



Lesson Goal:

For you to further your understanding and experience --

- ⇒ the difference between living under the law and living under the gospel
- ⇒ yet, how prone we are to live under law (in subtle as well as obvious ways), and how that overflows in an unloving approach toward others
- ⇒ but how Christ has set us free from bondage to the law; and, through the gospel, empowers us to grow in fulfilling the law's intention



1. Listen to or watch the Lesson 4 talk.

Use the following transcript of the talk while you listen or watch.

The Law and the Gospel

Dave Desforge

Differences Between the Law and the Gospel and How Grace Brings Them Together

1 **I. THE PROBLEM IS WITH US!**

2 The topic tonight is the Law and the Gospel. As I've been considering this topic I've
3 thought honestly that oftentimes our problem with the law is that there is honestly a problem with
4 the law. And there are some pretty crazy laws out there. I have a book that outlines some of them
5 and it's kind of amusing to me. These are true laws. In International Falls, Minnesota, they
6 actually forbid cats to chase dogs up telephone poles. That's true. It's on the books to this day. In
7 Memphis, Tennessee, it is actually still on the books that it's against the law for a woman to
8 drive a car unless a man is walking or running in front of it waving a red flag to warn
9 approaching motorists and pedestrians. In Lebanon, Tennessee, it is the law that a husband
10 cannot kick a wife out of bed even if her feet are cold, but a wife can kick a husband out of bed
11 any time for any reason whatsoever. And I'm sure every husband already knows that anyway. But
12 as we look at God's law, the truth is that our problem isn't because there's a problem with the

13 law. Our problem is because there's a problem with us. There's a problem with how we relate to
14 the law. 1 Tim 1:8 says this: Paul says, "**We know that the law is good if one uses it properly**"
15 or, a literal translation would be, if one uses it *lawfully*. We know that the law is good if one uses
16 it *lawfully*. And when he is talking about the law there, it's not just that he's talking about the
17 ceremonial law or the civil law of the Old Testament. He is at the very least including the moral
18 law when he says that-- the ethics of the Old Testament. Because in verses 9 and 10 that follow
19 that, he makes a list of moral or ethical sins, and even in that list he follows the order of Exodus
20 20, which he does on other occasions as well. So the very least, when Paul says that, he's
21 including the moral law. And what he is saying then, is that we can actually be keeping or trying
22 to keep even the moral law-- even the ethics that we find in the Bible-- and to do it in a way that
23 is unlawful, in a way that is actually disobedient, in a way that doesn't actually count. And so
24 tonight as we go through this together, I want us to reflect on how the law is good, but how we
25 often abuse it or misuse it. If I were speaking to a group of new Christians or inexperienced
26 Christians, it would be a whole different lecture. If it weren't a group of seasoned Christians like
27 yourselves, then I would probably talk about the misuse and the abuse of the law by degrading
28 the law, by not taking it seriously, by despising God's law, by being licentious. But for our
29 purposes tonight with experienced believers, what I want to focus on is how we misuse and abuse
30 the law by actually turning it into our gospel, by confusing the law with the gospel, by making
31 the law our good news instead of what Christ has done for us. And that, in doing that, when we
32 confuse the law with the gospel, you lose both. You not only lose the gospel but you lose the law
33 as well. Now how does that work? What does that look like?

34 **II. MISTAKEN EXPECTATIONS- CAPSIZING THE LAW**

35 You have an outline before you tonight and the first thing is that we do that: we keep the
36 law unlawfully or we pursue the law unlawfully through our mistaken expectations of the law,
37 thereby capsizing the law. And that is, that we look to the law; we expect it to secure for us the
38 righteousness that only the gospel can secure. And when you load the law with that kind of
39 burden that it was never meant to have, it's like overloading a boat with a load that it's never
40 been meant to carry and you just capsize the boat. And we do that with the law-- mistaken
41 expectations. And when I talk about this, what I'm talking about is what I would call functional,
42 or practical, legalism. And in talking about legalism, what I mean is not a zeal for the law or
43 passion for law. Legalism isn't that we're passionate about the law. The apostle Paul was
44 certainly passionate about the law. Jesus Himself was zealous for the law of God. So I'm not
45 talking about being zealous for God's law as legalism. But practical legalism or legalism in the
46 sense of using the law of God in order to prove our goodness, using it to make ourselves

47 righteous in our own eyes, to make ourselves right in the eyes of other people and in the eyes of
48 God. So what I'm talking about when I'm talking about legalism is that instinct we have to use
49 the law, to use rules to prove our own goodness.

50 Now I daresay that is instinctive. I was in Africa with some missionaries recently. We
51 were in Senegal, Africa and some friends of mine and I, along with World Harvest, part of the
52 kind of thing we're doing tonight. And one of our introductions to that culture which none of us
53 had ever experienced before was the way they eat. And we sat down for our first meal and they
54 put a large bowl out in the middle of the room and that bowl was filled with rice and all kinds of
55 other goodies I couldn't identify, with some large pieces of fish and meat in the middle of that
56 bowl. And then we were each given forks and you sit around the bowl and you each have at it.
57 And they call it the common bowl. And none of us being familiar with that of course found it
58 strange from the start and were a little uncomfortable. But what was really interesting was the
59 instinctive reaction that we all had. And what do you think that was? I mean, instinctively, what
60 do you think the first thing was that we wanted to know? And what that was, was everybody
61 wanted to know the rules. We wanted to know what the rules were and we were anxious about
62 the fact that maybe we were going to have to do this and be introduced to this culture without
63 knowing what the rules were. We wanted to know how you use your fork. We wanted to know if
64 everybody had their own certain quadrant of that bowl that you stay in. How do you separate that
65 meat and fish in the middle with each other when you've already had your fork in your mouth? Is
66 it OK to steal something from someone else's other part of the bowl? (Which somebody did that
67 night. . . became a forgiveness issue for me.) But all these questions were coming in our minds
68 and what was there is, our hearts immediately wanted to know the rules so we could prove our
69 Senegalese goodness, that we could prove our missionary righteousness, that we could know that
70 by keeping the rules we were OK, that we were good people. . .it's instinctive for us.

71 Now the fact of the matter is I pursue this kind of self-generated righteousness in every
72 area of my life. And I daresay you do too. I pursue husband righteousness, parenting
73 righteousness, speaker righteousness, my concern even for doing this tonight. I pursue driving
74 righteousness, I mean just about every area of my life I want to know the rules so I can prove my
75 goodness and that's what I'm talking about when I talk about legalism. Now probably the
76 weirdest thing was last fall when I was in another Sonship conference like this, I found out I even
77 have bathroom righteousness. I was getting ready to speak on this very topic and it was sometime
78 before that and I went out into the hall and wanted to use— needed to use, the bathroom before
79 the time came. And on the way there they had this table with snacks and different kinds of
80 drinks. And there was some apple juice there and I grabbed some apple juice as I ran off to the
81 bathroom. And I got in there and there was a stall free. That was the only part, it was pretty

82 crowded in there, and being in between sessions... And I went in and began to be “in process”
83 you might say, and put the apple juice down on a window sill that was beside the area of the stall.
84 And somehow turned around and banged it with my elbow knocking it onto the floor and it
85 busted. And I turned around and all I could think was “Oh no, I broke the glass, I’m going to
86 have to clean this up, how am I going to make it on time for the next lecture?” and all that. Then
87 suddenly another thought hit me and I began to panic. I thought, “There’s people all over this
88 bathroom and what is leaking out of there is yellow.” I couldn’t do anything because I was “in
89 process,” but I’m watching this yellow stuff trickling down to the next stall, going under the area
90 into the next stall where somebody is occupying, and out the door. And all I could think of was
91 “What are these people going to think of me? They’re going to think I’m some kind of pig, you
92 know, that I have no self-control whatsoever” and everything within me just wanted to yell out
93 “It’s only apple juice!” I’ve got to prove my bathroom goodness. That’s what I’m talking about
94 when I’m talking about this functional or practical legalism that’s trying to prove our goodness
95 by knowing and keeping the rules. And so as you think of your own life, what are some of the
96 telltale signs that this takes place in your life and in my life? I think a few of them are these. How
97 do we expect the law to give us and secure us the righteousness that only the gospel really
98 secures us?

99 **A. Telltale sign #1- Looking for credit for your good deeds**

100 Well, one thing I think is you’ll see a need for credit. That your righteousness, your good
101 deeds, your right acts are going to have to be known by other people. Your goodness must be
102 acknowledged by other people. You’re going to see that tendency. Now one of the laws that the
103 Bible gives is in Ephesians 5 when Scripture tells me that I as a husband am to love my wife as
104 Christ loves the church. Well there was one day not long ago where I was alone in the kitchen
105 and I went to put some of the dishes away in the dishwasher and I noticed that on the outside of
106 the dishwasher was getting kind of grimy. It was getting a little dirty. And as I bent down to close
107 it, and I saw that, the first thing I thought (you know, typical husband) was, “Boy, Peggy should
108 do something about this.” And then I noticed that there was a sponge on the outside of the sink
109 nearby and I had this unique thought. I thought, “Well, maybe I could do it.” And so I grabbed
110 the sponge and I began cleaning the outside of the dishwasher and I started feeling really good
111 about it. This felt like a holy thing. I thought “Peggy. She’ll never know this.” I just did it for
112 her and it really was one of those rare, holy, serving-your-wife moments. But then I found to my
113 surprise, shock and chagrin, really, three times that week I found myself mentioning it to Peggy.
114 Three times. And on the third time I heard the cock crow outside, you know, the rooster. But
115 that’s that drive within me to prove my goodness and to do that, it has to be acknowledged by

116 other people, doesn't it? And so you will see that the need for having credit and getting credit in
117 your life to prove your goodness.

118 **B. Telltale sign #2- Defensiveness**

119 But another thing is there will be a sign, a telltale sign of defensiveness. One of the laws
120 that the Bible gives is the Scripture says, "Study to show yourself approved," and that's
121 something that's important to me too. I have had a Bible for many many years. This Bible is a
122 Bible that I love, it is well worn and I've gotten a lot of Bible righteousness through this Bible.
123 Because you know how we think, right? You know how much a man studies his Bible by how
124 well-worn it is, how written it is, how much writing is in there, and how much underlining and
125 marking is in there. And a good Christian studies his Bible and a real studier of the Bible is going
126 to have an old tattered-looking Bible, aren't they? So I love this Bible. So hard to get rid of, but
127 I've been growing and learning that you don't need Bible righteousness by the way your Bible
128 looks. And so someone came up to me, someone here tonight and said, "I want to fix your Bible
129 for you, I'm going to redo it, and re-cover it, and rebind it," and which she's done and I
130 appreciate it. But when she said this, I felt that real holy thing of "I don't need Bible
131 righteousness." OK. I'll just get rid of this Bible. I'll get a new Bible and I even told her very
132 nobly (at that time anyway), "It's fine. I don't need it." And I went out and I bought a new Bible.
133 It was no more than a week later with this new Bible that I sat down to dinner with one of our
134 leaders (it was a dinner after church) and we were sitting down and I got there late after
135 preaching and sat down to my meal and I took this Bible and put it up on the table. Started eating
136 and this leader turns to me and starts looking at my Bible and flipping through it and all of a
137 sudden he says "You know, there's not much writing in this Bible." He says, "You know, my
138 dad, he really studied his Bible. His Bible was full of notes and markings and it was well-worn
139 and tattered. I respect my dad." And I found myself saying immediately, "Well, you should have
140 seen my old Bible." And I was thinking in my mind (I didn't have the guts to say this), "I'm sure
141 it had more than your dad. It's probably Greek and Hebrew stuff in my Bible." That need for
142 Bible righteousness and defensiveness immediately to prove my goodness.

143 **C. Telltale sign #3- Comparing yourself with others**

144 But I think another telltale sign is a fixation with comparison. I was with a friend of mine
145 once and we were talking about some discipling things. He was inviting me to speak into his life
146 a little bit and to help him see some things that were going on. One of the things I shared with
147 him was I said, "You know, brother, I think one of the things God might want to work with you
148 on, one place that you could probably grow, is that you're really critical. I think God would really

149 want to help you with that critical spirit.” And I think it really brought some conviction. One of
150 the ways I know that, is immediately he said, “Well, that may be true” (and you could tell he was
151 a little hit by it), he said, “But don’t you think I’m at least better than the gays?” And I said,
152 “Man, brother, you just brought critical spirit to a whole new level.” And you know what was
153 happening with him is what I experience, too. And that is when the law begins to convict you,
154 when the law begins to come to your heart, the first thing you want to do is cry out for rescue.
155 And one of the ways we do that is we cry out for rescue from the law itself. And how do you do
156 that? You do that by comparing yourself with others. And what he was saying is the law, being
157 judgmental and critical, may be bad, and it may not prove my goodness. But at least if I compare
158 myself to others; if I think of others that I consider worse than myself; then the law will be able
159 to prove my goodness somehow and I’ll be rescued and I’ll be able to secure a righteousness that
160 I’m not believing I can find in Christ. You see? And, the interesting thing is that even as that
161 happened, I began to feel in my own heart, “At least I’m better than this guy.” Because I
162 immediately thought, “I would never think like that.” Or (at least I wouldn’t say something like
163 that out loud.) And there you find my own penchant for that comparative righteousness. And
164 that’s what we’ll do. We’ll look to prove our goodness by comparing ourselves to others. That’ll
165 be another telltale sign.

166 **D. Telltale sign #4- Reputation fixation**

167 And then, a last telltale sign I think is a reputation fixation. One of the things that I’ve
168 found since getting back here the last couple of weeks is there’s been just this wave or parade of
169 people complaining and criticism. And that happens every now and then in ministry and just
170 happens to be one of those waves going on right now. And I was with one of our staff this
171 morning, Colin, and sharing how that has discouraged me. It’s just gotten my spirit down and it’s
172 just gotten hold of my heart. And it does that on a periodic basis, you know, when there’s too
173 much criticism or too much complaining. It just gets a hold of my heart. And my question is, why
174 is that? Why would that complaining and criticism so capture my joy in Christ? And the reason is
175 this: that my performance isn’t proving my righteousness. My performance isn’t securing my
176 righteousness, isn’t proving my goodness. And as people are pointing that out, as people are
177 complaining, it begins to pull the rug out of that practical legalism, that functional legalism
178 that’s in my life.

179 And I’d like you to just think about how that works in your life too. Because I hope you
180 see that what I’m talking about; there’s something wrong with that. What I’m trying, belaboring
181 here, is that unlawful law-keeping that you and I fall into all the time. And that there’s something
182 desperately wrong with that. That it’s a moralistic approach to religion instead of that which

183 Christianity is supposed to be. And it's supposed to be something incredibly different between
184 Christianity and moralistic religions, such as Islam or Mormonism or something else like that.
185 That when I do this, I'm basically reducing Christianity to a self-improvement program. And so, I
186 think there is a desperate need in my life to remember how passionately Paul attacked that kind
187 of unlawful law keeping. How he just zeroed in on it in places like Romans 3:20-21 when he
188 says, **"Therefore no one will be declared righteous. . . by observing the law. . . But now a
189 righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known. . ."** Romans 3:20-21 And
190 that's the gospel. And in Galatians 2:21 when Paul says, **"I do not set aside the grace of God,
191 for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"** Galatians 2:21
192 And so what I would be inviting us all to tonight is a repentance. You know that there is a
193 repentance issue here and I don't just mean like this one-time experience of repentance that I
194 need. But what I'm saying by all the examples I'm giving you... They're current examples in my
195 life and therefore, there's an on-going, daily, constant need of repentance in my life in this area.
196 And when I say repentance, what I mean is that I need to understand and question not only am I
197 keeping God's law but I need to question: why am I keeping God's law? Why am I trying to
198 keep God's law? I mean, what am I trying to do with that? Am I trying to create a righteousness
199 that's self-generated? Am I trying to prove my goodness by the law? Am I trying to secure what
200 only the Gospel can give me, and thereby confusing the two and losing both of them? Older
201 theologians used to talk about two kinds of repentance (I mean the theologians from hundreds of
202 years ago). They used to talk about the need to repent of your unrighteousness but also your need
203 to repent of your righteousness. And Tim Keller, a pastor up in New York [Redeemer
204 Presbyterian Church], puts it this way: he says, "We need to not only repent of what makes us
205 bad. But we need to repent of anything we look to in dependency to make us good other than
206 God." And that includes a dependency upon the law, a looking to the law in the wrong way. He
207 also says that we've got to understand that when we are doing this we are falling into a moralism
208 instead of the power of what Christianity is.

209 And so, what I would call you to and call myself to, is not only a repentance then, but also
210 a faith to believe the gospel. To believe that in the gospel we have everything that we need and
211 that, as I fall into this kind of practical legalism, this mistaken expectation that capsizes the law,
212 then when I do that I'm basically asking the law to be my Jesus. I'm saying, "Law- rescue me.
213 Save me from my sin. Make me non-condemnable. Make me worthy. Make me somebody. Make
214 me good. Make me lovable. Make me non-condemnable," which is something only the gospel
215 can do. I'm turning the law into my Jesus. And yet, it's the gospel that says, for example in
216 Romans 10:4, where Paul says **"Christ is the end of the law so that righteousness may be for
217 everyone who believes."** Romans 10:4 And what the gospel says is that I don't need to get

*"the evil of our
righteousness"*

218 righteousness from the law because I already have it in Christ and that Christ frees me from that
219 need to get righteousness from the law. And therefore, I can love the law, and pursue the law, and
220 look to the law, and instead of depending on it to create some kind of righteousness of my own,
221 instead I can have a passion for the law simply because it reflects the righteousness of God.
222 Instead of trying to use the law to prove my own goodness, I can instead have a passion for the
223 law because it's God's goodness and because I'm caught up in His goodness, you see? There's a
224 big difference between those two things. So, mistaken expectations that end up capsizing the law.

225 **III. MISUNDERSTOOD DIAGNOSIS- TRIVIALIZING THE LAW**

226 Second on your outline . . . We also keep the law unlawfully; have an unlawful
227 observance of the law through our misunderstood diagnosis, and thereby we trivialize the law.
228 And what I'm doing is, I'm being rather Trinitarian about this. We not only look to the law to be
229 our Jesus, but we also look to the law to be our Holy Spirit.

230 **A. Problem #1: We give the law a power it was never meant to have**

231 The first way that we do that is that we give the law a power that it was never meant to
232 have. We look to it for a power to change us. And the law was never meant to have that kind of
233 power. We tend to think (I tend to think), that if I just know the right thing and do the right
234 thing, that that's equivalent to transformation. And thereby I depend upon the law to do
235 something that only the Holy Spirit was meant to do. Only the Holy Spirit is meant to be the
236 power for transformation and the power for change in our lives. And I think there are several
237 problems with that way of thinking or with that way of approaching the Christian life. And the
238 first is this: that when we do that, the first problem is, we misunderstand the role that the law was
239 meant to have. Galatians 3:24; Paul says this: he says, "**The law was put in charge. . .**" Why?
240 "**. . . to lead us to Christ. . .**" Galatians 3:24 And in verse 21, the latter half of that, he also writes ". . .
241 **For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have**
242 **come by the law.**" Galatians 3:21 And by saying that he is saying, "And it doesn't." It comes by the
243 gospel. It comes by the Spirit. It was never meant to come by the law. Life and righteousness
244 cannot come that way. Change and transformation cannot be made that way. And so, what I'm
245 saying is that the problem is that we've got to recognize that the law has no power in itself to do
246 what it's describing. It describes to us what change looks like or the result of change or what fruit
247 will look like, but it doesn't have the power to get us there. I recently put together a basketball
248 goal for my kids. We just completed our driveway after many years. One of the things we've
249 been looking forward to was being able to play basketball in the driveway with my girls. And so
250 for Christmas we bought them this basketball goal and it's taken me this long to get to putting it

251 together and one of the reasons is that it comes with this complicated set of directions (like
252 everything you can possibly buy, right?). And, here's the thing, I had those directions. The
253 directions told me what the goal's supposed to look like, how you're supposed to do it, and how
254 you're supposed to go about doing it. It gave me directions. But there was no power. I sat there
255 looking at the directions for months and months and months and the basketball goal never went
256 up. And that's because there's no power in the directions to get it there. That takes me. That takes
257 my energy and my prowess with tools (which is really a lack thereof) to get us there. And it's the
258 same thing with the Christian life. The law gives you a set of directions. It describes what
259 righteousness looks like as it bears its fruit. It describes the character of God. It describes the
260 character that God is bringing us up to. But it doesn't have the power to get us there. It's like the
261 directions.

262 Another example is my wife and daughter are at a horse rally in South Carolina tonight
263 and they didn't really know the directions to get to the house where they were going to be
264 staying. So they had to call for directions and make a little map of it. Of course, once they had the
265 map they didn't confuse the map with the destination. The map describes the destination and how
266 to get there, but it really took getting in the car, and the car being the vehicle (or actually in this
267 case our Ford pick-up truck and a horse trailer behind it) in order to get them there. There's a
268 difference between the map and the power, the vehicle, that gets you to that destination. The
269 law is like the map. But we can't confuse it with the vehicle that gets us to that destination or we
270 end up losing what both are really all about. Again, old theologians had this down and several of
271 them write about the law being like a mirror. The law is like a mirror. It shows you your dirty
272 face but it has no power to clean your face. That takes something else. That takes soap or a wash
273 cloth in order to do that. Some more modern teachers use the example of an X-ray and they say
274 the law is like an X-ray. It'll show you problems that are within, it'll show you broken bones. My
275 wife hurt her back and just found out today from one of our friends, took some X-rays, and found
276 out that she's fractured one of the bones in her back and that's why she's having all the pain. But
277 the fact that they did the X-ray didn't make her better. It takes something else to heal. It takes
278 something else, some other power, to make her better (which is going to be a lot of work and a
279 lot of other things). But it's the same way with the law. The law is an X-ray that can show you
280 the brokenness, that can show you the places where we need to grow, but it's not going to have
281 the power to heal you or get you there. So, that's the first problem is we misunderstand the role.
282 in why we want to use the law as power to change

283 **B. Problem #2: We have a suspect motive in relying on the law to change us**

284 A second problem that I see is that there's a suspect motive when we look to the law in
285 this way to change us; a suspect motive. I have friend that's a District Attorney in a city and he
286 once said to me, "You know Dave. . ." (and we were talking about law and the need to uphold
287 law and to be in law enforcement) and he said, "You know what breaks my heart is that those of
288 us in law enforcement in this city don't really love the law. We love the power that the law gives
289 us. And there's a big difference between the two." And I think that the second problem that I see
290 is that there's a suspect motive in why we want to use the law as the power to change. And the
291 problem in my life is that I don't really love the law, I love the power that the law gives me.
292 What I want is control. What I want to be is to be involved in this spiritual self-management so
293 that I'm on top of things and so that really ultimately I get the credit. And here's what happens.
294 When I begin to think that change equals law-keeping, then it allows me to really be the spirit of
295 my life, to be the Holy Spirit of my own life. And I begin to view the law actually as the Spirit
296 instead of seeing the difference between the two and acknowledging that and living by that. I get
297 involved in "sin management" instead of what's true Christianity.

298 **C. Problem #3: We forget God's real target**

299 A third problem that I see is that it misses the target. That when law-keeping equals
300 transformation I'm forgetting what God's real target is. You know, Jesus clearly taught that
301 everything that comes out of our life, our behavior, issues from our heart, and that the real target
302 is the heart. He said that all of the law can be summed up in a single commandment that is to
303 love your neighbor as yourself, but first he said it's to love God with all your heart, right? God's
304 real target is the heart. "Man looks on the outer appearance but God looks upon the heart," right?
305 And, I miss that when I begin thinking that that transformation is just by law-keeping. I forget
306 that the real target God has is the heart. And here's the thing. The law cannot touch my heart.
307 Only the Holy Spirit can touch my heart. Only the Holy Spirit can change my heart.

308 **D. Problem #4: We underestimate the flesh**

309 The fourth problem, and the last problem that I've been thinking for this purpose is that it
310 underestimates the flesh. It underestimates the flesh. Romans 8:3-4 talks about the limits of the
311 law when Paul says "**For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the**
312 **sinful nature, . . .**", or a more literal translation (a better translation I think)-- in that was
313 weakened by *the flesh*, "**. . . God did by sending His own Son.**" ^{Romans 8:3} God had to solve my
314 problem for change, my problem with sin, by something other than the law because the law is
315 limited by the power of my flesh and therefore God had to send His own Son in order to bring

316 about what needed to happen. I was at an amusement place one time with my girls when they
317 were little and I was captivated by this one particular old-fashioned amusement. And what it was
318 is, you pick up this mallet, and in front of you is a whole board, a large board with holes in it.
319 And as you stand there, a little gopher pops up out of the hole and the idea is that you are
320 supposed to grab this mallet and hit the gopher before it goes back down again and if you do you
321 get a point or something like that. You get enough points and you get a prize, right? Probably a
322 crayon or something (you know how it works. . . a thousand points and you get this little trinket).
323 So we're there pounding away on this thing, especially when I look so goofy standing there.
324 Because what happens is you go to pound one gopher and then what happens? Another gopher
325 pops up. And pretty soon there's gophers popping up all over the place and I'm standing there
326 like a madman trying to pound these gophers away. And I remember thinking, even as I was
327 doing it, you know this is a good illustration of my life, my Christian life. As I go about this sin
328 management attempt of change in my own power it's like I try to pop down one gopher, one flesh
329 gopher with the mallet of the law and what happens? There's another one popping up and they're
330 popping up all over the place. And what I need to recognize is that it's out of my control. My
331 flesh is enough of a problem that I can't give myself to sin management without there being some
332 sort of insanity to it. So there's problems with that. But I not only (and I think as I deal with other
333 people, its the same for them), I not only give the law a power that it doesn't have, but in that
334 process I deny the law the power that it really does have. Those two things go together, and what
335 do I mean by that? What I mean is that the law was meant to have a power to drive us to Jesus
336 Christ. The law was meant to have a power to cause us to have a dependency upon the Holy
337 Spirit for change. And when I do this law-keeping-equals-transformation thing, I'm denying it
338 the very power that it really was meant to have. And what I mean by that is that I end up
339 trivializing the law by reducing it to a spiritual make over. That's one way that I do that. I reduce
340 it to basically some sort of talk show spiritual make over and I settle for a superficiality, an
341 externalism that was never meant to be. And what I'm talking about is when Jesus talked about
342 how we settle for being whitewashed tombs. Or when Jesus talks about cleaning the outside of
343 the cup and being satisfied with that instead of being concerned with the inside of the cup which
344 only the Holy Spirit can touch. When I went to that conference last fall, the Sonship conference
345 last fall, my wife, very nicely as she often does, very thoughtfully, presented me with a gift as I
346 was about to go. And I opened the gift and it was one of those moments of, "I'm really glad that
347 you are so thoughtful and yet I'm not really sure I want this thing," you know? And I opened it
348 up, it was a pair of new pajamas. And the reason I was uncomfortable with that I said, "Peggy, I
349 don't know if I want to wear these because I'm going to be rooming with a guy for this week.
350 And you know I think the cool thing, the macho thing ("I don't want to look like a sissy" is what

Good weekly meeting talk idea!

351 I was saying), I think maybe I should just wear boxers and a T-shirt or something like that,” and
352 she’s got these nice PJ’s. I didn’t want to say anything, but I said, “You know look, I’m going to
353 be with a guy. I’m not sure I should do this.” And in total seriousness, she looks me in the eye.
354 She says, “Yeah but, what if there’s a fire?” And I thought, you know, “What planet are you
355 from?” And I had this vision run through my head, that there’s a fire in the hotel, people are
356 screaming and running through the hall, burning bodies everywhere, I have to jump out of the
357 fourth story window but I look good because I have new PJ’s. And, you know, you heard the
358 same thing with your mom. You have to change your underwear because you might. . . what if
359 you’re in a car accident? Or you have to have socks without holes (you know, where does that
360 thinking come from?) But you know what? That’s how we are spiritually. We are so concerned
361 for our spiritual PJ’s because we are so caught up in that we look good. And the truth of the
362 matter is that you and I are more concerned with looking good than actually truly being good.
363 And we could have as the motto written over our entire lives, you know the North Carolina state
364 motto is this: “To be and not to seem.” I think that’s awesome. But you know the motto that
365 could be written over a lot of my life much of the time would be the opposite of that: “To seem
366 and not to be.” Appearance isn’t everything, it’s the only thing, right?

367 And if you think that’s not true, just think about this for a minute. Just think about how
368 that work in our lives. Let me ask you this: are you more bothered, are you more bothered by
369 failing the law or by being caught failing the law? I mean what’s the truth? Are you more
370 bothered that you’ve sinned or that you’ve been seen sinning? And what I’m talking about is a
371 trivialization of the law by giving ourselves over to an externalism, you see? Let me ask you a
372 few other questions. Guys. Husbands. Are you more bothered that you are looking at another
373 woman or that your wife catches you looking at another woman? Men, are you more bothered
374 that in the check-out counter line you’re glancing at some of the covers of those magazines or
375 that people really notice that you’re glancing at some of those check-out counter magazines? Are
376 we more bothered that people notice that our kids are sinners even more than the fact that they
377 really are sinners? Aren’t we more bothered when people can really tell that our marriage isn’t
378 perfect than the fact that it really isn’t perfect? I had a recent experience of that when we were at
379 a dinner with some other folks from the church and we had a disagreement about when to leave,
380 and actually got mad at each other in front of them and weren’t able to hide it. And I’ll tell you
381 the truth. I was much more bothered by the fact that it showed that we weren’t getting along than
382 that we weren’t getting along, you understand? More bothered by being seen sinning than the sin
383 itself. More bothered about being caught failing the law than actually that I failed the law. How
384 about for you? Doesn’t it bother you more that people really can tell you’re unhappy than that
385 you really are? Or depressed? Or angry? Or joyless? It does for me. It really bothers me when

386 someone tells that there's no joy in my preaching, when they can really see it than that there's no
387 joy in my preaching. If you can't tell it's not so bad, right? Doesn't it bother us more that we can
388 no longer hide that we drink too much or eat too much than that we drink or eat too much? I'm
389 often more bothered that people can tell that I don't remember their name than that I didn't
390 remember their name. It really bothers me when Peggy can see that I'm not listening than that
391 I'm not listening. How about for you? Doesn't it really bother you more when someone knows
392 because they can see you don't care than that you actually don't care? How about when you can't
393 find that hymn in the hymnal or don't know the words to it or when you can't find that Bible
394 verse or you don't know that Bible verse or when you can't find that book in the Bible. I mean,
395 doesn't it bother you a lot more that everybody can tell than that you really can't find it? Doesn't
396 it bother you more (it does for me) that Peggy catches me being lazy, than that I'm actually lazy?
397 I mean, what I'll find myself doing is, I'll be watching an action movie just wasting away,
398 enjoying it, but I'll have that remote real handy and real close so I can switch over to
399 MacNeil/Lehrer [a news program] or something like that if she comes in, you know, because
400 that's not as lazy as watching an action movie. More concerned about what she sees than about
401 the fact that maybe I really am being lazy. Would it bother you more that you sleep during this
402 message or that you're not paying attention, or that I notice you doing that? The truth is that we
403 are caught up much more into "seem"... "to seem and not to be," and thereby we trivialize the
404 law in externalism. But it's not only that we do that by reducing the law to a spiritual make over
405 and Christianity to a spiritual make over, but also that we trivialize it as well by reducing God's
406 perfect law to a human achievable do-able standard, to a do-able human standard. And you know,
407 it strikes me that I am wise enough not to do that in a lot of other areas of life. I think I'm wise
408 enough to know that as good as I might have played softball at times (and it wasn't all that good)
409 or as good as I might play golf or something like that, or you, whatever you're good at. . . I'm
410 wise enough that I would not stand up beside Mark McGuire and that record incredible year that
411 he had, or Babe Ruth or somebody like that and say, "I can do that. I can do that." Or Tiger
412 Woods or somebody and say, "I can do that." And yet, we have the audacity to stand before the
413 law and say, "I can do that. I can do that." And yet, Psalm 19 reminds us that **"The law of the**
414 **Lord is perfect, reviving the soul."** ^{Psalm 19:7} The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul.

415 We were in the kitchen one time not long ago (this was sometime this past year), and
416 Peggy was over at the sink and she suddenly looked up and she said, "Dave, your glass is in the
417 sink. You didn't put it in the dishwasher." And behind all that, you have to understand we have
418 this understanding, this is a Peggy law: you put the glasses in the dishwasher. You don't wait
419 for her, she's not the maid, to do that, and she's right. We both know that. You put the glass in
420 the dishwasher. This is an unspoken rule now that we all know. And so behind that was also, you

421 know, that's not too much to ask. And it really isn't. You know, one of the things we have in our
422 house is "Ask questions." So I said to her, "Listen, I didn't do something bad. I actually did
423 something good. That glass was downstairs and it's not even my glass. I took that glass
424 belonging to somebody else all the way up here and put it in the sink just for you. That's
425 something good." She said, "Well. . . (and she was being playful; this wasn't one of the serious
426 arguments) she said, "Well, actually that's only half good 'cause you only went half way. You
427 didn't put it in the dishwasher." I said, "Excuse me, but I think all the way from downstairs up to
428 the sink is far more than half way. I think this is nine tenths good." And without skipping a beat,
429 she said, "Dave, you broke the law." And she was kind of alluding to James 2. She said, "Dave,
430 if you keep the whole law, but stumble at one point you've broken all of it." She goes, "No
431 credit!!" And I said, "You're right. You're right." Galatians 3:10 says, "**All who rely on
432 observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not
433 continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'**". Galatians 3:10 "**Christ redeemed us
434 from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.**" Galatians 3:13 You know, there are certain
435 things that remind me, certain laws especially -- and ask yourself what that is for you -- that
436 remind me the law is not some do-able human standard. That it drives me to Christ. The
437 forgiveness law does that for me. James, when he talks about the responsibility of teachers, Paul
438 when he talks about the responsibility of husbands: those drive me to Christ and remind me I
439 can't stand before the law arrogantly and say, "I can do that!" But one of the things also I think is
440 the tongue. And that's why we give you the tongue assignment in this course [Lesson 2, page 9].
441 It's so that it will drive us to Christ. But then I hear some people saying, "I'm not going to do it,
442 I'm not even going to bother. I know, I know what this game is. I know I can't keep my tongue
443 under control so I'm not going to bother." And when you do that you miss the whole point.
444 Because the whole point is not that you don't try. The whole point is that you have to do it in the
445 dependency upon the Holy Spirit. And so, we ask you to seek that. But what would that be for
446 you? And look. Here's the thing. The gospel frees us from looking to the law to be the power for
447 change. Christ offers that in Himself and through His Spirit. Christ has won for us the Holy
448 Spirit. Romans 1:16: "The gospel is the power of God for salvation." We're invited as we look
449 at this tonight to believe the gospel.

450 **IV. MISPLACED DEPENDENCY- IDOLIZING THE LAW**

451 And lastly, the third point on your outline is that we unlawfully keep the law through a
452 misplaced dependency and thereby idolizing the law. And just to round out the Trinitarianism,
453 we also wrongly relate to the law by turning it into our heavenly Father or looking to it to not
454 only be our Jesus, our Holy Spirit but also in a way that tends to make it a replacement for our

455 heavenly Father. And when you do that, it's idol worship. And that's what I do all the time. We
456 were going on a cruise for our twentieth wedding anniversary and we went to the banker to get
457 some travelers' checks and as we were leaving she had found out what I do for a living, I'm a
458 Pastor and all, and as we were leaving, "Well, have a great cruise!" And then she said, right after
459 that, she looked at us and she said, "But I know you will because you live right." I know you will
460 because you live right. And what she was saying is our hope is in our law-keeping, our rule-
461 keeping and that when you keep the rules, life will go well for you, life will go better for you.
462 And it becomes our subtle hope, and that is my subtle hope spiritually in a lot of ways, not just
463 for a good cruise, but for my life to be less painful, for my life to go easier and better if I'm being
464 good. And I think that by being good and that everything's going to be all right. And when I do
465 that, I'm misplacing my hope. Instead of having my hope in my heavenly Father, my hope is in
466 the law and thereby I confuse the two and I make an idol out of the law. It's like I'm looking to
467 the law instead of my Father and I'm saying "Father me." Be the one that protects me. Be the
468 one that provides for me. Be the one that's my authority in my life. And the law was never meant
469 to be that. That's what only the gospel, that's what only my heavenly Father can be. And, as I do
470 that, when I look to the law and place my hope in the law, I become a slave to the law. I
471 remember singing one time before giving this talk, we were singing that hymn, "My hope is built
472 on nothing less than Jesus and His righteousness, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other
473 ground is sinking sand." And as I was singing that it became a confession for me. I began singing
474 in my heart my hope is built on something less than Jesus and His righteousness. It often is. And
475 one way I do that is to hope in the law instead. On the law, on my performance, on my solid
476 performance I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. No, that's not what it's meant to be, is it?
477 But I often live like that's what it is instead of on Christ alone I stand. And so whatever I put my
478 hope in and as I misplace my hope, I'm going to become a slave to that. It's going to put me in
479 bondage. It's going to keep me under its authority and under its control and thereby deny what
480 the gospel says. The gospel says, Romans 6:14, that I am ". . . **not under law, but under grace**".
481 Galatians 3:25 that you and I are not, as believers, ". . . **under the supervision of the law**". And
482 all that is to say is that Jesus is my Lord, not the law. The law doesn't have that authority over
483 me. My Father is my Father. He has authority over me. He uses His law but there's a difference
484 between placing my hope in that law and placing my hope in Him.

485 Now here's two ways that you're probably going to see that in your life, how you're going
486 to feel that slavery and bondage because most of the time it's rather unconscious. I think the first
487 way is that the pressure will be felt at some point or another, conscious or unconscious. There'll
488 be this sense of unlimited obligation. That as you place your hope in the law you will know
489 instinctively that there's no way that you're going to actually be able to please it. You know the

490 law is like Mr. Critical. The law is like Miss Perfect. And as you try to serve it and give it your
491 heart and your soul, you're going to feel the unlimited obligation of that and the pressure of that.
492 One small way that that comes out for me every now and then (this doesn't happen all the time)
493 but every now and then somebody will come up to me... (and you'll probably say this to me
494 afterwards just to get my goat)... but every now and then somebody will come up to me and say
495 "Good sermon, Pastor, good sermon." No, I'm sorry; "Good sermon *today*, Pastor." And out of
496 those four words, "Good sermon today Pastor," or "Today good sermon, Pastor—" out of those
497 four words, which do you think is the one that really rings around in my head and stays with me?
498 Which of those four words? Today. Today. And you know immediately my heart goes, "What do
499 you mean *today*?" What was wrong with last week? Where have you been for the last month?
500 You know, maybe I should go back and listen to the tape or something. Why was this week good
501 and not some other week? Why are you coming up to me? And that insecurity that can be there,
502 even for me. Again, it doesn't happen all the time but God uses that in my life to remind me of
503 how I make myself a slave to the laws of being a good pastor or a good speaker or a good person.
504 And with that comes this unlimited obligation that's a bondage, that's a slavery to where you'll
505 never be able to live up to it. You'll never be able to please it and there's this insecurity that
506 goes with it, this pressure that will go with it.

507 The second way that I feel that bondage, and that you might too, is that there's going to be
508 a loss of passion, a loss of affection. One of the things that I have a passion about is playing golf
509 on my days off. I mean I just love it. It's just such a joy to play. And yet I find that I lose that joy
510 in a heartbeat and I know when that happens. It happens when I begin to give golf an authority
511 over me. And it will be that way with anything that you give yourself over to, that you place your
512 hope in. And just last week I was at the driving range, the practice range, and I had taken a
513 lesson the week before and I was hitting some of them really well, better than I ever had before.
514 And I was enjoying those moments. It was a gorgeous day and I found myself going back home
515 miserable. And I began to reflect back on why and the reason was that I hit twice as many bad
516 ones as I did as I did good ones and what was happening there was I was giving it authority over
517 me. I was giving it authority to define me, an authority to take care of me in a way that it was
518 never meant to do. I do that in all kinds of ways, with all kinds of things. And so do you. So the
519 way that we will feel that slavery is we'll feel the pressure, but we'll also feel the loss of joy, the
520 loss of passion and affection. And so, once again, what I need to be called to is a repentance and
521 a faith to believe the gospel instead of placing my faith in the law, instead of placing my hope in
522 the law, to believe the gospel. Galatians 4:4-7 says this, and what it's reminding me of is that I
523 have a heavenly Father that Jesus Christ has secured a relationship with, it is my heavenly Father
524 that provides for me, that protects me, who's an authority over me and nothing else is. And when

525 anything else becomes that, it becomes an idol, including (and like everything else), an idol is
526 something good. And the law is something good but it can become an idol as well. Galatians 4:
527 listen to this; just let it wash over you. **“When the time had fully come, God sent His Son. . .”**
528 —the gospel. **“God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under**
529 **law, . . .”**— to redeem us and liberate us under law, **“. . . that we might receive the full rights**
530 **of sons. . . So you are no longer a slave, but a son.”** Galatians 4:4-6



2. Memorize Galatians 3:1-2

“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?”