

Knowing Our Misery

Heidelberg Catechism

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What we just sang is going to be very important for us this morning because the law is going to reveal some very sobering things about who we are, and yet we confess the law is good.

Let's turn in our Scripture reading this morning to 1 Timothy chapter 1. 1 Timothy chapter 1, and we read that in connection with Lord's Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism. And as we read this chapter, especially notice, starting at verses 5, how the apostle speaks of the law and the commandment. 1 Timothy chapter 1,

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; 2 Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. 3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. 5 Now the end of the commandment [the purpose, the goal of the commandment] is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; 7 Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. 8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; 11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. 12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with

faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern [for an example and an encouragement] to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. 17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

We will be looking at a few verses in this passage in the course of the preaching. It's on the basis of this passage of scripture and on the basis of many passages that we have the instruction of Lord's Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism found on page 3 in the back of the Psalter. Pages 3 and 4, Lord's Day 2.

Q. 3. Whence knowest thou thy misery?

A. Out of the law of God.

Q. 4. What doth the law of God require of us?

A. Christ teaches us that briefly, Matthew 22:37-40 [which we already heard this morning], Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Q. 5. Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?

A. In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last week Sunday, we looked at the Christian's comfort. Lord's Day 1. We looked at the fact that the Christian's comfort is that he belongs to Jesus Christ, or to use the language we used last Sunday, the Christian's comfort is that his identity is in Jesus Christ. And belonging to Jesus, having our identity in Jesus Christ, God, our Maker, has wonderful things to say about us. Our sins are forgiven. We are heirs of everlasting life, and God is our heavenly Father. So that having Christ, we have everything. But at the end of the sermon last Sunday, it was also brought to our attention that in order to enjoy this comfort, there are three things we need to know. First, how great our sin and misery is. Second, how we may be delivered from all our sins and miseries. And third, how we are to show our thankfulness to God for such deliverance. Here with Lord's Day 2, we begin looking at that first thing that we need to know, how great our sin and misery is.

Now that arrangement might seem strange. Maybe you children or young people are saying, "I thought the Catechism was about comfort. But now in order to enjoy comfort, we're first going to spend time looking at how great our misery is? Why can't we just talk about comfort? Why can't we just talk about Jesus?" Well, this is how it works. The Catechism doesn't teach us about our misery in order to make us even more miserable or even in order to delay our comfort but the Catechism is going to teach us about our misery in order that we might understand more deeply the significance of what it means that we belong to Jesus. Seeing our misery in its fullness, we will understand better why belonging to Jesus is our only comfort and we will understand why belonging to Jesus is our all-sufficient comfort, the only comfort we need. And this is important. If we leave out a study of our misery and we move right on, say, to the second section of the Catechism on deliverance, we're not going to understand that second section as we ought or appreciate it and we're not going to understand the significance of what Jesus has done and who he is, and then when we get to the third section, we're not going to understand why we are to be living our whole lives completely in thankfulness and then our lives will show it. So enjoying the comfort of belonging to Jesus begins with knowing how great our sin and misery is. We take as our theme, "Knowing Our Misery," and we look at that theme under three points. First, what it is, what our misery is. Second, how we know it out of the law of God. And then third, our response to it.

What is our misery? Beloved, let me ask you that, what is your misery? What is your misery? There are a lot of potential ways in which people might answer that question. One person might say this, "My misery is this, I feel poor. I feel like I never have enough money. Every week again, our family is living paycheck to paycheck and it is stressful. If only I had more money, I wouldn't be so miserable." Another person might say, "My misery is this, that I'm sick. Here I am stuck in the hospital room with cancer and I'm doing chemotherapy and it is miserable. I'm in pain and suffering and I constantly feel like I'm dying. If only I were healthy, I wouldn't be so miserable." Maybe another person might say this, "My misery is this, my family situation. It's so stressful. I'm constantly fighting and bickering with my spouse, the children are chaotic and life is so busy and stressful I can't take it anymore. If only I had a different family I wouldn't be so miserable." And here already I think we see the importance of understanding what our misery is, because if we start giving those kinds of responses, if we start thinking that as if that's really our misery, then we're going to also look for the answers and the solutions in the wrong places because what your misery is also determines how you go and seek comfort, and it really determines how you live your life. If my misery is that I'm poor, well perhaps maybe I should rob a bank or maybe I should leave my spouse and find a wealthier person to live with. If my misery is that I'm sick, well maybe I should just end my life and be done with it all, if that's my misery. If my misery is my family situation, maybe I should leave my family, move down south and start afresh, right, get rid of my problems. But beloved, I think we know that those aren't real answers or solutions. Those actions won't give us real comfort. They won't give us the solution to our pain and sorrow because we know if we go in these directions, the reality is our misery will only increase and that's because we're not identifying what our misery actually is. I don't want to minimize the very real pain and misery of sickness or the misery that comes with poverty

or strained relationships, but in the end, we need to recognize that these are only symptoms, these are only secondary miseries. We need to get to the heart of the nature and extent of our misery otherwise we won't enjoy the comfort that is ours in Jesus Christ.

What is your misery? Well, the Catechism has already given us the answer back in Lord's Day 1, Question and Answer 2. Notice the language that the Catechism uses in answer 2 of the Catechism. First, what are the three things you need to know? First, how great my sin and misery is, and right there you have the answer. For the Catechism, this is the answer, our misery is our sin. For the Catechism, sin is synonymous with misery. We could just as well reword Question 3 so that it reads, "Whence knowest thou thy sin," because for the Catechism, our sin is our misery. The misery of the human condition is not poverty. The misery of the human condition is not sickness. The misery of the human condition is ultimately this, our sin. It is because of our sin that there is poverty. It's because of our sin that there is sickness. It's because of our sin that there is death in all its forms. My sin is my misery and notice, it's not as if sin is one misery I have, and then I have other miseries besides. No, my sin is my misery and that's an important point to make because if I can find an answer to my sin, I've also found the answer to everything else.

That's the great problem with man today and his thinking, man's thinking today is that he thinks ignorance is ultimately the problem, or that poverty is ultimately the problem, and so he says, we need education. I'm not minimizing education. We need more resources, and I'm not minimizing that. We need money. We need distribution of wealth. But what man doesn't do today is recognize his true misery and he therefore cannot solve the problem of the human condition. And so there's no solution with man. There's only moving from one misery to another misery and to another and, in fact, going deeper and deeper into misery as man goes deeper and deeper into sin and he grows in his own confusion of what his problem is. That's what we see happening in the world around us, man growing in his own confusion of what the problem is.

So what is our misery? Well, to give the detailed, a more detailed answer, we can put it this way, our misery is twofold: first, our misery is our sin, our sin and our sinful nature and our depravity; and second, our misery is the effect that our sin has had and does have on our relationship with God and here is where we need to make reference to our relationship with God because God is the great reality in all our lives. God is the one whom we were made to live for. God is the source of man's happiness. Fellowshiping with God, living with God, walking with God, enjoying God, that is man's happiness. The only way man can be happy is if he is enjoying God, if he is standing in a right relationship with God, and if man is standing in a right relationship with God, then he can say that everything else is well with his soul because of that right relationship with God. However, because of sin, man's relationship with God has been destroyed, so instead of enjoying God's smile and fellowshiping with God, man is under the wrath of God and therefore man is miserable.

Man's misery is rooted in his sin and in his broken relationship with God because of his sin and what we should emphasize here is that man is fundamentally miserable. All mankind is fundamentally miserable and his misery is due to his sin and what his sin has done and is doing to his relationship to God. His sin is his misery. But now when we talk about misery, we talk about all of this, we need to go a little bit further and now we need to make a distinction between the misery of unbelievers and the misery of believers, and to make that distinction, we should recognize that we can talk about misery in two different ways. First, there is the objective reality of man's misery. Objectively, that means as a matter of fact, whether I am feeling it or not, experiencing it or not, this is the objective fact, man is miserable, fundamentally miserable, whether or not man will acknowledge his own misery, whether man understands it or appreciates it, man is, all men are objectively, and women and children are objectively miserable because of their sin. But then second, there is the subjective experience of man's misery and this refers to the actual feeling and experiencing and grieving over our misery and that's where there's a difference. Many do not acknowledge their misery. Many live in the denial of their own misery. They don't talk about their sin. They don't want to hear anything about their totally depraved, sinful natures. And they certainly don't want to hear anything about being exposed to the wrath of God, their Creator. They sear their consciences with a hot iron and they avoid listening to the law of God. In fact, in a certain sense, because they never see their sin as they ought to see it, they can't really recognize just how miserable they are. They're walking in darkness, and when you walk in darkness, you can't see like you ought to see. You don't see things right. And because sinful man of himself will never address his sin honestly, and because he doesn't taste of the grace and the goodness of God through Jesus Christ, he will not appreciate his misery as he really should. Some may even feel at certain moments in their life that they don't have any misery at all. "Life is good. I have all that I could want. And in fact, I need to tear down my barns and build bigger barns because life is so good right now." And yet they are miserable because God's wrath is upon them and because they are sinners walking in darkness. Whether they know it or not, whether they acknowledge or not, that's their misery. They are guilty sinners, enslaved to sin, walking in sin, and they stink of sin. Of themselves, they can't even discern the truth or embrace the truth, but they deny the truth and that's part of their misery.

So when you see lost sinful man, walking in his sin today, that's his misery. There should be compassion and pity for that. That's misery. Even though they flaunt it and boast that there is no misery in it, it is miserable. But here's the difference, the believer experiences this misery, experiences this reality. He has the subjective experience of it. By God's grace, the believer's eyes have been opened, God has shown him the reality of God's greatness and God's goodness, he experiences the reality of who God is as his fullness of joy, as the one he is to delight in, and he sees the reality of his own sins and sinful nature, he sees what his sins have done to his relationship with this only good God, and he sees that because of his sin he is exposed to the wrath of this good God and that he is worthy of eternal condemnation and of everlasting punishment of body and soul and hell, and he sees that of himself he would only walk in sin every single day of his life, he has a totally depraved sinful nature, and because the believer is a believer who loves God out of the new man and who is given to see this reality, he experiences this misery so that he

grieves over his sins. He grieves over his sinful nature. He is filled with sorrow and misery in a way that the unbeliever simply doesn't experience and can't experience. The believer is brought face to face with the reality that he is prone by nature to hate God and to hate his neighbor. By nature, I hate God, and I hate my wife, and I hate my children, and I hate my fellow church member. And I see it, and I confess it, and I embrace this as my reality, and I experience this reality as my own sinful nature. And I grieve, and you grieve. And we grieve because we see now in a way that we could not see of ourselves that God is good. He is gracious. He is merciful. He is righteous in all his ways, holy in all his works. And to hate God is the most foolish, miserable, wicked, abhorrent thing in all the world. And he grieves because he sees that God originally made man upright but man has sought out many inventions and man has done this and he grieves over it. And he grieves over it all because in his new man, he does love God, and in his new man, he sees just how dark and wretched he is of himself. An unbeliever may grieve over the consequences of his sins, but that's not the misery we're talking about here. We're talking about the misery of the believer who loves God and who sees the reality that within his own self, he has an old man of sin that hates God and that hates the neighbor and he grieves over it because in his new man, he loves God.

This is our misery, beloved. This is the misery that God's people are very familiar with in the scriptures. A few weeks ago, we looked at Peter. Think of Peter after he denied Jesus three times and then what did he do? He went out and he wept bitterly because he came face to face with his own sinful nature. And oh, Peter loved Jesus so much, he said he was willing to die for Jesus, and yet here he is and he's sinned so grievously. Think of what the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 7, when he's talking about this inward warfare in himself, the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and he writes, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul's writing that as a believer. He says earlier in verse 18, "For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." And then he says, "I find a law in me. I find this principle, this rule, this power in me, this rule, this power, this law of sin that when I would do good, evil is present with me." This is my misery. Think of how Paul expresses it in the passage we read this morning. 1 Timothy 1, he looks back on his previous life and he says, "I was a blasphemer. I was a persecutor. I was injurious. I hurt God's people." And then he says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and then Paul says, "and I am the chief one."

My sin is my misery. Yes, all men are miserable, but I see and experience my misery and it is misery indeed, and all of this comes to greater light when we recognize what sin itself is. What is sin? Well, we could say sin is the transgression of the law, 1 John chapter 3, I believe. But we can also say this, I think this is very important, sin is a spiritual principle, a spiritual power. The word disposition comes to me, but I don't even know if that's a strong enough word. Sin is a spiritual principle of opposition against God. Sin is being against God, being at enmity against God. That's the fall into sin so that of the devil, we are at enmity with God. We hate God. We are rebelling against God. That's what sin is. And every time I sin, I'm living out of that principle of opposition and hatred against God. That's my sinful nature. My sinful nature is who I am under the rule and the

power and influence of sin. That's my old nature to use the language that some use. Every time I sin, it is hatred against God. And not only do we have our sinful natures, but in addition, we have the guilt of our sins so that because of our sins, I stand exposed to even more punishment. I'm worthy of eternal death in hell. And not only that, but there's then the further pollution of sin so that I stink. I'm one who's defiled myself by my sins that I stink and I'm filthy. And as I said, by nature, I am under the mastery of sin. Sin is this law that rules me. And this is my misery.

And these are the things that characterize all men, all men of themselves are governed by this principle of opposition against God, and even though I am a believer, this is also what I see in myself and who I am by nature. This is my old man of sin. Again, we need to be clear here, we are believers and as such, we are in Jesus Christ. We are not left to ourselves and our comfort is that Jesus has fully satisfied for all our sins. He's delivered us from the power of the devil. He has established his rule of grace in my heart. We remember these things and we experience these things but still, when I look at myself, who I am of myself, when I look at the power of sin, an influence of sin still in me, then I remember this is who I am left to myself. Left to myself, I am a child of wrath. Left to myself, I am totally depraved, dead, spiritually dead in sins and trespasses, at enmity against God. As the Catechism says, I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor and that word prone means this, this is my default setting for my old man of sin. This is the direction my whole nature is facing. And should I move with any part of my nature, my will, my body, my mind, my emotions, by default, under the law and rule and power of sin, I automatically move in the direction of sin and of opposition against God. That's me, by nature. That's me under the rule and power and influence of sin. That's me outside of Jesus Christ. And again, even now, I still have that influence of sin in me and should it ever get the chance, it immediately wants to rule me again and it inclines me to go and sin, even still today. That's my misery and when I sin, every time I sin, I am confronted with and reminded of this reality that this is all I am, this is all I have of myself outside of Jesus Christ. And beloved, I will add, that's just only part of our misery; we still have two more Lord's days to expand on this.

But this is our misery. I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor. That is misery when we understand everything properly. The question comes, how do we know this? That is, how do we come to learn these things? Question 3 asks, "Whence knowest thou thy misery?" From where do you know your misery? The answer, "Out of the law of God." The law of God tells us these things. And the law of God reveals to us our misery in two important ways. First, the law reveals God's standard; the law shows us what God is requiring of us as his creatures. And then second, the law then reveals what we truly are. It honestly tells us how we're doing with regard to that standard. It shows us that while God requires us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, what we do is this, we don't just fail at keeping the law, but we do the exact opposite. That's the point of the Catechism. We don't just fail to love God, we hate God and we hate our neighbor.

First, the law shows us what God requires of us and when we speak about the law, we can understand it in one sense to refer to the whole scriptures, the whole scriptures are telling us what God requires of us. More specifically, the law of God refers to the Ten

Commandments. The Ten Commandments shows us in very summary form what God requires of us. But as we look at the Catechism, Question and Answer 4 doesn't give us the scriptures or the Ten Commandments, but it gives us the summary of the law that Jesus gives in Matthew 22. And I ask the Catechism students, why does the Catechism give us the summary of the law here in Lord's Day 2? Well, it's first of all to disabuse us from the idea that we can't keep the law, because then you become a Pharisee. "Oh, I haven't killed today, I haven't stolen today." So it doesn't give us the Ten Commandments for that reason, but alternately, it gives us the summary of the law in order to emphasize the idea of love. This is the law. This is all the law and the prophets. This is all the scripture, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself." Love. You are to have an ardent affection for and delight in God. You are to glorify God and enjoy him forever. You are to pursue a relationship of friendship with him because that's what love does. And we are to love our neighbor perfectly as an expression of our love for God.

But what do we do? Do we love God? Do we love our neighbor? This is where the law shows us who we truly are and the Catechism has an opportunity now to to impress upon us just how great our misery is. No, we do not love God or our neighbor in no wise. Certainly, we do not love God with all our heart soul mind and strength but, as I said, it's more than that. It's the exact opposite. We hate God. Instead of loving God, we hate him. Instead of loving the neighbor, we hate him. That's what the Catechism is teaching. And of course, that's the Bible. Some of the Catechism students memorized it a few weeks ago in Catechism class, Genesis 6 verse 5, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thought of his heart was only evil continually." That's man left to himself. Romans 8, verse 7, "Because the carnal mind," the mind of the flesh, the carnal, fleshly mind, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God," it is in opposition to God, it is in hatred, it is in that position of hatred against God, "for it is not subject to the law of God," it doesn't listen to the law of God, it doesn't bow down to the law of God, "neither indeed can be." It can't be subject to the law of God. That's the carnal mind hating God, hating the neighbor. Titus 3 verse 3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish," you know, at some time in the past when we were living in sin, "we also were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another."

So many people refuse to acknowledge this, but that's exactly our misery, our misery is that we won't love God of ourselves, and our misery is that we can't love God of ourselves, and our misery is that instead of loving our neighbor, we hate our neighbor. We are selfish. We seek our own welfare in all things and not our neighbors'. That's total depravity. Spiritually dead, we can do nothing good. That's what the law is putting before us. This is how we know our sin and misery and I can add, that's also the function of the law because no one else is going to speak truth to us. No one else is going to tell us how it exactly is. You talk to your neighbor, you talk to yourself, you're going to minimize your sin but you look at God's law and it will tell you honestly where things stand. And this is the function of the law, to show us our sin and misery, so that by God's grace, we are driven away from ourselves, away from all creatures, and we are driven to Christ Jesus alone as our hope. And Paul emphasizes this in numerous passages, but that's also

why we read 1 Timothy 1 this morning. 1 Timothy 1 verse 5, "Now the end of the commandment is charity." What that means is this, the purpose of the law, the goal and the aim of the law is love. Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. The end of the commandment is love and a good conscience and honest faith. The goal of the commandment is to drive us to love. The law of God requires love of us. That's the purpose of the law.

But then in verses 6 and 7 we read, "From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." And what Paul is saying there is, he's talking about Jews who had the law but they didn't know how to use it. They wanted to teach each other about God's law, but they themselves didn't understand what God's law was all about. They didn't understand this purpose of the law.

And Paul goes on and he explains himself, verses 8 and 9, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." You have to use it lawfully. "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient." And what Paul is saying there is this, the law is good, the law has a good purpose, but you need to use the law in the right way. The law is not there to prove to yourself that you can keep the law. That's what the Pharisees were doing. That's what the Jews were doing. The law is not there so that you can declare yourself righteous and pat yourself on the back and prove to yourself and to others that we can all keep the law. No, the law is good because the law reveals to us our sins. If a person were righteous, he wouldn't need the law. But the law is not for the righteous. The law is for sinners, to show them that they need to love God and love the neighbor, to show them how they fail, and ultimately then to drive them to Christ as the Savior they need.

That's exactly how the law is good, because it shows us our sin. If the law is taught, if the law is so taught that it calls people out for their sins, Then that's good. Then the law is serving its function because it's driving the people to look for their salvation outside of themselves. That's one use of the law and what the Catechism here in Lord's Day 2 is doing exactly that, it's using the law and it emphasizes the summary of the law, love God, love your neighbor in order to show us that outside of Christ all we do is hate, we hate God and hate the neighbor and the purpose is to drive us to Jesus Christ, to understand that our only comfort is that we belong to him. And again, this is so important because what do we do by nature? By nature, we deceive ourselves. By nature, we say we are better than we are. But the law is not going to flatter us. The law will be faithful and true, and the law tells me I am prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor. And that word hate is a strong word. We struggle to receive this instruction. It kind of shocks us, but this is the reality. Hate is an intense disliking for someone. Hate is the desire to see someone's destruction. Hate is the rejection of fellowshiping with someone. And the Catechism says, that that's what the law says about us. We have an intense disliking towards God and the neighbor. In our sinful natures, we would love to see God's overthrow and destruction. And in our sinful natures, we reject any sort of fellowship with God. We shake our fists at God. And that's our misery. And to see that in our own sinful natures, and to see that that's who we are by nature is miserable indeed and yet we do see it, don't

we? I see it, you see it, we all see it. We see it when we talk rudely to our spouse, maybe put them down. That flash of evil comes out. That's who I am. We see it when we don't feel like going to church on Sundays. Right? Who's been there? Well, because I'd rather live for myself than worship God. It's a sinful nature that hates God and that hates my neighbor. That's how we come to know our misery, out of God's word.

Well, the question we need to ask ourselves is this: how do we respond to this? How do we respond to what the law shows us about ourselves? Well, here's one possibility: change the law. Change what the law actually says or tells us to do. You see, that's what the Pharisees did. They took the very heart out of the law and they made the law to be only about external behavior, "Tithe this, tithe that. Don't walk so many steps on Sunday." And Paul says they don't even understand the law. They change the law so that they can pat themselves on the back. This is what we see happening all around us, beloved. All sorts of laws are being changed today. Good laws, rooted in a Christian heritage, we can even say, are being changed today and why are these laws being changed? Because more and more, man wants to call good evil and he wants to call evil good. And more and more, Satan wants to confuse us so that we feel bad about things that we shouldn't feel bad about and we feel good about things that we shouldn't feel good about. And people want to feel good about their own sinful natures and so they overthrow good laws and they introduce evil laws. Will that be our response, to change the laws of God and reduce them to nothing or make our own man-made laws so that we can continue to be proud about ourselves and see that our misery isn't that bad?

Another response is this: don't change the law, but simply ignore it. Give it lip service, but then kind of put it on the shelf. Don't keep reading it Sunday mornings in church anymore. It's too negative. Don't preach it. Just preach Jesus. And that's what happens and the law is not brought to God's people and applied to their lives, they're never called out for their sins and they become lukewarm. They put up with their sin and they don't feel their misery anymore and Christ doesn't become as precious to them anymore. And then they're not living that life of thankfulness and then it becomes a life of laws instead of a life of thankfulness because they don't even understand their need for Christ.

And that's the danger, of course, for all of us. What is our response to be, beloved? What is our response? Our response is this: let the law be preached. Let the strict and full requirements of the law be preached and let that strict preaching of the law drive me to Jesus Christ alone to find all my salvation and all my confidence and all my comfort in Christ alone. Let the law be preached exactly so that the gospel, the good news of God's sovereign gracious salvation might shine all the more brightly and might be applied to my heart all the more deeply. This good news, this gospel, that although I am a damn-worthy sinner, undeserving of any good thing, nevertheless, God Almighty, my Maker, still looks down on me in love. He looked down on me in love. He himself became flesh. He sent his only begotten Son to save me from all my sin and misery. And he will perform his good work of saving me until the day of Jesus Christ. My salvation is secure. Nothing shall separate me from the love of God. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and I know I'm a sinner.

We're going to look at this again tonight. Matthew, Levi, the publican. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. That's my comfort. God has provided a Savior. This is my joy also to see that this is how great God's love for me is. Even though I was dead in sins, even while I was yet an enemy of God, shaking my fist at him, a child of wrath, while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me. I know my misery, how great my misery is, but I have a greater Savior. I have an awesome God, and this is my comfort. I belong to Jesus. He's fully satisfied for all my sins. He's delivered me from the power and the bondage of the devil. He's conquered death and all the power and effects of death, and God is my Father. And because he first loved me with an unchanging, eternal love, I also in the new man do love him. My relationship with him has been restored. I do walk with him. I do glorify him and enjoy him, and I'm going to enjoy him forever. And the Holy Spirit, as I just implied, will work that good work which God has begun in me until the day of Jesus Christ.

So let the law be preached. Let the law reveal to me how I truly am because I know that although God is just, he is the just and righteous God, he is also merciful. He's granted me salvation through Jesus Christ. He's made me a believer. I call on his name. And knowing all this, I know how I am to live my life so that all the glory goes to God. This is the joy that characterizes my life. I'm enjoying God and I'm giving him the glory. This is life. This is life indeed. As the apostle says, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever." And when I'm there, when I am there with that attitude, that is life. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we stand amazed again at the gospel of salvation in thy Son Jesus Christ. We've heard much of our misery, but we pray, Lord, that as we see it, we might see the brighter glory of Jesus Christ. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Lord, we stand in awe of thee, and we pray that our lives might be lives lived to the glory of thy name, for so great a salvation thou hast obtained for us and imparted to us. Bless this preaching to our hearts and to our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.