paul says the Law is good when it is used properly (v. 8). What does it mean to use God's Law "properly," and what are some ways people can, or have, misused it?
2. Verses 9–10 describe sinful behaviors that are contrary to sound doctrine. How does God's Law and God's Gospel help shape how we as Christians think or behave toward specific sins?
3. Even though Paul was a blasphemer, persecutor of the Church, and an insolent opponent, God decided to judge him faithful to be an apostle and appoint him to the work (vv. 11–12). How is Paul's testimony an encouragement to you? A challenge?