The Old Testament law is like one of your best teachers from high school. You learn a lot; you are held to high standards; you honor and respect your teacher; and at some point you realize they are holding you to these high standards because they want you to develop a love of learning. They want you to want to love to learn. They are tough and demanding in a way, not because they dislike you, but precisely because they love you and want you to learn. By the way, one of the things that excited me the most when I came to our church ten years ago was when I learned that one of my favorite teachers, Mr. Charlie Bowers, is an elder and active member here. When I think of a great teacher, he always comes to mind.

This is the next sermon in a series on “The Law and the Gospel”. We have discussed how the law convicts the unregenerate person and bids them enter into a life-giving relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Last week, we discussed how the Old Testament law as the basis for the civil law of the nation and how both the “unregenerate” and those “regenerate” need to obey the civil law specifically because in our obedience we are obeying God. And this week we explore John Calvin’s third use of the law, how it is helpful for instruction in leading the Christian in right paths and in the way everlasting. It is Calvin who suggests that the law is the Christian’s schoolmaster.

The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans notes that, “the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8: 4) This section notes that God sent Jesus in the flesh, to die on a cross in the flesh in order that the “just requirements of the law” might be fulfilled in us. When we invite Jesus Christ within, when we believe in Him, when Jesus takes up residency within our heart, then His perfect obedience on the cross, forgives us of our sin, of which we were convicted by the law, brings us into a right relationship with God in and through Jesus, and then Jesus and the Holy Spirit, alive in our heart, leads and guides and directs us in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer under the law for He Jesus has fulfilled that for us at Calvary. So when the law is proclaimed, as a Christian we hear it a different way. “There is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8: 1) so the law is not there to tell us we are not saved. No, now the law is there for instruction, like a good school teacher to advise us in our “walk in the Spirit” where our lives conform more and more to the law. The law doesn’t save us; Jesus saves us. The law helps us to understand what it means to follow the Master and to walk in the Spirit, like a good schoolmaster.
I want to go on a little sermonic “riff” now, contrasting how the Christian understands the law versus how the unregenerate understands the law. To the unregenerate, those in whom Christ does not dwell, the law is an annoyance; it is there to remind them they are not saved; it condemns them and makes them feel most uncomfortable; they seek to be “good” (quote unquote) but never measure up. To the regenerate, to those who believe, the law is no longer condemnation, it is now helpful and instructive; when our lives are out of synch with the law it bids us to ask ourselves how we might more closely follow the Lord in our life. We cannot LOSE OUR SALVATION. No, that has been guaranteed by Jesus Christ at Calvary and our faith rests in His completed work done there. Rather, like a good teacher the law is helpful in instructing us in the paths in which we should go and the dangers along that path. For the unregenerate, they try to fulfill being good apart from Christ and find it is impossible. For the regenerate, we know we can never fulfill the law apart from Christ and so rest in what He has done for us that we could never do for ourselves. For the unregenerate, they feel the law is there to hurt them or to stop them from doing what they really want to do in life. For the regenerate, we know the law is helpful and for our good, it is there as a kind teacher wanting us to learn about God and to love Him more and to have the best possible life we could ever have. For the unregenerate, they see the law as stopping them from doing what they want. For the regenerate, in whom Jesus bodily dwells, we want to do what Jesus wants us to do, because we know blessing and favor and a good life is the result. The Christian WANTS to do what Christ wants us to do; our heart has been changed, our soul is filled with the Holy Spirit, we want to be obedient to the law because we LOVE God and know that God loves us in Jesus Christ. Transformation in Jesus Christ makes all the difference in the world! This is the LAW and the GOSPEL.

An illustration from the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20: 8 notes that the fourth commandment is: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor…but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” “GO TO CHURCH” is how my parents would have summarized the Old Testament Law to me. And when I was in high school I would say, “I don’t want to go to church; I’m too tired; I have other things to do; its boring (of course its boring, I didn’t know Jesus yet!!!). Unregenerate little Stuby-doo was convicted by the law and dragged to church. But at some point in time, all this church stuff started to make sense. I started to love going to church, not because I HAD TO but because I WANTED TO. My heart changed. I loved Jesus and Jesus came and lived in me. A long time church member often says something like, “I hate missing church, because then the rest of my week doesn’t go as well.” Exactly! Seek ye first the kingdom and all else will be added unto you. Place God first on the first day of the week and blessing and favor follow. The law is: GO TO CHURCH. But the Gospel
is: Christ has entered my heart and inspires me to WANT TO GO TO CHURCH because then and there I encounter HIM more and more in all His fullness. The just requirements of the law FLOW FROM a right relationship with Jesus; the LAW doesn’t save us, JESUS saves us! We want to be obedient to what He says because our heart is changed and we know He loves us.

Most of my life I drove myself in school to achieve and get good grades. I wanted to go to law school and you had to get into the right college and get good grades in order to go to the right law school in order to achieve my plan for my life. This is the law; legalism personified. Driving ourselves to do good things in order to appear to achieve. For my whole life I studied, not because I loved knowledge or what I was studying, but purely to get a good grade. I knew how to take tests but I didn’t really care about what I was studying. I got good grades but I never quite lived up to my teacher’s hopes that I would develop a love for learning for its own sake. I could never quite measure up; if I got an “A” I felt I should have gotten an “A+”. That’s the condemnation of the law. But Jesus Christ changed my heart and my mind. I became transformed by the renewing of my mind, no longer conformed to a world that drives us to performance and success by a spirit of legalism. Because I could never measure up to my own high expectations of myself. And I felt called by God to go to seminary. And there I discovered a whole body of knowledge that I LOVED to study. I devoured the scriptures. I read more than my assignments. I would take out books from the library that I saw in the footnotes and read that also. I discovered a whole body of knowledge that I cherished because in its study I was discovering more and more each day my Lord and Savior, Jesus, and God’s great love and grace for me. I WANTED to study; I didn’t HAVE to study. And by the way, I got better grades than ever. Not because I was DRIVEN to study to get a good grade (this is the condemnation of the law) but because I had developed a genuine love for learning and reading and study. The good grades flowed from my love for God, not because I was driven to study the Bible. That’s the love of learning that my teachers from high school were always trying to have me understand. And if you understand the difference, you understand the difference between THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL. Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!