

I. Intro

A. One of the great things about a great novel is that they teach you important things without you realizing it. They smuggle truth right into your heart. And my favorite novel of all time - *Les Miserable* by Victor Hugo, which I've read it a couple times and watched every movie made about it (domestic and foreign) and attended the Broadway production twice – does this very well.

B. *Les Mis* is famous for its focus on grace – starting with the opening scene, where the priest changes John Val Jean's life by shielding him from the police after he stole the priest's silver, stating that it had been given to him.

C. The novel also does a great job of portraying the opposite of grace, the law – which is embodied by Javert, the police officer who antagonizes John Val Jean his entire life. Javert does not believe people can change and his attitude shows how limited the law is – how small and mean and graceless it can be. I am not going to give anything away, but there is a scene in which the Law utterly collapses in on itself when it is given grace, and Javert, the character representing law, ends his own life. I thought about playing it today. But it's pretty dark and I thought, probably not the clip to play on Mother's Day.

D. But I reference it because *Les Mis* in general and Javert in particular does a great job of setting up Galatians 3.

II. This is the fifth sermon in our study of the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to his friends living in Galatia. He is mad because a group of religious Jewish outsiders are leading them astray – giving them:

A. A distorted view of God, which is a huge problem. C.S. Lewis wrote that what we think about God is the second most important thing about us. (The most important is what God thinks of us). But what we think about God matters. It profoundly shapes who we become. Paul is sick about the ways the Judaizers are distorting God.

B. And he is mad at the way they are distorting how we relate to God – they have corrupted the Gospel – the Good News. They have been peddling classic religion, which says obedience leads to acceptance - $F + W = S$. Paul has thundered Christianity says acceptance leads to obedience. $F + N = S + W$. Christianity is not “this I do,” but “this He did.”¹ We are not redeemed - justified, adopted into the family of God, forgiven, granted eternal life – on the basis of what we do, but by accepting the gracious work of Christ, period.²

C. I have noted that: 1) The things this group in Galatia wanted the Gentile Christians in Galatia to add – circumcision, special diets and holy day customs - are not the point. Different groups have different lists of things they think are going to make them right with God;³ 2) I've also said, what Paul is writing doesn't mean our works do not matter. They matter.⁴ We are expected to do good work. We were created to do good work. Our good works help others, secure rewards for us in heaven and validate our faith.⁵ But we are saved by grace, period, full stop.

¹ Many people think the Bible is a book of ethics. It is not. It is principally a book that reveals God and his plan for our rescue through the work of His Son.

² A careful reading of Paul suggests that it's not just that we do not need to do anything, but that as soon as we try to do something, we blow it apart. We destroy it. To cite Martin Luther, all we add to the equation is sin and resistance.

³ In conservative churches it's dress codes and prohibitions against movies, or it's just a general endorsement of a specific culture. The message is, if you are a good Christian you will look like us, talk like us, smell like us, dress like us and like our music. In liberal churches it tends to be a certain set of social causes. If you are with God, you think a certain way about these social issues. In previous sermons I have noted that the issues being talked about in

D. The question today is – the question raised by Galatians 3 – is, so what are we supposed to do with the Law? Starting with Moses in Exodus 20, one of the key things that made the Jews the Jews was a set of rules and additional instruction that they got from God.⁶ The show piece in the middle of this is the Ten Commandments. What do we do with that?

1. It comes up here because in Galatia you have all of these Gentiles who have never heard about Moses and the Ten Commandments asking questions about them.

2. It comes up in our life because the Bible is full of the Law and we need some directions.

E. But I just spent a month arguing that our salvation pivots around the work of Christ, period. What are the rules concerning rules?

III. In a moment I am going to read Galatians 3:1-14 – but before I do let me say a few things about the law first, because it can be a bit confusing.

A. I do not think that should surprise us. It's a bit confusing in English. Think about it. The term Law is used to describe everything from a bill passed by Congress to city regulations, to observations about nature – the Law of Gravity – to the Police. (“Look out, here comes The Law.”) In the Bible, “the Law” refers to: the first five books of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, and to all of the things Moses got from God. And when it comes to the things Moses got from God, there are three very distinct categories:

1. Civil Laws: Between the time the Jews were slaves under Pharaoh until Nathan appointed Saul to be their first human king, God was their king, and Israel was a theocracy that He ruled through prophets, priests, judges and the law. Some of what we find in the Old Testament are civil laws for Israel that do not apply to us.⁷

2. Alongside the civil laws there were ceremonial laws, which governed the sacrificial system.⁸ These were the rules for the Levites found in the Book of Leviticus. When Christ died on the cross he put an end to the ceremonial laws.⁹ We look to understand and honor the principles behind these laws, but not the laws.¹⁰

Galatians are not our issue. The point is, the specific issue is not the issues. The point is, we do not add anything to the work of Christ.

⁶ If you are a Christ-follower, you should see your life changing. You should be becoming more generous, more thoughtful. Your heart should be going out more to the poor and oppressed. Read Matthew 25. Our works matter.

⁷ Luther said: Good works ought to be done not as the cause, but as the fruits of righteousness. When we are made righteous, we ought to do them, but not contrariwise, to the end that when we are unrighteous, we may, by these, be made righteous. The tree makes the apple, but not the apple the tree.”

⁸ After they escape from Egypt they travel to Mount Sinai where God meets with Moses and he comes away with the Ten Commandments. And over the weeks ahead – between Exodus 20 and Numbers 10 - he receives additional revelation about how to live, which includes the book of Leviticus guiding the Levites concerning the sacrificial system and other stuff. The Ten Commandments are the “foundation head” of the instruction. Between Exodus 19 and Numbers 10, the Jews are “geographically static and theologically dynamic” – i.e., Moses receives a lot of “instruction” for the people. Note: “instruction” is the root of the Hebrew word “Torah, which is translated “law.”

⁹ These laws were designed to keep them pure and healthy and moving forward, at least until the time they gave the world a savior. These laws do not apply to us today because we do not live in a theocracy.

¹⁰ One of the categories of ceremonial laws are the “clean” laws, which told you what you must do in order to be able to go to the Temple. They had several effects: 1) they showed people that they were not able to make themselves acceptable; 2) they showed you how much work was involved just to be clean enough to go to the Temple and offer

3. A third category of law given by God to Moses falls under the heading Moral. These laws do apply. They teach us about God and ourselves and how we should treat each other. Morality is based in God and His character.

B. Another data point before we jump in focuses on the different purposes of the law.

1. One is to act as a curb – a set of guard rails. Through threats of punishment or consequences, the commands of Scripture help keep our sinful natures in check and help keep societies going. Sometimes the law helps us do the right thing not because we want to but because we are scared of the consequences.¹¹

2. Likewise, a second purpose of the law is to be a compass. After we come to faith, the law shows us how to live well. The Law that is revealed to us in the Bible not only comes from God, it comes out of God. The law isn't a set of random rules, the law flows out of his holiness and character and it reflects the way He designed the world to work. The law can point us in the right direction. Think of the law as railroad tracks that help us know where to go.¹² Which sets up the third use: not just curb and compass, but...

3. Finally, the law is also a mirror. The law helps us see ourselves more clearly because it gives us an objective standard.¹³ It helps us realize that we do not just fall a bit short of the standard, we are under sin's power and not able to work harder and fulfill the law. If this isn't clear to you right now, that is because you either haven't read the Sermon on the Mount or you have never tried really hard to be really good.

4. So, think of it this way: when you are an unbeliever, the Law points to your need for grace. When you are a believer, grace points to your need for the law. But when you are an unbeliever, the Law helps you realize, I cannot pull this off on my own.

a sacrifice; 3) they made it hard for the Jews to mix with other people – which kept them from syncretism. See: Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:23; Eph. 2:15.

¹¹ In a sermon on Gal. 2:1-10, Keller says: Are you saying that the ceremonial laws are gone? Annulled? That we can ignore them as long as we keep the moral laws? No, for starters, the laws have not been annulled they have been fulfilled. Secondly, we should honor the purpose of every law in the Bible. The purpose of "thou shalt not lie" is to get an honest heart in you. Only way to do that is to keep it. But the purpose of the law about not eating pork is to help you see that you need a savior. Once Jesus comes along the way you try to break them is to keep them. After Christ, these laws have not been annulled, they have been fulfilled. Don't you dare keep them. The way you can really dishonor the clean laws is to try to keep them. They haven't been annulled they have been destroyed. How dare you keep them.

¹² The purpose of the Old Testament law is to convict people of our inability to keep the law and point us to our need for Jesus Christ as Savior ([Romans 7:7-9](#); [Galatians 3:24](#)). The Old Testament law was never intended by God to be the universal law for all people for all of time. We are to love God and love our neighbors. If we obey those two commands faithfully, we will be upholding all that God requires of us.

¹³ This doesn't deal with the root problem – which the Law cannot do. Our problem is not that we do the wrong thing, our problem is a heart that wants to do the wrong thing. But the law can keep us from doing the wrong thing that pulls us further down.

¹⁴ One of the things we need to realize is, we do not break God's laws as much as we break ourselves against God's laws.

¹⁵ We have all kinds of challenges assessing ourselves. And for the most part, we grade higher. We think we are better than we are. Not everyone, but we tend to judge ourselves on our intentions not our deliverables. The Law helps us see God's standard – and it helps us realize that we fail.

C. The third thing to note is that the Law is boundaried on both sides. I have been arguing against legalism – making too much of the Law. We could turn to Romans 6 and read Paul confronting those who are doing the opposite. They are not legalists they are libertines¹⁴ or antinomians.¹⁵

1. There were some in Rome who were saying, if we saved on the basis of faith alone – and what I do doesn't matter - I am going to do what I want." I had a fraternity brother who said this. And a few years ago, I pleaded with a man who had been at the church a couple years before telling me that he had grown tired of his wife. (They had been married close to fifty years). He said, "I am leaving her. I know it is wrong. But what I do doesn't matter. It's all about God's grace. I will repent after I do it and all will be well."

D. When it comes to The Law there are lots of other conversations we could have.

1. It's worth noting that in the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5 – 8 – Jesus gives us a commentary on the Ten Commandments, showing us that they are impossible to keep because our heart is the key issue.

2. It's worth noting that in Matthew 22 Jesus summarized the law,¹⁶saying: "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and to love your neighbor as yourself" If we obey those two commands, we will be fulfilling all that Christ requires of us: "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"

3. Some of you went to Law School so you know that conversations about legal theory can go on forever.¹⁷ For our purposes, the big question today is limited. The question is, what do we do with it? If salvation is by grace – and we do not add anything to it – what are the rules about the rules?

IV. In Galatians 3

A. You foolish Galatians! The New English Bible translation calls the Galatians "idiots." In Eugene Peterson's paraphrase he opens asking them if they are on drugs?

¹⁴ I have been arguing against legalism, the trap we fall into when we say: the Christian life is about keeping these rules. Piper writes: There is no Greek word for legalism. When Paul wanted to refer to the legalistic misuse of Moses' teaching, he either had to use the term "law" and trust that the context would clarify the meaning, "misuse of law"; or he had to use a phrase like "works of law" which for him always had a negative, legalistic meaning. We know from the context of 2:18 that Paul distinguished what Moses really taught from what the Judaizers did with his teachings.

¹⁵ In *Table Talk* – Dec. 5^a, there is a discussion of three types of antinomianism: 1) libertinism; 2) gnostic spiritualism (claiming insight above the law but linked to special knowledge); 3) situational ethics – often grounded in idea that all that is needed is love.

¹⁶ Matthew 22:37-40

¹⁷ There are several other aspects of the law that deserve notice: 1) I mentioned three kinds of law in the Bible – moral, civil and ceremonial. A fourth category also comes up - natural law. We are not going to unpack because it's a bit of a black hole and the subject of much controversy. But in Romans 2:14-15 Paul talks about a law written on our heart, which suggests there are some things we cannot not know. There is something to be said for the fact that almost all societies share some common morals. As C.S. Lewis said, "the peoples of this world may disagree over whether you may have one wife or four, but they all recognize that there is something special about the marital union of a man and a woman; they may disagree about which virtues are most important, but they all agree that gratitude is something good and cowardice is something bad. 2) It's worth noting that the Pharisees were so determined not to break the law of God, that they created buffers around it. If they law said, "don't go over 30 miles per hour they said, 'don't go more than 20.'" But, Jesus criticizes them more than anyone else because they failed to see their own heart. They thought they were doing pretty well; 3) Finally, there is an emerging legal crisis in secular or liberal circles: a growing awareness that without God, laws are arbitrary. Arthur Leff's 1979 Yale Law Review article is one of the better places to go to understand this.

B. Who has bewitched you? This is the first of five sets of questions Paul asks in this section.

C. Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.¹⁸ I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? This is a rhetorical question. They are being rebuked. Although it is worth noting that they have received the Holy Spirit – and that came as a result of their faith not their works.¹⁹

D. Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? After becoming a child of God through faith and the agency of the Holy Spirit, are you now really going to try to stiff arm God and move forward under your own power?

E. V4: Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

V. In verse 6 – 9 he starts talking about Abraham – which is his way of going right after the Judaizers who were misleading the Galatian Christians.

A. It appears that they had argued that Abraham was saved by his faith in God and his works. Paul turns their reference to Abraham against them, “No, you got that wrong.” In verse 6 he writes: **Abraham “believed God, and it was credited** – some translations say “reckoned,” but that’s a bit too Texas for most of us. Credited is an accounting term. **Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”** (This is the first time we see Paul using this phrase. It will show up again in later writings).

B. V7: Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

C. ¹⁰For all who rely on the works of the law²⁰ are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”²¹ The Law cannot save us –we cannot save ourselves by being good enough. We would have to be perfect. You are not. (There is a joke about the man who stood up for his wife’s first husband.)

¹⁸ Eugene Peterson writes: The single, overwhelming fact of history is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. There is no military battle, no geographical exploration, no scientific discovery, no literary creation, no artistic achievement, no moral heroism that compares with it. It is unique, massive, monumental, unprecedented and unparalleled. The cross of Christ is not a small secret that may or may not get out. The cross of Christ is not a minor incident in the political history of the first century that is a nice illustration of courage. It is the center. (Traveling Light).

¹⁹ If we walk through Acts we see that they received Holy Spirit at once. This is part of what was persuading people that God was moving. See also John 3:5

²⁰ The phrase “works of the law” refers to doing things in an effort to earn our salvation. God is not against effort, but he is against earning. Later I will be arguing that keeping aspects of the law is a good thing, when they are done on the other side of faith.

²¹ Paul cites four OT passages in this section. This is Deut. 27:26. He will also cite: Hab. 2:4; Lev. 18:5, and Deut. 21:23.

D. Javert couldn't even save himself. The law can curse and condemn but not save. Anyone who relies on the works of the law is cursed, sunk, undone, destined to fail, because if you head down this path you have to keep it perfectly. You have to do **everything that is written in the Book of the Law.**

E. V11: **Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”** ¹² **The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.”**

F. V13: Here is the Gospel: **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.** We are saved by Christ – who kept the law.²² He substitutes himself for us. He does the hard work of keeping the law and then he does the hard work of suffering for us who did not keep the law. This is what Isaiah is saying in Isaiah 53 when he talks about Christ bearing our grief and carrying our sorrows.²³

G. **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 pole.”**²⁴ ¹⁴ **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.**

VI. So what do we do with the law?

A. I've already noted that we are not paying attention to the civil and ceremonial. They were fulfilled in Christ. But the question raised by the Bible in general, and Paul's comments in Galatians 3 is, what do we do with the moral law? What are the rules about the rules? Are we supposed to follow them or not? Are the Ten Commandments still in effect? What about the command to love and serve others? The Great Commission? The instruction to pray, attend church, discipline ourselves for godliness? How do we understand the commands? Here is a plan: keep the law; but keep it in its place.

B. And we need to start with the second: keep it in its place.²⁵ If we lead with the Law we are in trouble. We do not look to the law first. We do not think it can save us. We should not think it is making us better, earning us points. We have to fight those hard-wired, religious impulses. We must start with the Gospel. The order matters and the order that works is to start with the Gospel.

²² In one sense we are saved by keeping the Law. It's just that we are not the ones who pull it off. Jesus does it for us and then hands us the credit.

²³ "... he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made *us* whole, and with his stripes *we* are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of *us all*."

²⁴ In our day, a curse is considered superstitious, but in biblical usage it refers to the negative judgment of God – it is the opposite of a blessing.

²⁵ Paul was OK with circumcision when the purpose was to advance the Gospel, but not when people thought it was contributing to salvation. In that case, he forbid it. Piper writes: Circumcision may be a "work of law" or an act of love which flows from faith. Subjecting yourself to certain dietary restrictions may be a "work of law" or a free act of love which comes from faith. Sunday School teaching, preaching, all these may be "works of law" which we do in our strength, to move God's favor our way, or they may be done in humble reliance on the strength which God freely supplies that in everything he may get the glory. The decision of curse or blessing hangs on how you obey and who gets the credit. If they are a "work of law" and we think we are getting credit for our salvation for them, then Paul is against them.

C. If we get the order wrong we become an accidental Pharisee – a joyless, religious older brother. You do not want to make this mistake. We must keep rehearsing the Gospel. We must repent of our righteous acts.²⁶

D. Then – the second thing we do – is learn to see the Law as a friend, a gift. The Law is from God and it is good. We do well to follow it. To obey God by striving to keep it. By following it as best we can, we place ourselves in the spot where God works on our heart. This will come up more as we move into the second half of Galatians and come across a lot more discussion about how to grow. The point being, what we are after is God to change our heart. He is the only one who can – but he will.

VII. Campus Pastor Wrap Up

A. The Law is a gift. It helps us know how the world works. This is incredibly helpful, because we do not break God's laws as much as we break ourselves against God's Laws. Can you imagine how much you'd be willing to pay for The Law if it wasn't already in front of us.

B. It is also a huge gift because it tells us the truth. It points to our need for a savior.

VIII.

IX. Question

A. What are some examples of things you think we need to do to be saved?

B. How much would you pay for the Law if it wasn't available?

C. Are you proud of your efforts to be good? If you are, you need to repent!

²⁶ George Whitfield, *The Method of Grace*: Before you can speak peace to your hearts, you must not only be troubled for the sins of your life, and sin of your nature, but likewise for the sins of your best duties and performances. When a poor soul is somewhat awakened by the terrors of the Lord, then the poor creature, being born under a covenant of works, flies directly to a covenant of works again. And, as Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees of the garden and sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness, so the poor sinner, when awakened, flies to his duties and to his performances to hide himself from God, and goes to patch up a righteousness of his own. Says he, "I will be mighty good now—I will reform—I will do all I can; and then certainly Jesus Christ will have mercy on me." But, before you can speak peace to your heart, you must be brought to see that all your duties, all your righteousness put all together are so far from recommending you to God, are so far from being any motive and inducement to God to have mercy on your poor soul, that he will see them to be filthy rags, and that God hates them and cannot but do away with them, if you bring them to him in order to recommend you to his favor.