

# “Gospel Hope for Law-Breakers”

## (Part 1)

### Exodus 20:1-21

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019 – Glenvista Baptist Church

41<sup>st</sup> Message in The Ten Commandments

Two messages to conclude the study of the Ten Commandments

**Exodus 20:1-21 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

<sup>18</sup> Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” <sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup> The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.”

## Introduction: “A Perfect Standard of Righteousness Required” (Rom 1:17)

**Romans 1:17 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

- a) We have come to the end of our study on the Ten Commandments. Forty messages in which God by grace has given us His will. His revealed will for mankind laid down in Ten Words on tablets of stone. Grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy, as God withholds from us what we deserve and grants us in abundance what we do not deserve. How good and how kind our God has been!
- b) One thing that has stood out clearly is that the Law reminds us so adequately of the truth in **Romans 3:23** stating that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. Simultaneously we have learnt that where there is law there always is grace. That is why the apostle Paul can state so boldly in **Romans 1:16-17**, “<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Yet this righteousness, which is revealed through the Gospel, which is from faith for faith, comes by the meritorious sacrifice of Christ our King alone. A sacrifice on our behalf as the Son of God gives His life for sinners. A sacrifice in which God substitutes His own innocent Son for all believers.
- c) The law however presents us with a standard, a standard that is unattainable by human merit, a standard that cannot be adhered to through human accomplishment, a standard at which man fails at every attempt. A standard Christ alone could achieve. A standard which the apostle calls “the righteousness of God” (**Rom 1:17**). It is a righteousness that condemns all of our pretenses, a righteousness that presents our own attempts of righteousness as “filthy rags” in the sight of God. Yet in the law God not only shows us how righteous we must be in order to meet that standard, but He also shows us His Son through whom alone such righteousness is granted to all who believe, and through whom we are made acceptable and holy in the sight of God our Father.
- d) So we need to know that we are powerless in ourselves to achieve any such merit in the sight of God. Nothing we do can achieve an acceptable standard in the sight of a Holy God. Our best attempts simply add further destruction to the package. God demands perfect inward holiness of heart and of life; this is beyond human capability. And outside of Christ the law leaves us standing condemned. This study on the Ten Commandments has effectively been a clear reminder to us all that God does not demand **our** best, but that God requires **His** best, and nothing but His best will satisfy. That means there is only one righteousness that can appease the wrath of God, and it's the righteousness that comes by the meritorious substitutionary sacrifice of Christ our King.
- e) Therefore it is in Christ alone where hope can be found for law-breakers, for it is in Christ alone that a righteousness apart from the law has been made known (**Rom 3:21**).

## **Point 1 – “The Requirement of the Law in light of the fact that the Law reminds us of how wicked we are” (Deut 27:26)**

**Deuteronomy 27:26 (ESV)** “<sup>26</sup> Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”

- a) We've seen time and again that the righteous requirements of the law are beyond human capability. Man cannot keep the law in each of its aspects. The law requires more of us than we can do in and of ourselves. That presents the human race with a major dilemma. According to **Deuteronomy 27:26**, every person that does not obey everything that the law requires, is under a curse; the curse of the law. We've seen that the New Testament presents us with the same truth when James states that he who

keeps all of the law yet fails at one point becomes guilty of transgression against all of the law, and by such doing incurs the penalty of all of the law. So putting these two verses together, we read the following: **Deut 27:26** <sup>26</sup> **“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”** And then also **James 2:10** <sup>10</sup> **“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”**

- b) With that truth in mind, Paul begins his epistle to the Romans by explaining how the Jews are condemned by the law written on tablets of stone, whilst the Gentiles are condemned by the law written on their consciences through the created order. And so **Romans 1** presents a scenario of natural suppression of the truth, even though the created order bears witness to the glory of God. The Gentiles suppress the truth by trying to erase God's fingerprints from the Divine Image stamped upon them. We see them worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, exchanging the truth for a lie and turning God's created order upside down. Therefore their men exchange natural relations for indecent acts of homosexuality in an attempt to remodel the world after their own wickedness so that their own wickedness can be regarded as normal.
- c) But in **Romans 2:1** the apostle turns the tables around, and places the focus now on the Jew rather than on the Gentile. He says to them, <sup>1</sup> **“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.”** In other words Paul says the reason these Jews were so easily passing judgement on others for violating God's commandments was simply because they themselves knew the law of God so well, but nonetheless were guilty themselves of continuously breaking God's law. And it is precisely because of that that they were even more inexcusable. So these Jews were practicing the same sins they were accusing the Gentiles of, and this is what made them even more guilty of lawlessness themselves. In **Romans 2:3** Paul assures them that they will no more escape the judgement of God than will the heathen. That argument is then taken further in **Romans 3:9-12** when Paul asserts that all the world stands condemned, since **“Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”**, and he confirms this further by saying that, <sup>10</sup> **“None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”** The conclusion of this truth then is stated in **Romans 3:19-20** where we are reminded that the purpose of the law is to remind us how wicked we are. <sup>19</sup> **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”** (**Romans 3:19-20**) Did you take note of the fact that **by works of the law no human being can or will be justified in the sight of the a holy God**? So that means the law pronounces us guilty and reminds us of our helplessness, if we were to make the law of God our refuge.
- d) Now just like the Jews spoken of here in **Romans 1** we can so easily fall into the religious trap that causes us to think because we are serving in the church and involved in religious activity, that we are righteous and holy and good. And we stand guilty of thinking that it is only the wicked out there, who are really bad. But this text brings us to the same level. We practice the same sins, but our religiosity so blinds us that we cannot see it clearly, and it is precisely because of that that we will be held even more accountable before a holy God. We cannot claim to know better and do better, when in actual fact we are simply in a more sophisticated manner committing the same sins

as our unbelieving neighbor. That is hypocritical and that stands condemned under the law.

- e) So the law comes to tell us that there indeed is no one who does good, not even one. We may think we are holy, but God sees all things by means of His all-pervasive eyes. And therefore it is all too easy to see the homosexuals, and the pornographers, and the abortionists, the humanists and so on as the ones in need of the law. But we have seen clearly in our expositions that Jesus redefines the law and effectively states that we all are adulterers, fornicators, murderers, false witnesses, thieves, covetous, false worshipers, blasphemers and self-seekers.
- f) And so the law pronounces us **as** guilty, as the man who commits the actual licentious deeds. There is no difference. And the requirement of the law is that such penalty needs to be exacted, or else the law fails in its duty. And so friends, this generation in which we find ourselves living is in need of having its eyes opened, so that we may know our own powerlessness against the threats which the law places upon us. This generation needs to be resurrected from its lethargy. God demands perfect holiness as the only acceptable standard in the shadow of the law, and unless we attain such holiness there is but absolutely no hope for us. **So that then leads to the question: So what now?** And I will seek to show you that there is only one way of being made right in the sight of God, in light of the law's requirement, and it can only be done God's way.

## **Point 2 – “The Requirement of the Law in light of Two Significant Theological Truths”** **Truth 1: Being Declared Righteous (Justification) - (Rom 3:21-24)**

**Romans 3:21-24 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...”

- a) That one way is found clearly in **Romans 3:21-24**. Once we realize we have no righteousness within that would be acceptable to God and that the law points to our own wickedness, then and then alone can we be ready for the remedy that is offered through the Gospel alone. If the law cannot make us right in the sight of God, then what can? If the law pronounces us guilty, then what can take away the shame and the guilt? Paul tells us in **verse 24** that this is only attainable **“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”**. This righteousness is apart from the law (**v21**) and is granted to the believer through faith in the accomplished work of the Savior, both in His ransom on the cross as well as His complete abiding and fulfilling of the law.
- b) **This brings us to the grand doctrine of justification**. It was the Reformer Martin Luther who said, **“Justification is the article by which the church stands and falls”**. The Doctrine of Justification however begs a very important question: **How can a just God, be both just and the justifier of the wicked?** Paul makes this assertive statement in **verse 26**, when he says that God **“might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”** Paul emphasizes this truth then by stating in **verse 28**, **“<sup>28</sup> For we hold <sup>(maintain)</sup> that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”** So Paul makes clear that we are not made right in the sight of God by any of our own works, but purely by the justification that comes through faith. This truth is emphasized again in **Romans 4:5**, **“<sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in him who**

justifies the ungodly <sup>(wicked)</sup>, his faith is counted as righteousness...” Again, it begs the question: **How can God declare righteous those who are unrighteous, and in fact, wicked? How can He say something about a people that is not true?**

- c) Now you see, this is exactly where the Pharisees of our Lord's day failed to grasp the Gospel as we read in **Luke 18:9-14**, “**He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:**”<sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’<sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” This is exactly what so many do today – they trust in their own abilities and the biggest mistake they make in this regard is that they view their relation to God primarily in terms of moral transformation. **And the fundamental theological flaw that comes with this is that such people always struggle to believe that God can declare us righteous even if we have not yet become righteous.**
- d) To this, Martin Luther became well known for capturing the following phrase: “simultaneously justified and sinful”. **In other words the Christian is to believe, on the authority of God's promise in His Word, that he is righteous because of someone else's obedience to the law and his perfect satisfaction of the requirements thereof. This means for him who is in Christ, that God regards him as if he has never sinned before, and in fact as if he has obeyed the law in its entirety perfectly.** This is a fact the Gospel brings that is by no means dependent on any of our own performance. But if you approach the law from a moralistic perspective you will always find this Gospel fact impossible to believe. Now this needs to be noted; if you are going to try and reason this out, then you need to be warned that you will lose your mind. These truths that come with the Gospel cannot be learned from reason or from nature. That is completely impossible.
- e) In actual fact, beloved friends, the law makes perfect sense, whereas on the other hand the Gospel is “**foolishness to those who are perishing**” (1 Cor 1:18). Where in your life have you ever heard of someone declared “not guilty” even when he continued committing the same crimes? How can the law-keeping of someone else be credited to a law-breaker? **So this then is essentially what the Gospel stands for;** and we see it right at the outset where “**Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness**” (Gen 15:6), to the Gospels where the sinner cried out to Jesus, “**God have mercy on me a sinner**” and he “**went home justified**” rather than the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like the others (Luke 18:13-14); that the Gospel proclaims not that God **makes** sinners holy, but that He **declares** them holy even if they will never live up to that testimony this side of heaven. We call this **the imputation of righteousness**; God crediting to the sinners' account what never belonged to the sinner.
- f) Now this then is where the Federal Headship theory which Paul speaks about in **Romans 5** then enters the debate. The First Adam, the one in the garden, was the federal head or representative spokesperson for the whole human race. What he did affected everyone born after him. This could only be undone by another Federal Head who could undo and remove in its entirety the stain of the sin of the first Adam. The Second Adam, then, Christ, would federally represent all in Him, doing for them what the first Adam could not, and what they themselves also could not do. To this Michael Horton most helpfully comments: “We are born sinners, with both the imputation of Adam's guilt (since we were

in some sense with him, united with him in his sin) and the corruption of Adam's nature. But in Christ, we are taken from the covenant of works, by which we are judged law-breakers and sentenced to judgement – even from birth – to the covenant of grace. Adam, our covenant head, ruined us by his disobedience, but Christ, the Second Adam, rescued us by His obedience. As Adam's guilt is imputed to us even apart from our personal actions, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to us even apart from our personal actions. This is justification.”<sup>1</sup>

- g) This justification, Paul tells us in **Romans 3:24** is entirely a gift of God's free grace. Such we do not deserve, yet such is given freely and abundantly. That means wicked sinners, like you and me, who stand condemned under the law, are absolved of guilt and declared innocent on account of something someone else has done for them. And that someone, is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- h) Hallelujah! What a Savior!

## **Conclusion: “New Life in Christ, resulting in Actual Righteousness” (Rom 5:1-2)**

**Romans 5:1-2 (ESV)** “<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

- a) In conclusion then this morning, just as Adam's corruption was passed onto us, so too in Christ, are we given new life, that results in actual righteousness, as well as personal acts of obedience that flows from a renewed heart. That is called sanctification, which comes as a result of justification. This is the second of the theological truths which we Lord willing will consider next Lord's Day.
- b) **How amazing is the grace that flows from the throne of mercy by which wicked men and woman are justified in the sight of a Holy God!** Men and woman who cannot keep the law; men and woman standing condemned under the judgement of the law; men and woman lost without Christ. It is futile for us to claim righteousness before God based on our obedience. For if we do that, then dear friends, we must have perfection, and since we do not have perfection, using the law to justify ourselves brings only condemnation.
- c) As we have clearly seen, our salvation cannot be achieved by our own good works. Instead, only the good works of Christ are the basis of our being found righteous in the sight of God (**2 Cor 5:21**). The point is that God demands perfect obedience to His law, and that is why Christ's obedience can justify us. Our obedience cannot make us righteous in His sight because we cannot obey Him perfectly.
- d) **To put it bluntly, if we get justification wrong we get the Gospel wrong.** The Reformer John Calvin (1509–64) ardently declared the doctrine of justification by faith alone to be “the principle hinge by which [the Christian] religion is supported” (*Institutes* 3.11.1). Known as the *material principle* of the sixteenth-century Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith alone was at the epicentre of the battle to bring needed reform to the church. This biblical doctrine is central to preserving an accurate understanding of the gospel even as we find it so clearly taught in Paul's letters to the churches of Rome and Galatia.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom, Relating to God and others in and through the Ten Commandments*, Moody Publishers Chicago (1993) page 262

- e) In other words, justification is a *legal* act by God, based on the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, by *means* of our faith (granted as a gift from God).
- f) Friend, I end of with a very simply question. **Do you know this free gift of justification? Do you know the blessing of being in Christ and seen as if you have never sinned? Do you know the amazing grace that saves law-breakers from the penalty of their sin?**
- g) If not, it is found in none other than Christ our King. Turn to Him then to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria (For God's Glory Alone)

Glenvista Baptist Church – 5 May 2019