

The Law, the Gospel, and Christian Obedience

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This morning we're continuing to look at the Reformation doctrine of the law and the Gospel as a part of our Reformation series, and so far in our series we've seen a number of ways in which the law/Gospel contrast works itself out. We've seen how the law/Gospel contrast is at the foundation of the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone; that if you don't understand the difference between the law and the Gospel, you cannot understand that we are justified by faith alone. Why? Because the law/Gospel contrast says you can't keep the law. You can't do it perfectly for your justification, but Jesus fulfilled the law in your place if you belong to him and you receive his righteousness by faith alone. So you are justified on Christ's perfect obedience to the law which you received by faith. So the law/Gospel distinction is the foundation of the great Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone.

We've also seen that the Bible teaches the perpetuity or the continuation of God's moral law summarized in the 10 Commandments and we looked at that out of the book of Romans and we saw how the whole of Scripture articulates the 10 Commandments as that which is written on the hearts of men and which is rewritten on the hearts of God's people in the new covenant.

But this morning I'd like us to consider some practical implications of this. So we've looked at that doctrines and we've considered some of the practical implications but how does this distinction between the law and the Gospel motivate us or lead us to live godly lives? And I would suggest that faithfulness to Christ depends directly on your understanding of this. If you get this wrong, you will flub a lot. There will be many mistakes. Many of you are responsible not only to lead yourself but to lead others in the Christian life. Parents, you are charged with leading your children. How do you lead them? Your understanding of the law and the Gospel will determine that. Spouses, you are encouraged, you are to encourage each other in the Gospel in Jesus. How do you do that? Well, if you don't understand the law and the Gospel, you will not get this right. I would submit unless you understand this law/Gospel dynamic, you cannot understand motives properly in the Christian life.

So what I'm saying is this law/Gospel distinction in the Bible is not one more doctrine to add to your thinking alongside everything else, this law/Gospel distinction is a major

organizing principle of the whole Bible, is what it is. It's the big biblical theme under Christ himself. If Christ is at the center, the structure that points us to Jesus is the Bible's covenants: the covenant of works which is the law as a covenant; the covenant of redemption which is the Gospel proper; the covenant of grace which is the Gospel applied to our hearts. So if you understand the law and the Gospel, then you have understood the overall structure of the Bible and the whole counsel of God, and this understanding of the law and the Gospel will teach you how to think and how to live as a Christian, and not only that, but it will teach you how to lead others to Christ as well.

So this is something very important so what I'm attempting this morning from the Bible is to pull everything together we have already been looking at and to show how it applies at the practical level, and we could look at a number of places in the Bible that teach this and practically how it applies. There are several passages that make this very clear, but I want us to turn to Luke 19 and see it in the story of Zacchaeus. Luke 19, beginning in verse 1. Join with me as we read God's word together. Luke 19:1 through 10.

1 He entered Jericho [that's speaking of Christ] and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Let's pray.

God, we thank you for the grace of the law and the grace of the Gospel, that you convict us of sin so graciously, Lord, you have not left us guessing about what you require who you are but that you have told us to convict us and show us. And we thank you for the grace of the Gospel, that you have not left us to die in our sins but that you sent Jesus to fulfill the law positively to merit justification, and that you also sent him to fulfill the law as an example for us to follow in our sanctification. Lord, we pray that you would teach us this morning from your word. Help us to think like Christians and that we would bring glory to you, humbled beneath you, under grace and faith but with joy in our hearts. For your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

I would like us to consider two main themes this morning. First we'll look at the law, the Gospel, and then Gospel obedience in the life of Zacchaeus; and then I'd like us,

secondly, to consider a couple of examples of the law, the Gospel and Gospel obedience in the life of believers.

So first let's look at the law and the Gospel and Gospel obedience in Zacchaeus' life. First consider the law. Look at verses 1 and 2 again. It says,

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

Now we notice several things already if we think about these verses. First, his name, Zacchaeus, if you look that up in the Greek name dictionary, it says it means righteous or lawful. But he's also a tax collector and tax collectors were anything but lawful and so there is an irony right here at the very beginning. Zacchaeus, who is named just or righteous or lawful, is himself an unlawful man. Any Jew would have heard this reading this, right off the bat. Zacchaeus, a tax collector? They would laugh because surely tax collectors are not lawful.

Verse 2 also tells us that he was a chief tax collector which means he was not an ordinary tax collector. He wasn't out manning the tax booths. He wasn't walking through the streets or going and knocking on doors to collect taxes that were owed. He was a chief tax collector which means he was an administrator. He had underlings, other tax collectors who did the grunt work and he administered them. He had tax collectors working for him.

Then verse 2 goes on to say he was rich. Now, you're not supposed to get rich collecting taxes, this isn't something that you do to get wealthy. If you did your job correctly, you'd need to collect a little bit more to pay your people and to have a living for yourself, but the fact that Zacchaeus was rich means he was extorting people. He was a thief. His name was lawful but he broke the law. He broke the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," and what he was doing is he was taking a huge cut from his underlings. He was telling all of his workers, "You've got to give me this much of yours," and making lots of money and what did they do? Those underlings would turn around and tax the people even more to make up for what their boss was making them pay and to line their own pockets as well.

So all of this meant that the common people suffered and no one could question the tax collectors because they had the power of the Roman Empire on their side. They had absolute authority to do what they did. As long as Rome got what it required, they didn't care what else the tax collectors did and so Zacchaeus got rich on the backs of the common citizens of Israel. He stole from them. He was not a righteous man like his name says. He was unrighteous.

Now look at verses 3 and 4 and continue to think about the law and the life of Zacchaeus. It says,

3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

Now these are interesting verses because they do not describe what you would expect a rich person to do. A wealthy high-class person ran, that's not very dignified; and he climbed up a tree, which is also not dignified. You don't do that if you're rich but Zacchaeus was determined to see Jesus for some reason and this does not seem like idle curiosity. He's not just, "Oh, I heard about this guy causing a stir." No, he is determined that he is going to see him and so he runs and he goes up a tree.

Now what might have caused Zacchaeus to act this way? We don't know for sure. The text doesn't make it explicit but we can imagine maybe what was going on in Zacchaeus' mind. He had stolen from everyone in his life. He was a thief and what happens if you steal from everyone, including your underlings, all the people who work for you, you are taking their profits, making their lives harder? Well, probably most everyone hated him but we know for a fact from the history books that they hated tax collectors anyway. That's a fact but here is Zacchaeus, an accomplished tax collector, he did what he did very well because he was rich, he was a good thief, but he had alienated all of his friends. The people who worked for him hated him. No one trusted him. He didn't trust anyone. It's possible that he was at least feeling the consequences of his sin and he might have been at a point in his life where he realized that he had all these riches but he was miserable. People hated him. The riches he thought would make him happy aren't making him happy, and maybe he felt guilt from his sin.

Maybe his conscience was bothering him and he was looking for Jesus, but why Jesus? It doesn't tell us exactly why he was looking for Jesus but here's what we know: at Christ's baptism, John the Baptist shouted out for everyone to hear, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus himself told people that their sins were forgiven and the Pharisees hated him. No one could forgive sins but God alone. So he was by this time, this is late in the book of Luke, making a reputation for himself as one who forgives sins. The Pharisees hated him. They thought he was a blasphemer claiming to be God, which he was claiming to be God. And it's certainly possible that Zacchaeus knew about these things and he thought, maybe he thought that, "Maybe Christ can forgive me of my sins. Maybe Christ can lift the burden. I just want to see him." So he goes and climbs up a tree and there we see the law in Zacchaeus' life. A rebel against God. A thief. One whose sins aren't just secret and in his heart but break out and hurt other people very badly and he wanted to look at Jesus.

Now consider the Gospel in Zacchaeus' life. Look at verse 5. So we are moving from the law, that's the covenant of works, the soul that sins shall die. Do this and live. Zacchaeus failed just as we all do in Adam, but now we move to the Gospel, the covenant of redemption in which the Father agreed to send the Son to live among sinners, to bear sins in his body, to die and to rise again. That's the covenant of redemption. So look at verse 5,

5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,
"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

There is so much Gospel grace in that little verse. That is full and overflowing with the grace of Jesus. Notice that Jesus came to Zacchaeus. He went to him. Zacchaeus did not walk up to Jesus, he was up a tree trying to just look at him. Jesus came to Zacchaeus. What grace. And then Jesus looked upon him, he looked at him, what grace that Jesus would even look upon a sinner like Zacchaeus. Others despised Zacchaeus so we can imagine they wouldn't even want to look at him as he walked through the street, but Jesus set his gracious eyes upon this wretched, hell-deserving sinner who hurt other people, and here we see that salvation is all of Christ's gracious initiative. He's the one who saves us. He looks at us. Even when we are dead in our sins, he looks upon us.

And then Jesus called to Zacchaeus and this is the Gospel call, he said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down." That's the same as, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." It's no different from the Spirit and the bride say, "Come and let the one who hears say come, and the one who is thirsty come, that the one who desires come and take the water without price." This is a free and open invitation. "Come to me," Jesus says. "Come down from the tree."

Then Christ says something nearly unbelievable, he says, "for I must stay at your house today." The word "must" means it is necessary. There is no other way. It is absolutely necessary. I must stay at your house today. There is no other way for you to be saved. Christ must stay at your house. He must enter into your most intimate dwelling. He must come into your personal space. He must dwell with you closely. And when Jesus says, "I must stay," he means, "I must remain." The word "stay" doesn't have any length of time attached to it. He says, "I must stay. I must dwell there. I must remain with you." Zacchaeus was only expecting a glimpse of Jesus but Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down and said, "I'm going to remain at your house. I must abide there."

So look at how Zacchaeus responds in verse 6. This is a response to the Gospel. It says,

6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.

So Zacchaeus is converted. He received Jesus. Jesus called him, he received Jesus and he received him joyfully. He comes to believe in Christ. That's what you are to do as well. You are to believe him, believe his promise to you, welcome him into your home to dwell with you.

And the crowds didn't like this just as the world doesn't like it today. The crowds didn't like what they saw happening. Look at verse 7. It says,

7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

But that's what Jesus does, he goes to be the guest not of the righteous but of sinners. The world today is in conflict, isn't it? It calls some evil, good, and some good, evil, and yet when it is convinced that something is a sin, there is only one response if you're the world, destroy the sinner, make him pay. The world hates what it thinks are sinners, and then the sins that it likes, it calls righteous.

So the world grumbles when they see Jesus welcoming a real sinner and calling him but Jesus becomes the guest of sinners and so Christ goes to Zacchaeus' house and we have no record of what Christ said to Zacchaeus but we can imagine. Just imagine Jesus having dinner with Zacchaeus that evening and maybe Jesus said something like this, "I came to give my life as a free gift and never to steal anything from anyone." Jesus might have explained what Paul was going to say in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich," he was rich, "yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." And maybe Jesus explained, "Zacchaeus, I left a world of riches to live a life of service to God and to others, and one day I will become poor by taking the sins of my people upon myself and I will die in their place so that you can be richly forgiven and richly rewarded because of my death, with an eternal inheritance." And Jesus might have looked upon Zacchaeus and said, "I know all of your sins, Zacchaeus. I know what you've done. I know how you have hurt this person and this person. I know the way that you have schemed and manipulated. I know how you have abused your power and you have abused the weak. I know your crimes against God and man. But I forgive you and I promise you life."

And Zacchaeus is completely overwhelmed with Christ's love. Everyone hates him, remember. He is hated. He might have even by this point in his life hated himself in some way but here Jesus is saying, "I love you and I forgive you. I want to be with you. I want you to know me and I want to know you. You will have an eternal inheritance and what that means, Zacchaeus, is you don't have to steal. I give myself to you. God gives himself to you. You have the new heavens and the new earth, you don't need to take anything at all. You're full and overflowing now. These are my promises to you. I will satisfy you and you will be so full in me that you'll overflow with love and grace and gifts to others." Maybe Christ said things like that. We don't know what he said but whatever he said, what we do know is it changed Zacchaeus forever. He was a different man after this.

So there we've seen the covenant of redemption and the great sweet promises of the Gospel. Now look at the covenant of grace. What happens after the Spirit converts Zacchaeus? How is he different? What does he do? Well, third, we see Gospel obedience in Zacchaeus' life and that's the covenant of grace. Gospel obedience is obedience to the law as a standard, not as a covenant. So as Christians we don't obey to earn life or to avoid condemnation. That would be legalism. Why do we obey? We obey because we have been redeemed, because Christ has loved us so much and we love him, and Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

So the law as a standard guides and directs our faithful loving obedience to Christ. So Gospel obedience is obedience to God's law as a standard because of Gospel promise,

and what we see here is Zacchaeus' Gospel obedience in Luke 19:8. Look what he does. Verse 8,

8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

So instead of stealing, Zacchaeus gives and that is the eighth commandment which says, "Do not steal." You say, "Well, where does it say to give?" But listen to how Paul interprets the eighth commandment in Ephesians 4:28. He says, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." So the negative, "Do not steal," includes the positive, "Work and give," and this is what Zacchaeus does. He responds to the Gospel. He says, "I give half of my goods to the poor."

Christ had given him everything and so his heart overflows with generosity and then he says, "I will restore fourfold everything I have stolen. That means I'm going to make it right. I'm not just going to pay you back what I stole, I'm going to pay you back fourfold." He makes complete restitution and that's what the eighth commandment requires us to give. Not only don't steal but give. And how could Zacchaeus do this, and this is important? How did he want to keep the commandments? It's because Jesus had forgiven him of all of his debts. Jesus forgave him much and so he loved much. He loved God much and loved men much. He knows Christ's love and he has Christ himself and Christ is all to Zacchaeus and so Zacchaeus doesn't need to steal and he has everything so he can give.

So he gives. So willingly and from the heart he keeps Christ's commandments. He gives because he has everything, he has Jesus. He doesn't have to sin to try to get what he needs out of this world. He is full of Christ and his obedience to God's law was not reluctant here. It wasn't this, "Oh, this is what Christ requires of me. I've got to do this because he is my Lord and I have to obey him." No, it's joyful. It's glad and free. It's not slavish. It's not from guilty fear. It's not from shame. Gospel obedience keeps God's law from a heart of faith and love and the very same commandments that condemn Zacchaeus as an unbeliever are the commandments that he keeps as his rule as a believer and he does so gladly.

Then in verses 9 and 10,

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

So Zacchaeus was lost in his guilt and shame and condemnation under the law, but Jesus found him and saved him and poured his grace out upon him and Zacchaeus changed and he became one who keeps the very law that he broke.

So that's the first thing we're going to look at this morning, the law, the Gospel and Gospel obedience in the life of Zacchaeus, but now let's consider the law, the Gospel and Gospel obedience in the life of believers. And we could look at this in many ways but let's just begin with an example of prayer. First, consider the law in relation to prayer. The law of God says, "You shall have no other gods before me." It says, "Do not covet." So the law of God requires you to worship the Lord, to draw near to him in prayer. The law commands you to pray.

There are many other statements in Scripture which require you to pray. Listen to this and evaluate yourself as I read these. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus says, "Pray for those who persecute you." In Ephesians 6:18, Paul says, "Pray at all times in the Spirit and with this in view, be on alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." Are you praying for all the saints? In 1 Timothy 2:1 it says, "I urge that entreaties and prayers and petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men." 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." This is a command, a law. James 5:15 says, "Pray for one another so that you may be healed."

So the law tells you that you must pray. This is the command of God, and yet you don't pray like you should. You have not kept that commandment perfectly and what's the root of that? It's because you're proud. You don't think you need to pray. You think you need to eat and so you eat, but you don't think you need prayer or you would which is proud. You must feel self-sufficient. People who are humble and see their need of the Lord, they pray. The reason you don't pray like you should is because you don't think you need God as much as you do.

Another reason you don't pray is because you don't believe that sweet communion with God in Christ will satisfy you. You don't believe that it will be sweet to walk with him in prayer and so you may look to other things to fill and satisfy your soul, things that you must believe are better than the Lord and you may look to material pleasures or earthly comforts, and you deny the Psalm that says that at his right hand there are pleasures forever. But he will satisfy you. And you don't trust that in communion with the Lord there is life and joy and peace, and this is the covenant of works that says that for all these reasons you deserve to go to hell because you don't do this for life and your own conscience tells you that these things are true. You have broken God's commandments and you deserve to die. The soul that sins shall die.

But consider the Gospel in relation to prayer. This is the covenant of redemption, all that Christ has done, and to set your mind on this, think about a time in Christ's life when he prayed. Think of the garden of Gethsemane when right before Jesus was going to go to the cross, he was there in the garden and he was praying, and on the night before Christ's crucifixion, he asked his disciples, he said, "Stay up with me tonight and pray. Watch with me and pray." And what did the disciples do? They went to sleep several times. They didn't obey Christ. Now, the text says it was for sorrow, and there are many reasons we don't pray, some are practical reasons, and yet the disciples were so full of sorrow and they went to sleep and Jesus corrected them again and again, but Jesus didn't condemn them.

Maybe you identify with the disciples who don't pray like they should. Jesus doesn't condemn you either, instead Jesus prayed perfectly even when they didn't. He was there in the garden praying to the Lord with such intensity that the Bible says that he sweat like drops of blood. He prayed perfectly as their substitute. He fulfilled the command in your place to pray. His whole life was a life of perfect prayer in the place of his people for justification. And then the next morning, Jesus went to the cross and he died on the tree for these prayerless men. He didn't forsake them. He didn't abandon them. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and that means that there is no condemnation for you, O prayerless one, that Jesus' blood covers you; that his righteousness wraps you; that you are free from the condemnation of the shame of the law; that the Father has adopted you as his own son and celebrates you as his child, seats you in the heavenly places with Christ, promises you an and eternal inheritance with him; gives you his Holy Spirit to dwell humbly within you, to seal you for eternity. And he says, "Now I want to hear from you in prayer. I have forgiven you of all of your sins against me. I want you, though, to approach me." He delights in the prayers of his children just as a father, a good father, delights in hearing from his children. He delights in your prayers. Even though you come to him in prayer with imperfect sin-laden prayers, he still wants to hear from you. He washes all the sins out of your prayers with the blood of Jesus. He loves to hear you pray.

So that's the Gospel, that Christ died for prayerlessness and that he prayed perfectly in the place of all of you and of me prayerless sinners, to make us acceptable before God. So will you preach this to yourself when you think about your prayerlessness? A great mistake that Christians make is they think, "I'm not praying and so I need to make a schedule and I need to start praying and I'm going to make a list and I'm just going to get up in the morning and do it." That's wrong all by itself. You don't go straight from sin to obedience. What's missing? Jesus. Jesus is missing there, so go from sin to guilt and not then from guilt to obedience but from guilt to grace, from guilt to Jesus. Look unto Christ. Believe his love and his mercy and then draw near to him personally in prayer and then you can make a schedule and all those other things as well. But go to Jesus and preach this Gospel to yourself.

But now consider Gospel obedience in your prayer life. This is the covenant of grace, that the law still commands you to pray. "You shall have no other gods before me," which implies prayer and all other aspects of worship. Even as a believer, the law commands you to pray. You are obligated. It's not just a matter of it flowing out of you naturally as though there is no obligation. It is to flow out of you and yet there is also obligation, but the Gospel is what powers you by grace to keep his commandments. Listen, you know Christ's love for you who died for your prayerlessness, who obeyed in your place, and so you love him back. Won't you love this Christ who loved you so? And if you love him, won't you keep his commandments? Don't you want to pray? You know how much Jesus has forgiven you and you are so grateful and you respond with a heart of gratitude and joy and so you draw near to him in prayer.

You know that in Christ the Father will never cast you off, he will never destroy you, he will not push you away, and what that means is that he doesn't hold a grudge against you because you haven't been praying. You are completely forgiven. You are wrapped in Jesus and even now he opens his arms and he says, "Now pray and I will not hold your prayerlessness against you. Come and pray. Know me. Commune with me. I want to hear from you." And all of these Gospel motives lead you to keep the good law of God. So you see how in the Gospel you're not motivated to obey from guilt and shame and that motivates you to go to Jesus, and then Jesus teaches you and motivates you from grace and love and joy and so you keep his commandments with a right heart.

So that's a practical example personally of how we lead ourselves and we could think about this not just in prayer but every kind of Christian obedience, that we go from guilt under the law, to Christ and the covenant of redemption, to obedience and joy and love in Jesus in the covenant of grace. But consider another practical example of law/Gospel and Gospel obedience and let's consider the example of parenting. How does this effect parenting? Now, some of you are parents and so this will apply directly to you. Some of you are children and this will also apply to you. Some of you are going to be parents. Some of you were parents and so think about this. But one of the dangers of making such a specific application is that some people check out, but it applies broadly. The same principles apply in everything.

So think about parenting. First, consider the law. We need to think about the role of the law in parenting. Imagine you tell a child, "Okay, it's time to clean your room," and the child responds in an angry voice and says, "I'm not done playing yet! I'll clean my room later!" Which is, of course, bold and defiant and they are doing this with an angry whiny voice, complaining tone. Now you could respond like this, you could say, "You are disobeying me and you're not following the house rules." Well, that would be true, you're dishonoring your parents and you're not following the house rules and so I'm going to discipline you. But I would suggest you should not just discipline your children for not obeying house rules, in fact I would suggest you should keep house rules to a minimum so that liberty is at a maximum and discipline should come for breaking the law of God. And the main law parents should not be focusing on is, "Honor your father and mother." Now you need to teach that to your children, for sure, but that shouldn't be the first law you put down because that makes it all about me. My child is not obeying me. Whatever I say, they are to honor. So they are dishonoring me. No. God doesn't do that. He doesn't say, "Do what I say just because I'm God." He always explains himself and gives broader laws and gives the bigger picture.

So show your children how they are breaking other laws of God. Maybe you could say something like this, "When you got so angry because I told you to clean your room, do you see how you are coveting play time? Do you love your play time more than the Lord? That you are making a god out of play? And your covetous heart has led you to murder your father who told you to clean your room. That does not honor Jesus." So there is the conviction of the law for your children. You bring the law, you use the 10 Commandments and don't focus on yourself as a parent with house rules, but the broader law of God.

That's the conviction of the law but, second, you must bring the grace of the Gospel. Don't go straight to, "Do what I say. I'm going to discipline you, now go to your room. Go and clean your room." No, bring the grace of the Gospel. Maybe you tell your child something like this, "The Lord Jesus never murdered anyone with his words. Others murdered him with their words. He was reviled but he did not revile in return. He only spoke with grace and love. He spoke firmly and he spoke the truth but only with grace and love, and when they hung him on the cross to murder him, he prayed, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' This is how our Lord Jesus spoke, not with murderous words like you have just spoken, but with gracious words, and he will forgive murderers. He said, 'Father, forgive them,' so do you, my child, want to ask Jesus to forgive you for murdering?" And you also might say this and this is very important, "You know, daddy has murdered with his words too. Though I am convicting you of murder, I am confessing my heart as a murderous heart. I need the forgiveness of Jesus. I know what it's like to have murder in my heart. That's why I need the Gospel just like you need the Gospel."

And all of this is the Gospel. This is how we preach Christ to our children. We have to admit that we need the Gospel just like they do and the whole culture of the home should be a culture of grace. You know, there are some homes where the culture is basically one of someone is always in trouble and there is this pall of darkness and discipline over the home all the time. No, the culture of the home should be one of love and effusive grace. Why? Because we are adopted sons of God. That's how God treats us. We are his children, beloved, wrapped in the righteousness of Jesus. If he has to bring discipline, he does it reluctantly for a season and then the discipline is over, and even during the discipline, there is grace and love and mercy. The culture of the covenant of grace is a culture of love and grace before God, not that we are always in trouble before God.

So Christian homes should be the same way: love and grace and mercy. Sometimes that means that when your children sin, you overlook the offenses of your children. The Bible says it's a man's glory to overlook an offense. You don't have to discipline for every sin your child commits, but if there is a pattern of sin or if your child is committing sin that hurts them or others, then you have to discipline them and that means sometimes you have to discipline your child and when you do it, you do it in love, and when you discipline your child, you need to do it in a way they know you love them. There are two ways to bring discipline. This is about the covenant of grace. This is about the Gospel. One way is, "I'm against you. I'm pushing you away from me and I'm not even sure I want to have a relationship with you anymore." That's the covenant of works. That's not how Christians or anyone should ever discipline their child. The other way is, "I love you. I hate to discipline you. I do it reluctantly. I don't enjoy it and I'm not doing it to protect myself or to make my life easier, I'm doing it only because I love you because God says so. But I'm going to do it but I love you and I'm not against you and I'm for you."

And you don't cut your relationship off from them and then you discipline your child and you encourage your child and you encourage your child to ask forgiveness of murder.

"Do you want to ask God to forgive you, you want to ask your daddy to forgive you?" "Yes, daddy, please forgive me for murdering you." "Daddy forgives you." You wrap them in your arms, "I love you so much and I forgive you. I don't hold this against you. Now will you go and clean your room? It will honor Jesus for you to serve him and your family by cleaning your room now. So just like Zacchaeus stole, met Jesus, was forgiven, changed, he didn't continue in sin. He actually did the thing he wasn't supposed to do or did the thing that he wasn't doing. He repented of stealing and he gave and so if you repent, you go and clean your room too because you love Jesus and you want to honor him."

So there is no law, the Gospel and Gospel obedience. So do you see how the Gospel changes the way we relate to the law? And the Gospel changes the way we obey, it changes all of our motives. It should change how we relate to each other as well.

The same pattern applies in marriages and in pastoral ministry. Consider marriages. When one spouse approaches another for sin, they must do it in humility and love and knowing that they, too, are sinners. They don't come with raw authority correcting their spouse or anger, sinful anger. They approach the other spouse who sins knowing that they, too, are a sinner in need of a Savior and they only approach their spouse for love of them, not selfishly for their own benefit.

When pastors teach their congregations, they should not guilt and shame them into obedience. There is a way for pastors to guilt you and shame you so that you will outwardly conform to whatever he thinks you should conform to, but that's not what pastors should do. That's the covenant of works. That's not the Christian Gospel. Instead, pastors should love their congregations. They should speak the truth but they should love them. They should teach their congregations as men who have feet of clay who themselves are sinners in need of a Savior, and they should gently and lovingly call their congregations to Christ and to his grace.

This is what it means to understand the Bible's covenants, the law, the Gospel and Gospel obedience, the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace. And one very important thing to notice is that Christ is at the center of all of this and one of the biggest mistakes that we make with ourselves and that we make with others is we go straight from, "You've sinned. Stop it and obey." That's not the Christian way. We have to go from sin to Jesus and we look upon him and we rest upon him and we dwell in him and he dwells in us and then he teaches us to obey from his love and with his grace.

So that's how the law and the Gospel work out practically in our lives and this is what we are to learn and this is the structure of the whole Bible but also of individual books of the Bible, it moves from the promise of redemption to then how we live in light of redemption.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.