



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Galatians 3:15-22

"Moses and Abraham, Law v. Promise"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] For our Scripture reading this morning we are turning again to Galatians chapter 3, verse 15 through verse 22, and reading these verses, which so wonderfully and succinctly, in fact almost in a legal way, set forth the relationship between Moses and Abraham, or the Law and the Promise. Galatians chapter 3, and verse 15; and remember as we being that the apostle has just cited about six times the Old Testament in making his point that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law.

And he says in verse 15, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man annulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." That's a very interesting verse and has some interesting questions that surround it in the apostle's argument. It does not express the primary point of the passage, because it is a kind of a parenthesis of the passage as you can tell from reading verse 15 and verse 17. But it is interesting, because it lets us know that the Apostle Paul in his treatment of the Scriptures regarded not only the general sense of passages as important; that was extremely important, and it is, of course,

the thought of the passage that is preeminent, but he regarded the inspired Scriptures as being inspired to the very extent of words and even number, singular or plural. Notice he says, "and to seeds," plural, "as of many." "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ," founding an argument on the difference between a singular and a plural, so it is evident that for him, the word of God stands as the word of God even in its words, and even in the form in which these words appear.

Now, this text is also important, because it stresses the fact that the ultimate promise that God gave to Abraham extends to our Lord Jesus Christ and is grounded in him, but we'll say something about that later on. In verse 17, he picks up the thought of verse 15 and says,

"And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot annul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the Law? It was added because of transgressions (or better, for the sake of transgressions, because there was no transgression before the Law), till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."

That text, New Testament interpreters have claimed has been the object of between two hundred and fifty and four hundred interpretations. So if you were looking for a passage in order to support the point that men disagree over the text of the Bible, this would be one. Now, I've done a little bit of study over the text, and I cannot find more than two or three interpretations, but it is the contention of New Testament scholars down through the years that many interpretations have been put upon it. It is an amazing thing if it is true. Now, the apostle says in verse 21, "Is the Law then against the promises

of God? God forbid: for if there had been a Law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law." You'll notice here that the apostle states something that he has stated in a slightly different form already. In chapter 2, verse 21, the apostle said, "I do not make void the grace of God, for if righteousness come by the Law then Christ is dead in vain." He is saying, in effect, that righteousness does not come by the Law.

And then in verse 21 of chapter 3 he says life does not come by the Law, "for if there had been a Law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law." So through the Law of Moses we do not have righteousness, and we do not have life. "But," he adds, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin." That word, concluded, was the word that was used in Luke chapter 5 of the great catch of fish, which Peter made when he obeyed our Lord and cast out his net in the deep. He enclosed a great multitude of fish. Well, that is the purpose of the Law. It is to put all men in jail for transgression. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks and praise for the word of God, and we thank Thee for this marvelous little letter that the apostle wrote. We thank Thee for the way in which it unfolds the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that in our day, so many centuries later, that we may learn the truths that the apostle hoped the saints might learn in his day. Enable us to treat it as an epistle to us, and to us individually as well. May we learn from it, may we profit from it.

We give Thee thanks for the privilege of approaching Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ, and bringing to Thee the petitions of our hearts. We ask Thy blessing upon this country in these critical days. We pray for our President. We thank Thee for him. We

ask, Lord, that Thou will give him wisdom, and guidance, and courage, and perseverance in the things that are right, and wisdom to change in the things that are wrong.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for the church of Jesus Christ, and we ask Thy blessing, Lord, upon that body. We thank Thee for each local manifestation in which the word of God is proclaimed, and in which Christ is honored. Strengthen us and build us up, and give us, if it should please Thee, a fruitful ministry for the Lord Jesus Christ in our age and day. We pray for Believers Chapel. We ask Thy blessing upon our elders and deacons, and upon the ministry, the outreach, the staff, the people who carry on the work. And the individuals who are members of the Chapel, we pray Thy blessing upon them and upon their families, and upon their concerns. For those who are ill or sick or who have difficult trials to face, we especially remember them, we commit them to Thee.

We thank Thee Lord for all of the blessings that are ours through Jesus Christ. Enable us to appreciate them, to revel in them, and through them to glorify Thy name. Enable us as a body and as individuals to witness for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a way that will glorify Thy name. We commit our meetings of this day to Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon each one of them, and especially, Lord, upon those who are here as visitors in the various meetings, may they be strengthened and encouraged in the things of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] We turn again to the Epistle to the Galatians, and our subject for this morning is, "Moses and Abraham, or the Law Versus the Promise." In the preceding chapter of this Epistle to the Galatians, Paul has made a great deal over "the truth of the gospel" When he went up to Jerusalem he took Titus with him, and he would not allow Titus to be circumcised on account of the false brethren who might have interpreted that as an indication on the part of the apostle that he considered circumcision to be necessary for salvation. He says, "To whom we gave place by subjection, no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Then later in the chapter he describes his meeting in Antioch with Peter. He noted how Peter had been eating with the Gentiles, and had now began to withdraw and separate when the men came from James, and seeing in this a rather blatant contradiction to the free grace of the gospel that Peter himself had supposedly accepted. Paul says, "When I saw that they walked not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel." He then rebuked Peter before the whole of the church. He's made a great deal then over the truth of the gospel. I do not think it is wrong to say that for Paul, the truth of the gospel took precedence over what we call "Christian love." Now, I do think that love is important. It is of course, fundamental to the New Testament. Love is the final expression of a true relationship to God in Christ, but it must be a true biblical love. We all know that a man should hold the truth in love. He should not hold it harshly, bitterly, in condemnatory ways. He should hold the truth in love. But love is not true biblical love if it is not love in the truth, rooted in truth. It is not truth for us to love in such a way that we lie. Sentimental, gushy "lu -uve," [Laughter] is not really biblical love, when the truth is at stake. To repeat again Dr. J. Vernon McGee's statement, no "sloppy agape" for the Apostle Paul. [Laughter]

Now, Galatians expounds Paul's truth of the gospel in a lucid way. And if we were trying to sum it up, we would probably say that it consists of the gospel of "the five onlies," as someone has been put, *sola scriptura*, by the Scripture alone. For the apostle recognized that all of the truth that he was proclaiming was truth that he could find in the word of God, by Scripture alone. In Christian things, the Bible is the final word. *Sola gratia*, by grace alone, we are not saved through all, we are saved by grace alone, by the free gift of God. *Sola fidei*, by faith alone. Faith is the instrumentality, by which we receive the benefits of the gospel of Christ. We do not receive them by baptism. We do not receive them by circumcision. We do not receive them by joining the church, by sitting at the Lord's Table. We receive the benefits of the saving work of Christ by faith alone. It is the instrumentality by which we come into the possession of the forgiveness

of sins. By Christ alone, *solo Christo*, that is all our salvation is grounded ultimately in that which he accomplished when he became the sin offering for us. By Christ alone, the foundation of our salvation.

If someone should say to us, "Why do we think we have salvation?" We say, "We have Christ through faith, on the principle of grace, grounded in the teaching of the word of God." And finally, as a result of this, *soli Deo gloria*; all of this contributes to the glory of God alone, to God alone be the glory. We do not accept any of the glory of our salvation ourselves. The glory of our salvation is the Lord's, because it is altogether his work. Salvation is of the Lord.

Now, Paul is expounding the truths that are related to these five onlies, but this raises a rather interesting question and a rather troubling question for a religious kind of man, and he was dealing with men who were religious men. They were religious leaders. They knew about the Ten Commandments. They knew about the Law of Moses. They knew a great deal about these things. They thought that they lived by the Law of Moses. And the problem that Paul's doctrine was raising for them was simply, what then is the purpose of the Law of Moses? We have been living for hundreds of years under the Law of Moses, given at Mount Sinai. Why all of these years of subservience to the Law, what is the purpose of it if the Law is not basic to our salvation?

Now, we know from reading the Bible that Israel had twisted the significance of the Law making it, rather than simply a means by which they might come to the sense of their need, and also be educated to what would happen when Christ came, to a means of salvation. How often that happens in the experience of men. We are asked by our Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized in confession of our sins, but it is not too many generations before some are baptizing for salvation. It is so easy for self-righteous men to take the things of God and use them in way contrary to the intention of the Lord. It's one of the testimonies to the sinfulness of the human being that he can take something that was

intended to point out his sin, and make it the ground of his salvation and that is what has happened with the Law of Moses.

Was the Law then given for no purpose if it is not related to our salvation? Martin Luther accepted two uses of the Law. He believed that the Law could be said to have a civil purpose. It has been called a political purpose. He felt that it had a function as an instrument of civil government for the preservation and promotion of civil order. Luther said, "It is the hangman that keeps me from sinning, like chains, ropes, and strong bands hinder bears, lions, and other wild beasts from tearing and wending in pieces all that come in their way." So the Law was a kind of hangman. The Law was a warning, a statue of warning, by which men were kept straight. Now, Luther believed that that was a just use of the Law. But he felt that the principle use of the Law was pedagogical. That is, it was a mirror of our sin, and it was designed by God to show us our sin, not simply as a mental thing, but to reveal sin to us in all of its sinfulness. As the apostle says, that "sin might become exceeding sinful." That's the point.

Now, Calvin believed the same thing. He believed that the Law had this pedagogical use; it was like a whip to an idle and bulky ass to arouse it to work. That was actually a sense that Luther never accepted, but Calvin did accept the sense of it as a revealer of sin, and not as a savior. In the Heidelberg Catechism there is a question, "Whence do you know your misery?" And the answer that is to be memorized was, "Out of the Law of God." Luther and Calvin agreed on this pedagogical sense, but Calvin also added another sense. That is that the Law was designed to be an instructor of the saints. Now, Luther never was able to accept that, in the minds of many, and we need not get into the question of whether this third use of the Law is biblical or not. I rather tend myself to agree more with the Lutherans than with the Calvinists in this particular point.

The thing I want you to notice, though, is that the reformers agreed that the basic use of the Law, that is the principle use, Calvin did not. The principle use, according to Luther was that it should reveal our sin. That was its use. It was not designed to save.

We can imagine a man who has lived in Dallas for fifty years reflecting on his life in Dallas saying, "Well, I've been here for fifty years, and I have never broken a single law of the city of Dallas, and I think that I deserve a reward." We can imagine the man going down to the meeting of the city fathers, and asking for a chance to speak, and then getting up and saying before them that he had lived for fifty years in Dallas, and he has not broken a single statute of the city. And in the light of his perfect record he thinks that he should have some recognition from the council, a living cup, or a plaque on which is his name and an acknowledgement of the fact that he has kept the law for fifty years in Dallas. Is not that something for which one should be rewarded?

Now, I have my doubts about what our city council fathers might say to something like that, but if they were biblical at all, they would say "That's your obligation, that's what you're supposed to do. We don't give you a reward for doing what you're supposed to do. If you break one, then of course, we'll get after you. But you're supposed to keep them; therefore we don't have any reward for keeping it. It's your obligation, and furthermore, you've come down to bother us, and we want you to know that if tomorrow you break one, we're going to come after you." You see the Law was something like this. The Law set forth our obligation. It told us what we are to do, and even if it were possible that a man should keep the Law and still be breathing, he still is in danger of judgment the next breath. So the apostle is going to point out to us that it was never the intent of the Law to save. It was the intent of the Law to condemn by showing us what we really are.

We're going to look at verses 15 through 18 first, and the apostle speaks here of the validity of the promise as over against the Law. Someone has said that this is "Paul the Ecclesiastical lawyer at his best." Now in the background of this is a little bit of biblical history, and we don't need much history. We need to remember that Abram appeared approximately two thousand years before the time of that Apostle Paul. And that God gave some unconditional promises to Abraham. He said to Abraham, "I'm going

to make your name great." And furthermore Abraham "I'm going to give you a land." And finally, Abraham, "In you shall all the nations or families of the earth be blessed." A characteristic thing about the promises to Abraham is the use of the expression "I will." We read, "I will show you a land. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. You shall be a blessing. I will bless them that bless you. I will curse them that curse thee. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

You know the promises were confirmed to Abraham. They were confirmed to Isaac. They were confirmed to Jacob, and finally Jacob went down into Egypt. And Israel was in Egypt approximately four hundred years, four hundred and thirty years afterward Moses is before Mount Sinai, and there Moses, the second great leader of Israel or the second important person in this account at least, is given the Law, the Ten Commandments and all of the other statutes that make up the Law of Moses. These are the fundamental points around which the apostle will gather his discussion.

Now, it is important, too, to remember this that the promises that God made to Abraham included justification by faith and included in the unveiling of the divine revelation, the possession of the Holy Spirit. So the Abrahamic promises were given to Abraham, in which he promised Abram a future for himself, a future for the nation, a land. And furthermore he promised that Abram and his seed would have the blessing of justification, and the possession of the Holy Spirit, and it is all an unconditional promise. Abram was not required to do anything. God appeared to him. God gave these promises to him in grace. He confirmed these promises by means of a sacrifice. He parted the animals and God, in that most unusual ceremony, passed between the pieces of the animals in token of the fact that he was committing himself to this agreement, to this covenant. And Abram was not invited to follow him, because this was a unilateral agreement. It is God who promises to bless Abram.

Now, we learn of course that the covenant is made with the Father and the Son. But both of these being divine persons, this is a divine covenant, and unconditional covenant. The Mosaic Covenant, however, was a conditional covenant. And in the confirmation of the Mosaic Covenant, you'll remember that the blood was sprinkled not only on the people, but also on the book, representative of God. It was a conditional covenant, so that God has certain responsibilities and Israel had certain responsibilities. Now, these covenants, or these agreements are two different types of agreement. One is the unconditional one, in which God does everything, man receives. The other is a covenant in which God has responsibilities and man has responsibilities, which of course, he violates immediately and brings himself under the condemnation of the Law in history.

So the main point then the apostle is trying to make is, there is an earlier unconditional covenant. It cannot be annulled by a later conditional one. The "I wills" cannot be overthrown by the "Thou shalt nots" of four hundred and thirty years later. The promise hold, and Christianity stands in the succession of Abraham and not of Moses. Believers in Christ in the church are called the sons of Abraham, but they are not called the sons of Moses.

Now, the apostle will illustrate this by a simple agreement among men. He says in the 15th verse, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man annulleth, or addeth thereto." Mutual consent is necessary to void an agreement among men. If I should make a legal contract with you, and we both sign it, I do not have the privilege of changing the provisions of our agreement apart from your agreement to the changes. That's Paul's simple illustration. And of course, that is much more so in the case of a divine covenant when God has given promises and he alone is party to it. Moses, with the Law, does not have the right hundreds of years later of changing the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant.

Now, he says in the 16th verse, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is

Christ." Now this is a parenthetical verse, but what he is talking about is simply that Christ is the real inheritor as representative of the Abrahamic promises. It is he with whom God has ultimately made the covenant. And if I am in Christ, I am a recipient of the blessings of that covenant. If I am not, I am not a recipient. It is in Christ in him, in Abraham's seed who is Christ, that all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Thus the covenant is made, the Abrahamic covenant, between God the Father and God the Son, and those who are in the Son. And Moses cannot alter the conditions of this divine unconditional covenant.

Well now, this has great practical application, because in the context of the churches of Galatia, the Judaisers were seeking to add a codicil to an agreement. Just as the apostle is speaking about here, what they wanted to do was to add the codicil of the requirement of circumcision to the Abrahamic promises. They wanted to say it's true that "indeed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And God made promises to Abraham, but in Moses Law they were required to be circumcised, and so they were in effect making a new codicil, adding it to the terms of the covenant made with Abraham, and saying that those who are the recipients of the promises of grace only receive those promises of grace if they are circumcised. As you can see, his argument is simply this; you cannot change a covenant unless all the parties to it agree. And this is a divine covenant. It is an unconditional one and Moses or Moses' disciples cannot change it.

Now then, he speaks of the later Law of Moses in verse 17, "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot annul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." R.C.H. Lenski, the Lutheran commentator says, "These hundreds of years confound all Judaisers, because it was only four hundred and thirty years after the giving of the promise that any thought was made of transforming it." So Paul's point is simply this, if we gain God's blessing by virtue of Law, then it's not promise. But the Old

Testament specifically says that the blessing that came to Abraham came by promise, and not by Law. Well, if you're a religious man and you are whetted to the Law of Moses you might confront the apostle and say at this point, "Wait a minute Paul; you have just cited the Old Testament Law yourself six times in the preceding passage. And now you say that the Law does not save. What then was the purpose of the giving of the Law?" Now if you were deeply entrenched in a legal system and through that you got to heaven by keeping this Law, you can see that what the apostle was saying here is destroying the whole foundation upon which you think you stand before God.

So the apostle, having no doubt had this objection thrown at him many times said, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" What's the purpose of the law? Can any theology be right, which denies the Law saving power? We of course, may have some problems appreciating this, but if you were living in the context of a religious people who thought that their relationship before God stood on the basis of what they did, and this was true for hundreds of years, you can see the tension that would exist when the apostle says, "Man is not saved by the Law, he's saved by the grace of God." That would stir up all kinds of antipathy to the doctrine that the apostle is seeking to show.

So the answer follows in verse 19b, "It was added because of transgressions." Look at that little word add. That incidentally is not the same word that was used in verse 15. In verse 15, the word that was used was the word that was often used of the adding of a codicil to a will. This is a word that means something like "to add in addition" or "to add alongside of" to bring in as a complementary thing. The apostle says it was added because of transgressions. It came in alongside the promise in order to manifest transgression or sin as transgression.

Now, we need to stop here for a moment and ask ourselves, what is Paul saying when he says that the "Law was given or added or the sake of transgressions." What does he mean? Well, he means simply this, that the Law of Moses, "Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not." "Thou shalt not have any other Gods before me." "Thou shalt not

murder." "Thou shalt not covet." "Thou shalt not steal." All of the Ten Commandments, these were given for the sake of the transgressions. What is transgression? Transgression is rebellion, rebellion against an order, rebellion against a law. There was no transgression until the Law came. Sin existed, transgression did not exist. So the Law came for the sake of transgressions. It came in order that sin might be seen as rebellion against God. It came in order that transgression might be produced.

What a strange thought that the Law actually came to produce transgression. One almost conceives of the apostle as saying that God is the author of sin. We know that is not true, but he is here the one, who in giving the Law, has incited man to sin. By the giving of the Law, sin is vitalized; it is actualized; it is agitated; it is inflamed; it exposes sin; it incites men to further sin; it condemns men; and also it penalizes them. That is, it sets forth the penalty for that sin. It shows them that they are under the curse. How is that possible? Well, my dear friend, if you have ever set down before the Ten Commandments and taken a good look at them, you can understand why. If you think of a man being under the Law of Moses, as Israel was under it, Peter later says, "we were unable to bear that yolk, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear," are his words.

"Thou shalt not covet." And I look at my neighbor's possessions, and there arises within my heart, almost immediately, the desire to have them. I have broken the Law. "Thou shalt not murder." Well, of course, we're not guilty of murder. But that's not the way that text should be interpreted. Our Lord Jesus interpreted that properly. He said that if a man hates his brother, he's guilty of murder. "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not covet." If a man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he's broken the Law. It's not simply, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." It's the look; it's the desire; it's the hate. These things make us guilty of the Law of God. It's unfair. It's not right to be under such a stringent set of statutes as this, and in my reaction to the Law, I am guilty of further sin of hatred of God, rebellion against God, resentment against God, because I stand under this

code which I cannot possibly live up to in my present status. And so the Law terrifies us, as Luther liked to say it. And it particularly terrifies the man who has this, as Luther puts it, this "great monster, this beast of the presumption of righteousness."

We are living in a day in which people attend Christian churches possessed with this monstrous beast in their hearts. You can see them as they walk up to the church. "I'm going to church. I'll be sitting in the congregation when the collection plates are passed, when the Bible is read, and I'll be listening to a sermon. And I'll be accepted by God by the virtue of the things that I am doing." And this monster, this beast, this presumption of righteousness, which is so endemic to the human heart, is possessing them and gripping them until finally, as Luther says, "God has to send some Hercules to deliver him from this beast. And the Hercules to deliver him from this beast is the Law of Moses, which shows him what he really is.

You know, you can see this so beautifully, I think, in the giving of the Law itself. Moses stood before the children of Israel and they said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do. Just tell us what to do." And then the Lord said, "All right Moses, I want you to sanctify the people, wash your clothes, don't go near your wives for a few days, and I'm going to appear on Mount Sinai." And you remember what happened, when the day came, there was lightening, there was thunder, there was an earthquake, there was great smoke. And there was a loud blast of a trumpet that got louder, and louder, and louder, and louder, because it was a token, a visible picture of what it is to stand before God on the basis of what you do. You're standing before a holy God who judges the slightest failure to keep the Law. And finally Israel cries out, "We'll speak to Moses, but we don't want to speak to God lest we die." That was God's way of showing what the Law of Moses really is.

The effect of the Law upon our depraved hearts is akin to the effect of the sun on any putrid organism. That's what the Law does when it comes home to the human heart.

It reveals all of the wickedness and sin that resides there naturally, because we are the children of Adam.

There is an interesting account in John Bunyan of Christian, with Interpreter, coming to a large parlor. It's full of dust. And so Interpreter has someone come into the room and sweep the dust. And of course, when this person, the woman, comes into the room and sweeps the dust, Christian says, "The dust became so thick in the room that [he] almost choked to death." And then Interpreter called for a woman to come and sprinkle water about. And the water was sprinkled about, and then she took the broom and swept the room clean of the dust. And then Interpreter turned to Christian and explained what was going on. He said, "Now this room with all of the dust in it signifies the corruption, the vile nature of the human heart. And the broom that swept the room is the Law of Moses. And the Law of Moses sweeps and stirs up the wickedness and corruption, and it inflames and agitates it. But then the bringing of the water and the sweeping up of the dust by the means of the water represents the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by which we're delivered from the dust, sin, and corruption that the Law has revealed." That's the purpose of the Law. That's why the Law was given. The Law was never given to save. The Law was given to condemn, to show us what we really were.

Now, Paul also speaks of a couple of inferiorities of the Law in the latter part of verse 19. He said, It was given "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" The Law is transitory. You know we often hear people say, the age of the church is an intercalation. It comes in; it does not have any contact with the past. It does not have any relationship to the future, just the opposite. It's the Law that was the intercalation. The age of the church is the continuation of the age of the Abraham, when men lived under promise. And that's why we in the church of Jesus Christ are called sons of Abraham. Well now, does God contradict himself? Verse 22 and verse 21, is the Law then against the promises of God? No, Paul says the Law and the promises act in a

complimentary way. It is the Law that convicts us of sin, and it is the promise that reveals the way of escape.

And so he answers, "God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." The Law judges by works, the promise judges by faith. There are two different ways of dealing with people. We could imagine the courts. One of the commentators, I think it's E.D. Burton, says, "The courts exercise several different kinds of ministries. The courts condemn, but the courts also release the criminals. The activity of condemnation and the activity of pardon belong to the courts, but they are complimentary activities. A father who should as a father judge a son, and judge him guilty of breaking some family law might at the same time, on the basis of repentance, forgive the son who has violated law." That's not, by the way, a good illustration of divine forgiveness. For there must, of course, be compensation or penalty paid, in the divine law. But in any case, it indicates the fact that there may be complimentary works. So the Law judges, but it is the promise that offers the way of forgiveness.

So the apostle here, in about eight short verses, has given us a magnificent view of biblical theology. He's had us look back into the Old Testament and see a mountain range with several peaks. First, the peak of Abraham and the promise, then the peak of Moses and the Law, and finally the outstanding peak of them all, Mount Calvary where the Lord Jesus Christ offers the sin sacrifice. His master plan is salvation by grace. But in order to bring men to the knowledge of the need of salvation, it is necessary for them to have the Law. And the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses were given in order to bring to our attention the sin and rebellion of the human heart. As Luther says, "The principle part of the Law is to make men not better, but worse, in order that they might ultimately be transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ."

And so I say to you this morning, my dear Christian and non-Christian friends, we must be humbled. We must be terrified. We must be bruised. We must be broken by

the Law before we shall ever come to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. Now I do grant that it is possible for us to look at the cross and see our sins in the deepest way, through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, but there must come a time when our respectability must go, when we see ourselves as totally condemned before God; vile, putrid, corrupt, decaying spiritually before him. There are no good sinners. You often hear people get up and say, "Well I was not really a bad sinner, before I was converted." Young people often say that in testimony meetings. Some will get up and speak about the depths of sin, in which they have fallen, and then someone else will get up and say, "Well, I was not a very bad sinner. I grew up in a Christian home." Nonsense, you were a horrible sinner; [Laughter] to grow up in a Christian home and be a sinner is to be a horrible sinner. In fact, that monster, that beast of the presumption of righteousness, is the worst kind of sin that a person can have. To think he's pretty good when he's really evil and vile and corrupt.

I was listening to a tape by Dr. McGee this past week. It was given some years ago when he was still the pastor of the Church of the Open Door, and that church is a church which is located right down in the center of Los Angeles and now is connected to a forty-two story building. And he was commenting on the fact that just recently the church had become the tallest church in all of the western world, forty-two stories high. And then he went on to say that several men on the staff and other friends had gone up to the top of this building, evidently while it was still in construction, on an elevator on the outside of the building, probably a construction elevator. He said that he wasn't one of those men. But he said, "Let's suppose that they got to the top of the building, four or five of these men, and they were told, 'Don't go over near the side.' And one of them went over to the side, stumbled and fell over, and fell forty-two floors to the street below, and was lying there dead. And someone else seeing what happened said, well, I'm going to jump over.' And so of his own determination he leaps out." And then Dr. McGee said, "Suppose in our group of men there was another man standing there, a supposed friend

who said, 'I've always wanted to get you in a place like this.' And with that he shoved him over." [Laughter] And there are three men lying on the ground forty-two stories before, all of them dead. And then Dr. McGee said in his own imitable way, "Are you going to argue with me and say, 'This fellow that stumbled over and was dead, by virtue of this accident, was not as dead as the fellow who deliberately jumped over.' No they're all three lying on the ground dead, each just as dead as the other."

Respectable sinners and disrespectful sinners, they all stand alike before God in their corruption. It's not until the Law has driven us to the despair of ourselves that we will ever believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners. And it's not until the Law has humbled us, even to hell; someone has said, "Will we turn to the gospel to raise us to heaven?" Why was the Law given? It was given to show us what we really are. And in showing us what we really are, making us ready for the illumination of the Holy Spirit by which we may come to see the remedy in the salvation work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're here this morning and this presumption of righteousness is yours, this monster, this beast that is choking all life from you, and ultimately will send you to an eternal separation from God, we call upon you to see yourself as you really are. "Thou shalt not covet." "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not murder." "Thou shalt not commit adultery." "Thou shalt not have any other gods before me." That's a hopeless standard. You are condemned. You are lost. You are under the penalty, the curse of the Law. There is no escape, but the cross of Jesus Christ. May God, through his Spirit enable you to see yourself as you really are, and to see Christ as the one who offers a fully free salvation for sinners. May you come. What a wonderful thing it would be to see yourself as you really are this morning, and to come to Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost. May God help you to come. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the gift of the Law, not because we think that we could possibly live up to its precepts, but because it is a gracious activity to show us our sin. And Lord, we do confess that hat we have seen within our hearts is all vileness and corruption. And we thank Thee for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ who has born that vileness and corruption that we might have life. And though, Father, there are some still in this audience who have not yet come to Christ, O God, give no rest nor peace until they come to him. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be and abide with all who know him in sincerity. For Jesus' Sake. Amen.