

Text: Ps. 119:97-104

Title: "The life of the redeemed is a lawful life"

Time: 3/7/2021 & 3/21/21 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory about a man named Christian, a resident of the City of Destruction, whom we first meet clothed in rags, with a book in his hand, and a heavy burden on his back. The heavy burden he bore came from reading the book he held. Christian wants nothing more in life than to be free from this heavy burden he carries.

Still burdened with his load, Christian receives advice from Mr. Worldly-Wiseman to seek relief at Mr. Legality's house. Bunyan explains that this was a wrong turn: "So Christian turned out of his way to go to Mr. Legality's house for help. But behold, when he was got now hard by the hill, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next the way side did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the hill should fall on his head; therefore there he stood still, and knew not what to do. Also his burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in the way. There came also flashes of lightning out of the hill, that made Christian afraid that he should be burned." Here Bunyan footnotes the passage we studied together last week about Mt. Sinai - Exod. 19:16-18.

It is not the law of Sinai that brings us deliverance from the burden of our sin. The law of Sinai only makes the burden worse. As we come to this section of the book of Exodus and learn that the life of the redeemed is a lawful life, we must first understand the priority of first being redeemed. Without redemption, God's law only makes our sinful burden worse. Just like Israel was redeemed from Egypt

through the blood of the Passover Lamb, so you and I must be redeemed from the bondage and burden of our sin by the shed blood of Calvary's Lamb. Bunyan tells the story of Christian's redemption in these terms:

"He ran until he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, where it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more." A free man, Christian would leave that place singing the song of the redeemed:

"Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could ought ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest cross! Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me."

Christian's problem with Sinai was that he went there without having been to the cross first. Only through our Passover Lamb who died there and rose from the grave can our lives become lawful lives. This blessing in the life of the redeemed is one that the enemy has worked overtime to distort and confuse, and so before we study the content of God's law in Exodus, I want us to cover two introductory topics that will help us understand how God's redeemed people can love His wonderful law: (1) our relationship to God's law before and after salvation; and (2) common errors believers make in their approach to God's law.

I. Our relationship to God's law before and after salvation (Rom. 7:1-6).

Illustration: Ours is a world that is familiar with before-and-after photos. If a company wants you to buy their haircare product or their skincare product or even their dieting program, they will show you before-and-after photos to get you to buy. Some things are the same in each photo. You still have hair, and skin, and a body with some weight, but significant changes have made life visibly better.

Application: When thinking about man's relationship to the law of God, it is important to understand that big changes happen in that relationship when a person comes to the cross of Calvary for salvation. Some things stay the same, and they can be summarized simply with the truth that God's law always defines right and wrong for everyone. A corrupt society in Scripture is one in which everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25).

So sin and righteousness have nothing to do with our own eyes and everything to do with the Lord's law. Sin is always disobedience to God's lawful Old Testament and New Testament commands (Rom. 7:7-12). The apostle John says that sin is a transgression of the law, and one of the Bible words for sin is *lawlessness* (1 John 3:4).

And righteousness is always obedience to God's lawful Old Testament and New Testament commands (Rom. 7:13-23). Israel's great commission to the world required obedience to God's commands (Exod. 19:5-6), and so does the church's great commission to the world (Matt. 28:18-20). It is never righteous to do what is right in our own eyes; it is always the commands of God's law that designates for us the difference between sin and righteousness.

But there is a very important sense in which what was before salvation in our relationship to God's law has been forever changed. There is a set of before-and-after pictures of the person who has been to the cross when it comes to the role of God's law in his life. That difference is summarized in the previous chapter (Rom. 6:14).

So grace is the after-picture. When it comes to God's law, before salvation we were under it; after we come to the cross we are free from being under it because now we are under grace. We can put it this way: before salvation unbelievers are in bondage under the law; after salvation believers are free from bondage under the law. Being under bondage of the law burdens the life of the unbeliever with two curses that no longer apply to the believer.

(1) First, the law curses the life of the unsaved with an obligation to flawlessly obey it in order to be justified before God. Unbelievers often boast of their ability to do so, but this boasting is self-deception. In reality, everyone fails miserably (Luke 18:10-12, Phil. 3:4-6, 9, Rom. 10:1-4).

The experience with God's law of those saved by grace is very different from this. Instead of being obligated to obey it for justification, the law leads the believer to see his need for faith in the obedience of Christ for justification (Luke 18:13-14, Gal. 3:24, Rom. 7:24-25a). What has your experience been with God's law? Do you find there how good you are like the Pharisee? If so, you are self-deceived like he was. Or does the law of God show you how wretchedly sinful and helpless you are, so that your only hope is the mercy and grace of your law-keeping Savior? If so, you can go down to your house this morning justified by trusting Him.

(2) Second, the law curses the life of the unbeliever with the just condemnation and penalty of its guilty verdict (Rom.

3:19-20, 6:23). The wonderful news for those who are free from being under the law in this way is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:1-11), because Jesus suffered that condemnation for us (Rom. 3:24-26).

So in one sense everyone is confronted by the reality of God's law. We can ignore this reality, but we cannot escape it. The life of the redeemed can be a lawful life (Rom. 8:4), and we can study how better to obey God's law, only because for us everything changed at the cross. Our study of the law points us not to our own righteousness, but to greater faith in the righteousness of Christ, and we cannot come under the law's condemnation for the many times we fail to obey its commands. Christ obeyed all its commands, and we study it with the hope of becoming more like Him.

Have you experienced this change that the cross makes? Has your burden fallen off? If so, you are redeemed, and your life can learn to become a lawful life more like Christ.

II. Common errors believers make in their use of God's law (1 Tim. 1:8).

Illustration: Gun-control advocates believe that guns kill people and that our streets would be safer if the government took them away from citizens. Defenders of the Second Amendment of the Bill of Rights believe that fingers that pull the trigger kill people and that our streets are safer because the government has allowed citizens to keep and bear arms as an inalienable right of self-defense. NRA members believe that guns are good if used lawfully.

Application: Paul was never a member of the National Rifle Association, but I think he would have joined the National Law Association if it had existed in his day. He tells us that

the law is good if we will use it lawfully. Using the law lawfully seems to be very difficult at times for us in this church age especially. I want to point to four common errors in the use of the law by Christians this morning.

(1) The error of justifying legalism. *Justify* is the word for God's work of salvation that tells us that this work meets all the requirements of God's law. The error of justifying legalism claims that obeying the law of God is necessary to staying justified before God. The idea is that we are saved by grace, but we stay saved through obedience to God's law. This was the error that threatened the churches of Galatia (Gal. 3:1-3). Paul's point is that our salvation begins in the Spirit, not in our works, and so it ends that way as well. We are saved to the uttermost and eternally by faith in the finished work of Christ, not by works (Eph. 2:4-10).

(2) The error of sanctifying legalism. This error teaches that growing in Christlikeness is accomplished by making the outward appearance of our lives conform better to God's law (Matt. 23:25). This error fails to understand that God's commands are instructions for our hearts, not just our bodies. While we must not say that a clean outside is unimportant, growing in Christlikeness is always accomplished by cleaning the inside (v. 26). When our hearts are being cleansed, the outside eventually takes care of itself, because out of the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). If our lives are corrupt, we need a change in our heart, not merely in the rules that dictate how our body looks and acts.

(3) The error of antinomianism. *Anti* means *against*, and *nomos* is the Greek word for *law*, so this word means having an attitude that is against God's law as a believer. The error essentially says that we are free from any jurisdiction of the law of God over our lives (Rom. 6:1, 15; Gal. 5:13-14). But

Scripture is clear that our freedom from under the law is not freedom from its jurisdiction, but freedom from the way it applies to unbelievers (Rom. 7:1-6). The widow of this passage is not free from the jurisdiction of the marriage laws governing her life, she is only free from a particular application of those laws because they no longer apply to her situation in the same way. That we are under the jurisdiction of God's law is clear in that it is written on our hearts, its righteousness can be fulfilled in us, it is our delight, and it is part of our rule of faith and practice (Rom. 2:14-16, 24-29; 8:4; Psalm 1; Eph. 6:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:14-17).

(4) The error of ecclesiastical misapplication. *Ecclesia* is the Greek word meaning *summoned assembly* and translated *church* in our New Testaments. In the Old Testament, Israel was the Lord's summoned assembly. In the New Testament, local churches are, something quite different.

This error happens when the commands that gave definition to Israel's assembly are used to do so for local churches in the same way (Col. 2:16-17). The soteriological and moral applications of not harvesting the corners of a crop (Lev. 19:9), for instance, are still very instructive to us about the greed we find in our hearts needing salvation and the importance of generosity in the Christian life. But they do not tell Christian farmers how to farm the way they did Israel's farmers. Farms are no longer part of our summoned assembly as local churches.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I want to end where we began and ask whether we can say with the Psalmist, "Oh, how love I thy law!" Do we? Perhaps some common error is the reason you have to say "No" this morning.

I was fascinated recently by a new device that helps diabetics measure their sugar levels as they try to stay healthy. A port is installed in the patient's arm, and a device can then take a wireless reading instantly of sugar levels from the port whenever it is held up to it. The reading is stored and charted on a graft so it can be sent to the patient's doctor.

If we had a similar device that could measure the amount of the sweet honey of the Word of God was running through our heart and thought life, what would the reading show? Would we find the levels to be dangerously low?

Many redeemed people of God today have missed the truth of the Book of Exodus, that the life of the redeemed is a lawful life. They have lost the love for God's law that the Psalmist felt. For them, there has been little delight and meditation in the law of the Lord. Is that you? If so, repent of your cold apathy and negligence, and ask the Lord to rekindle a thankful love for and delight in His wonderful law this morning.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching