

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

If, then, you are looking for the way by which you should go, take Christ, because He himself is the way.

Thomas Aquinas

As a pastor I am often in discussions about the good news of the gospel, some deep and some not so deep. I have found over the years that most of the time it is best to be brief, concise, and distill the truths quickly. When I find it necessary to get to the point quickly, I define the good news of the gospel in a single word...

COME!

Before we dive in, it's important to see the depth of the phrase "come after" in light of the One who said it. Contextually this phrase "come after" would often be used in an intimate, personal, romantic relationship. To "come after" is a call to a passionate pursuit of the One calling! This truth that God is calling rebels on the run is woven throughout the pages of the Bible from the moment of the very first sin. Let me first take you to a place near the very end where it flows off the pages like streams of living water, slaking the thirst of all those who will come by faith to drink of it.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Revelation 22:17

This week we will take a look at Jesus' invitation of "come." To do that, it is essential that we also see the difference between the law and the

gospel. In a word, the law says GO and the gospel says COME. In two different sermons, one of my favorite preachers of all time, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (known as "the prince of preachers" of the 1800's) preached it to his congregations this way:

The law was a dispensation of the whip, which drove men before it; the gospel is just of the opposite kind. It is the Shepherds dispensation. He goes before his sheep, and he bids them follow him, saying to them, "Come."

How great the difference between Moses and Christ, the law and the gospel. When Moses had been forty days upon the mountain-top, he underwent a kind of transfiguration, so that his face shone with exceeding brightness when he came down among the people, and he was obliged to put a veil over his face; for they could not bear to look upon his glory. Not so our Savior! He had been really transfigured with a greater glory than Moses could ever know, and yet, as he came down from the mount, whatever radiance shone upon his face, it is not written that the people could not look upon him, but rather they were amazed, and running to him. The glory of the law repelled; for the majesty of holiness and justice, drive the awed spirits away from God. But the greater glory of Jesus attracts;

though he is holy, and just, and right too, yet blended with these there is so much of truth and grace that sinners run to Jesus, amazed at his goodness, attracted by the charming fascination of his love, become his disciples, and take him to be their Lord and Master. 1

The Scriptures paint a beautiful picture of the truths about the Law of God given to Moses and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The law drives us to the gospel and the gospel empowers us to obey the law for all the right reasons. Consider the following poem attributed to John Bunyan as you work through the Law and the gospel and I will provide a bookend to it at the end of this section:

*Run, John, run, the law commands
But gives us neither feet nor hands,
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and give us wings. 2*

The Law

In the giving of the law on Mount Sinai only Moses was allowed to approach God. Everyone else, including the beasts of burden were forbidden to even touch the Holy Mountain of God lest they should die. When Moses returned to the people carrying The 10 Commandments, they could not even look upon him because of the glory and holiness of God.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. **Exodus 34:29-30**

This passage paints the perfect picture of the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God through His law descending from Mount Sinai and blinding all those who would look upon it

unveiled. To be sure, there was nothing wrong with the Law of God. There was something wrong with the people who beheld it. The perfection of the law simply illumines the sinfulness of man. Reformer John Calvin said the first purpose of the law was to be a mirror. The law reflected the perfect righteousness and holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. It was St. Augustine who said, *“The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace.”* 3

When you look in a mirror and see your reflection and notice some dirt on it, the mirror cannot do anything to help you remove the dirt. All it could do was show you where the dirt is. You need something beyond the mirror to get your face clean. The same is true for the sinner and the Law of God. The law shows us where the dirt is in our lives but can do nothing to clean it—for that we need Jesus. So we look to our Savior who says, “Come!” Here the law acts as the “whip” Spurgeon preached about that stings and smarts us in our first step on our way toward our Savior who alone can clean us. The law reminds us of the curse our first parents put us under when they sinned in the Garden.

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." **Galatians 3:10**

This truth is designed to slay our self-righteousness. We simply cannot save ourselves by the keeping of the law and being good no matter how hard we try. Our “good enough” is neither good nor enough! If we fail at any place in the law, and we all have done that, we fail at every place and are under the wrath and condemnation of the Almighty. So the only solution is to receive this truth and run to our Redeemer. Tim Keller paints this picture beautifully in his book, *Galatians for You*.

Theologically, anyone who says: I can be saved by obeying the law must then be prepared to really look at what the law commands. To love God wholly, we would have to obey the law wholly. To be blessed by God instead of cursed by Him, we would have to look at the law and satisfy its every demand. And that cannot be done. Objectively, attempting salvation-by-law-observance means we are cursed. This means, psychologically, everyone who is seeking to save themselves by their own performance will experience a curse subjectively. At the very least, attempting to be saved by works will lead to profound anxiety and insecurity, because you can never be sure that you are living up to your standards sufficiently. 4

It never ceases to amaze me in speaking with those who are trying to save themselves by keeping the law, just how arrogant they think we are (those saved by grace through faith in Christ alone), in our doctrine of the Assurance of Salvation. Because they can never know when they have done enough to satisfy a Holy, Righteous, and Just God, they cannot ever imagine having the confident assurance of salvation. My response is this, "It's not arrogance to believe in Christ alone for salvation, resting our assurance on His sinless life, sacrificial death, and supernatural resurrection. It's arrogant to think you can work your way into God's favor, making Him your Debtor." In the end, the law does exactly what it

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was designed to do...fill us with anxiety, not assurance, and drives us to our Almighty Savior and His gospel of grace.

The Gospel

Jesus did what our first parents refused to do, and what we could not do, by keeping the law perfectly and thereby freeing us from its curse.

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

As sinners by nature and by habit, we deserved the full wrath of God and the all-consuming curse of His Holy Law. But Jesus took our place on that cross. Jesus bore the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Jesus took our nails, our crown of thorns, and our cross to redeem us and reverse the curse. The gospel is the good news of God's forgiveness for sinners who by grace, through faith, trust in Christ alone. But that's not all. After we have been given this new life we are given a new Spirit.

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. **Romans 5:5**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. **Acts 1:8**

Here we see that the Christian life is not about behavior modification. It's about a heart transformation that can only take place when the Holy Spirit takes up residency in the heart of a believer. For the very first time in this life we have the power to please God. The gospel

removes the self from the throne of life and puts the Savior there. We begin to live for the purpose for which we were created... the glory of God. A common question at this point in the disciple making process is this: "If the law was given to drive us to the cross and we are no longer under the law, what difference does it make how we live?" This is a very good question rooted in the following passage.

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4

So what does it mean that Christ is the end of the law? The answer is two-fold: first, as the law drives us to our Savior, here we see that Jesus is the end or purpose of the law. The law was given to lead us to our Lord. Second, because Jesus is our righteousness, we no longer have to try to establish our own by keeping the law. The law drives us to the gospel and the gospel empowers us to obey the law for the very first time and for the right reasons. The Spirit of God enables us to live for Jesus not out of a sense of duty but rather delight. Our desire for obedience is not rooted in what we can get from God but what we have already been given. Our obedience is not the reason for our salvation but the result of it.

Now let's take a look at two opposite but equally destructive pernicious errors that are running ramped in the contemporary church today when we misunderstand the relationship between the law and the gospel. These errors come under the heading of Legalism and License.

Legalism

The legalist is living under the law, still working for the approval and blessing of God. Paul penned the book of Galatians to fight against this error.

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to

learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Galatians 3:1-3

Paul was combating the error of the Jewish converts who were requiring circumcision as a requirement of the gentile Christians as a requisite of salvation. In other words, a gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian. These foolish and bewitched legalists were not convinced that faith alone in Christ alone was enough for salvation. So they added a work of the flesh to the free gift of salvation, by grace through faith, which not only distorted the gospel, it also dismantled it and made it of no effect.

When I speak with people in the church today, most of them will tell me that they believe they have been saved by God's grace. The problem arises when they believe in order to stay in God's grace they must continue to keep their place through their own good works. They believe grace gets them in but the spiritual sweat of their brow keeps them there.

License

In contrast to the legalist, the licentious person is living above the law because they are "under grace" convinced that God's laws have no place in the Christian life. Paul penned the book of Romans to fight against this error.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? **Romans 6:15**

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When Dr. Kennedy was asked, “If we are no longer under the law, what difference does it make how a Christian lives?” He responded, “How would a Christian want to live?” Well, I think you would agree, the answer is obvious. A true Christian would want to live for the One who made him a Christian. Loose living entitlement is not the mark of a person who understands what it means to be saved by grace.

Both of these errors are rooted in the self. The legalists are focused on their ability to keep the rules and the licentious are focused on their freedom to break the rules. Only when we rightly understand the relationship between the law and the gospel can we break the chains that hold us in bondage to the self. The truths of the gospel teach us that the law of God is not constricting but rather freeing because it is a “*law of liberty*” (James 1:25).

CONCLUSION

Let me share with you what I call a “gospel truth template” to empower you to combat both errors. Take any commandment and place this truth template over it and see how the gospel empowers you to live for something bigger than yourself. For example, God said we are not to covet.

The legalist will do everything in his power not to covet. He will set up buffers and safety nets and different levels of accountability. When that doesn’t work he will lower the standard in his definition of what it means to covet. But in the end he will discover he simply cannot not covet.

The licentious person will immediately say the standard is simply too high and won’t even bother with it. Besides he believes he is no longer under the law, and therefore need not try to abide by the commandments.

Living out the Christian life under the truth template goes something like this. God’s law

says, “Do not covet!” The Christian knows he cannot obey this or any command in his own strength because he is a sinner both by nature and habit. But he doesn’t stop there. He also knows Jesus did obey this and every other command perfectly on his behalf which ultimately frees him to obey by the power of the Holy Spirit that indwells him. This truth template keeps you from falling into either legalism or license and frees you to love the Law of God by living out the gospel of God, in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Leading into the law and the gospel I shared a beautiful summary that many suggest came from the pen of John Bunyan. However, it probably originated with 18th century Scottish preacher Ralph Erksine in these words:

*A rigid matter was the law,
Demanding brick, denying straw,
But when with gospel tongue it sings,
it bids me fly and gives me wings* **5**

Having now considered both law and gospel, look again at Jesus’ invitation to “*come*” to Him and turn away from any possibility of salvation through the law. It was the apostle Paul who said, “*Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died*” (Romans 7:9). Here is what we need to keep in view as it relates to the law: the sides of Sinai are too steep and slippery from the slime of the serpent for any of us to work our way to God. The only way to God is through Jesus Christ who came to us first and now says to us “*come*” through the grace of the gospel.

REFERENCE NOTES:

1. Charles Spurgeon, Sermon October 16, 1859, *Come & Welcome*; Sermon January 10, 1864, A Desperate Case—How to Meet It.
2. *GraceQuotes.com*
3. Taken from the *Three-fold Use of the Law*, R. C. Sproul
4. Tim Keller, *Galatians For You*
5. *The Sermons and Practical Works of Ralph Erksine*, vol. 10 (Glasgow: W. Smith and J. Bryce, 1778), 283.

Driving the Roots Deeper – Questions for Discussion

1. If the call to “come” is a call to a passionate pursuit of the One calling, what does it mean to you that Jesus has called you? _____

2. The law drives us to the gospel. Agree Disagree
Please explain: _____

3. What was the warning James was giving us when he said, *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).*

4. The gospel empowers us to obey the law for all the right reasons. Agree Disagree
Please explain: _____

5. How would you define legalism?

6. How would you define license?

7. Which side are you most prone to error on, legalism or license?
Why? _____

8. What is your most important take-away from this lesson?

