

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 23

The Law – Part Three

How has your week been? Have you spent any time in court? Has anyone asked a judge to sanction you this week? I have!

I recently got involved in a lawsuit representing Southern Methodist University in a fuss arising out of the George W. Bush Presidential Library. The owners of some condominiums whose units were purchased and then demolished sued SMU alleging that the school improperly took possession of the properties to build the library.

Even though most of my courtroom time is spent going after wrong doers (“plaintiff’s work”), I took this case as a defense attorney. My review of the facts led me to conclude that this was a shakedown of the University by two individuals who thought they could finagle a lot more money than they were justly due.

SMU offered these two folks more money than I thought was fair, and the folks would not take it. I thought the condo owners were being greedy and were improperly using the legal system.

This week, the case merited more media attention than normal because the condo owners wanted President Bush to give a deposition. The President, through his lawyers, filed papers explaining that he has no relevant knowledge on the condominium issues. I viewed the push for the President’s testimony a further abuse of the legal system as part of a publicity stunt or other means of pressuring SMU to pay more money.

With the media present, I made my views known. The next day, the *Dallas Morning News* ran an article setting out many of my views. I made known that the condo owners had been offered over a million dollars each for units that had cost around 40 thousand dollars, an incredibly generous offer for moldy, asbestos laden condominiums. I was quoted as saying the condo owners were trying to “shakedown” the University. I was also quoted as saying SMU would not be intimidated into paying more than they should in the case.¹

The condo owners were not happy. It seems I hit a nerve. The next day after the article ran, the condo owners filed a motion with the judge to disqualify me and get me out of the case! The reporter asked me my thoughts on this further

¹ I believe part of that quote was, “We don’t negotiate with terrorists.”

development and I explained it was more of the same – abusing the legal system as an intimidation tool.

I do not like when someone wrongly uses the law. I see it when people try to manipulate the law to get something they are not justly entitled to. I also see it when the opposite is true, for example, when a company may owe someone, but instead of paying, engage a stable of lawyers taking the fight to the courtroom.

I think one reason I take these matters to heart is because I live and breathe the law as my occupation day in and day out. I write of it now because it reminds me of the serious way Paul would address what he considered to be abuses of the Jewish law in his day. Except for Paul, there was more at stake than simply economic exchange. Paul’s currency was the souls of the church!

TODAY’S ISSUES

In this lesson, we continue our work on Paul and the law, seeing what Paul had to say about how the law was properly and improperly used. This class is built off the foundation of the last two lessons where we discussed in detail what the Old Testament law (“Torah”) was.² A brief review on this is in order.

While Paul used the word we translate “law” in a number of ways, the main usage that we find relevant to our discussion is when he is writing of the Old Testament Torah. The Torah was the first five books of the Old Testament, what we call the “Pentateuch,” or the “Five Books of Moses.” They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

These books that were the “Law”³ were not simply rules and codes of conduct. But in the true sense of the word, “*torah*” (meaning “instruction”) the “Law” contained stories that instructed as well as codes and rules. The stories included the calling of Israel into a covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai. As a part of that covenant, Moses was given the rules and commandments that were central to the covenant. These were rules of behavior for individual Jews, as well as for the entire Jewish nation. Tied to the rules were blessings when followed and curses when violated.

We did this work over the last few weeks in anticipation of asking the questions:

² These lessons, like all our lessons, are available for download at our website www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

³ From this point forward, when we are referencing the *Torah* Law, we will capitalize “Law.” When we use “law” in lower case letters, we are addressing the common use of the word, not the specific *Torah*.

1. How does the law apply to the individual? Here we consider, among other things, the role of the law in salvation and in holiness.
2. How does the law apply to the church? Should the church worship on the Sabbath (Saturday)? What of the worship lessons and admonitions are relevant today?
3. How does the law apply to society? Should America (or any government) hold to the legal foundations given Israel? If so, which ones -- civil? Criminal? Some of both? Should a country rightly appropriate the promises that accompanied the law as given to Israel?

We ask these questions convicted that, based upon Paul's theology and the teachings, therefore, of Scripture; the law still has an important role in the life of the believer, the church, and society at large. Paul taught and understood that the Torah was good and holy, even in the age of the New Testament Church. Paul told the Romans,

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good....we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin...I delight in the law of God. (Rom. 7:12, 14, 22).

The Law has its place. The key is to keep the law to its place! Paul wrote Timothy that, "we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8). We need to understand a proper use of the Law and honor the Law accordingly. So, we now consider each of these questions with an eye directed both toward what the role of the law *is* as well as what the role *is not*.

1. Law and the Christian as an Individual.

Warning: Some outstanding books address this subject, yet we have two or three pages we can spend on it. In other words, we are presenting a very cursory view of a broad subject!

This area is currently a "hot topic" in Pauline theology. Consider this question:

Did the Jews in Paul's time believe that salvation was earned by keeping the commands of the Law?

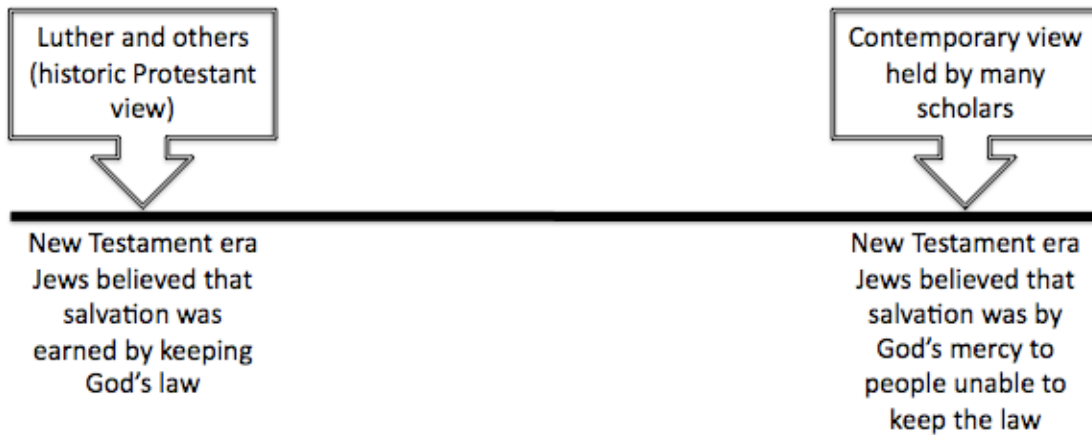
If you are reading this from a Protestant background, then there is a good likelihood you have answered that question, "Yes." Since Luther, many protestant scholars have seen Paul as writing against a certain "legalism" that was believed to

have existed in Jerusalem amongst the religious Jews. That scholastic opinion changed, somewhat, in the 1900's.⁴

Frank Thielmann of Beeson Divinity School placed an article in a compendium of contemporary scholarship where he dissects this view.⁵ He does an excellent job at working through the various stages scholars have taken on the road to a current view that for many, holds that the Jews of Paul's time believed in a God of mercy, not a strict legalistic God.⁶

If we were to put the views (old and new) on a continuum, we would have something like this:

What was Jewish theology in the time of Paul?



⁴ Charles Mickey made reference to this in his Overview lesson on the Law two weeks ago.

⁵ *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP 1993), p. 529ff.

⁶ Some of the actual works that are relevant on this issue are not simple reads. However, anyone wanting to work through some material should read the groundbreaking book by J. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress Press 1977). Sanders goes through the contemporary writings and sayings of Paul's day, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha, showing hundreds of passages in an effort to prove his point on the complexity of Jewish thought. Sanders explored the core belief that most every Jew (save the most unregenerate sinners) would have "a share in the world to come" by virtue of his membership in the Jewish covenant (i.e. genetics). See especially pages 147-182.

The reason we care about what the Jews of Paul’s day believed, is because it helps make sense of the passages Paul has written on the subject. Luther assumed that Paul was combating a justification by works just as Luther was struggling against internally. Maybe Luther was right; and maybe he was a bit guilty of reading his own situation into Scripture. We are not in a position to detail this debate here, beyond acknowledging it exists.⁷ We will necessarily, though, take into account contemporary scholarship, as well as the views of Luther, as we consider Paul’s perspectives on the law and the believer.

Let us first put our points into a chart, then we will discuss them:

The Law is NOT:	The Law is:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In Christ, the Law does not set up an “ethnic covenant.” 2. There is no “salvation” earned by keeping the Law 3. We do not merit God’s pleasure by the Law’s physical rituals (circumcision, dietary laws, etc.) 4. Gentiles do not need to become Jews to be Christians. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Law does teach a Christian holiness, which in turn sets a Christian apart from the world. 2. The Law reveals sin, revealing its insidious nature and power. 3. The Law functions to lead one to Christ. 4. The whole Torah points to Jesus. 5. The Law properly filled a temporary function.

As we have discussed, the Torah Law contained a covenant between God and the Jews. The covenant had written rules, some written by God on stone (the Ten

⁷ I will relegate to this footnote my own concerns on this issue. There are clear places where God’s mercy was taught in contemporary Judaism. There are also, however, some clear indications of a more strident legalism. I suggest that tidy lines cannot be clearly drawn, as if there were only one school of thought. Diversity in opinion is not a 21st century invention. In other words, see the whole continuum as having a place at the table. A second consideration is that Paul understood the law differently as a Christian believer than he did prior to his encounter on the Damascus road. Paul understood that the mercy of God, the righteousness of faith, was possible only because of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. While many of his Jewish contemporaries might not embrace a full legalism, without the crucified Messiah, Paul would assert that these Jews had no legal basis for God’s mercy.

Commandments). This covenant was with the ethnic nation of Israel and applied to the descendants of Abraham (hence, we refer to it as an “ethnic covenant.”) As God spoke the commands to Moses, he frequently said, “Speak to the *people* of Israel, saying...”⁸

This covenant was never the source of Israel’s salvation. The Old Testament taught that the covenant was a source of blessing as it was fulfilled, and of curses as it was violated, but it was never written or explained as a road map to heaven! There could be no promise, if the promise depended upon obedience to God’s Law. Paul explained in Romans 4:14, “if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.”

Paul is able to use the Torah itself to explain and justify his teaching. We read in the Torah that Abraham’s faith was counted as his righteousness (“And he [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Gen. 15:6). This is the passage Paul quotes in Romans 4:3. Paul used the Torah, then, to support his understanding that Christians are righteous before God apart from works of law, by faith. He emphasized this in Galatians 2:16:

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

The idea that works of law merited God’s justice or mercy has no place in Paul’s teaching.

Paul underscored this truth in discussing the three hallmarks of Jewish separatism: circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and kosher dietary observance.⁹ These were not areas where the Law was ever to be used for separating Jew and Gentile. The gospel brought Jew and Gentile together!

Paul underscored this truth in discussing the three hallmarks of Jewish separatism: circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and kosher dietary observance.¹⁰ These were not

⁸ See Lev. 4:2, 7:23, 29; 11:2; 12:2; 23:24; 23:34; 24:15; Num. 6:23; 9:10, etc.

⁹ J. D. G. Dunn considers these three areas of observance as the “identity markers” which the Jews used to socially distance themselves from all others. Dunn believes these markers were the specific practices Paul meant as Paul wrote of the “works of Law.” Whether Dunn is right in that detail does not change the importance that all scholars saw in Paul’s Jewish contemporaries on the exercise of these practices. See J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Westminster/John Knox 1990).

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Consider in this vein Paul writing to the Romans on the dietary laws. Paul explained that some believed they could eat anything while others had conscience issues on eating meat. Both are to honor the other as both sought to understand how God would have them live. Paul himself was “persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself” **BUT** “it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean” (Rom. 14:14). Paul allowed this diversity of opinion, but refused to let one camp judge another because salvation was not at issue. No one is saved by any work, especially diet!

Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

In writing the Galatians, Paul was quick to explain that circumcision was not some badge that brought special blessing. It was a part of the Law that was of no use in justifying one before God. “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law” (Gal. 5:3). These were not people found in Christ! Paul continues his train of thought adding that, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal. 3:4).

This emphasis in Galatians is repeated over and over. The thrust of the letter is Paul’s teaching that a Gentile is not required to become a law abiding Jew in order to be a Christian. Paul asked the Galatian whether they (Jew or Gentile) received “the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:2). Later, Paul adds that, “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18).

The Law was not without purpose. But Paul knew that he was living in a different covenant period of history than the Mosaic covenant of Sinai. Jeremiah had prophesied that:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after

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those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:31-33).

Paul had lived to see that day. Paul taught a people under the new covenant that God was writing upon their hearts, not upon the stones of Sinai. While the Old Covenant set apart the covenanted people of God with outward rituals of circumcision, diet, and Sabbath worship, the new covenant was in the heart. It was a covenant of Spirit. This new covenant with the law in the heart produced true fruits of righteousness.

The Law taught the believer holiness, but it did so as a fruit of the working Holy Spirit, not an outward command. Paul explained it as fruit of the Spirit, apart from any demands of the Law:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

Notwithstanding this personal life in the Spirit's grip, Paul still goes to the Law to help the believing church understand morality and proper behavior. To the Galatians, he pointed out the message of the Law's morality, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). Similarly, if we read Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, then we see Paul going back to the Torah Law constantly to give moral answers to the questions asked.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses the Law to justify payment of ministers:

Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned?" (1 Cor. 9:8-9).

While the Law was never intended to provide for one's righteous standing before God, it did serve a purpose of revealing sin as sin. Paul explained that, "if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (Rom. 7:7). What is more, the Law reveals the great insidious nature of sin's grip on the fallen man. As humanity is confronted by God's commands in the Law, some actually begin to think of additional sinning! Paul explained this also in Romans 7:

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, *seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness*" (Rom. 7:7-8).

In this sense, we have the Law playing a role in the new covenant similar to a role it played in the old covenant. In the old covenant, the rules of the Law gave Israel a unique status in the world. It stood out in outwardly marks like diet, circumcision, and Sabbath keeping. In the New Covenant, the people of God also stand out from the world, but not by such outward rituals. The people of God stand out by true deeds of love and fruits of the Spirit. This is a holiness that we learn from the Law, but have through the Spirit.

Paul uses a word to the Galatians that helps provide this point. Paul explains that the Law served as a “guardian” (ESV). Galatians 3:24 states:

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

The word translated “guardian” is the Greek *paidagogos* (παιδαγωγος) (literally, a "child bringer"). In Paul’s world, a pedagogue was a tutor, a caretaker, a guardian of children. It was a pedagogue’s role to bring a child up, teach a child manners and behavior, and get a child to and from school. That was a function Paul assigned to the Law. The Law was the believer’s pedagogue. It taught holiness, righteousness, and manners! It also brought us to the feet of the Savior. The pedagogue’s function was a temporary one, for as the believer came to Christ, the believer no longer needed the guardian. As Paul put it,

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal. 3:25).

In Romans 10:4 Paul put it this way:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Finally, we should note that the entire Torah fulfilled a function of pointing to Jesus. This is inherent in Paul’s example of the pedagogue, but Paul makes it clear in other places as well. We can remember from our lessons on the life of Paul the history Luke recounted in Acts 28. While Paul was under guard in Rome (house arrest), Paul reasoned daily with the Jews about Jesus. Luke explained that Paul did so from the Torah:

From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Here is the law in the life of the believer. It is not a source of Jewish ritual. It is not a source of salvation. It does not convert Gentiles into Jews. It teaches morality, it brings conviction of sin, of the need for a Savior and it then brings us to the Savior.

Now we ask, what does Paul say about the function of the Law in the life of the church?

2. Law and the Church.

The Law is NOT:	The Law is:
1. The Law is not an instruction booklet for New Testament worship of the church.	1. The Law is a source for the teachings and priorities of the Church
2. The Law does not provide the structure and roles of authority for the Church.	2. The Law teaches holiness which will set apart the Church from the world.
3. The Church is not an “ethnic” Israel.	3. The Law does not stop inclusion of Gentiles into God’s kingdom.
	4. The Law’s promises to Israel find fulfillment in the church.

The church is the community of believers. We teach and write here of the true church belonging to Christ. We are not writing of any denomination or sect. We simply mean the people belonging to God in Christ, as they exist throughout time since the death and resurrection of Jesus, regardless of the name they have on the building where they worship.

As such, much of what we have written about the individual believer applies in a cumulative fashion to the church. We will not rehash the texts in support of these points, but the points themselves bear repeating within the context of the church.

First, we should note that the Torah was not a manual for church worship. The festivals, the keeping of Holy Days, and the sacrifices called for under the old covenant do not have any place before Paul’s teaching of the church’s worship. These festivals and rules had their place in teaching and training in matters of the heart and morality, but they have no merit in presenting the believer before God. In like manner, they are not the way of the church. The church can receive and use the holiness and priorities of the rules set out in the covenant, but the church worships the risen Savior. The church worships in Spirit and truth.

That said, we should note two ways where we may draw an exception in the teachings and life of Paul. First, Paul does instruct the church to sing the Psalms in worship (We acknowledge that the Psalms are not part of the Old Testament division typically called the “Law” or Torah)

In Ephesians and Colossians, Paul told the church to address one another with “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Second, we note that Paul did continue to worship as a Jew at times. In Acts, we read of Paul going into synagogues participating in the worship and even leading as part of the teaching in the service. Likewise we have Paul going into the temple as a part of his worship. This was something Paul did as a Jew. It was never something Paul imposed upon Gentiles. It fit well into his explanation that:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law (1 Cor. 9:20).

For Paul, the law was never to be used to exclude Gentiles from the Church was the body of Christ, and it included all people who belonged to Christ. Paul does teach that the promises of Israel were promises that apply to the full Israel in a spiritual sense rather than an ethnic sense. So, Paul will cite to the children of Abraham by faith rather than the genetic offspring as the ones who properly receive the promises of God. Paul said in Romans 4:13-14:

The promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

The promises to Abraham find fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus is the true and full, the obedient Israel. In Jesus, the church, whether Jew or Gentile, inherits the promises made complete in the Savior.

In the church, then, we have in the Law lessons that educate and teach, directing us to our Lord. We have promises that rightly belong to all believers. We are not looking to the old covenant rules for worship rituals, but for principles and teaching that help guide our worship in spirit and truth.

3. Law and Society

The Law is NOT:	The Law is:
1. The Law is not what Paul pushed for in government. 2. The Law was not Paul’s blueprint for social structures.	1. The Law was the proper influence on values for Christians. 2. Christians take the values God placed in the Law and apply to

3. The Law was not Paul's blueprint for the national economy	all aspects of life, including interacting with governmental authorities.
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We might find it interesting that Paul does not ever write that the church should seek to bind the Law upon the government. Paul teaches the church to pray for the governing officials. As Paul tells Timothy to pray for everyone, he specifies:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, *for kings and all who are in high positions*, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Interestingly, the point of Paul's prayer there is not that the government might become more godly, but rather that the government might make for a peaceful and quiet, godly life for the church.

Similarly, Paul never asserts that government should be pushed or modeled after any aspect of the Law. Paul writes in his culture, and so we read of his concerns over the actions of slaves and masters, as well as the social institutions of the day. But, Paul does not send the Christians into the secular arena for their problems or solutions. Paul tells the Corinthians to avoid the secular courts in their internal disputes:

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? (1 Cor. 6:1).

Paul never asserts the nationalistic goal of Israel that God will set up his holy kingdom upon this earth in some human government. Paul explains that the kingdom of God awaits a new heaven and a new earth. (1 Cor. 15:50ff).

We do not find Paul teaching that God would heal the land of the Romans, the Jews, the Greeks, or any other peoples if they would simply turn their collective hearts to God. 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 provides a promise that God gave to Solomon after dedication of the Temple. The language is oft quoted today:

I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Is it fair for America (or any other country) to take that promise of famine relief for Israel and apply it to the moral, economic, or weather induced issues facing such countries? What does Paul say?

In truth, Paul does not directly answer this question. We do not have Paul speaking on the issue at all. Paul does say to subject ourselves to the governing authorities (“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Rom.13:1). In this same sense, Paul tells the believers to pay their taxes (Rom. 13:6-7).

This passage does bring up a sensible question in countries that are democratically based (something that did not exist in the time of Paul). America, as an example, is actually a government *of the people by the people*. As such, the people (we the voters!) are the governing authorities. Those that hold government office do so on our behalf. That is why, in America, they are called “public servants.” Now, we must readily confess that all elected officials do not necessarily always remember the truth of this! But, it is important as we consider Paul’s teaching.

For as a democracy, we the people have responsibilities to vote, participating as our part of government. It is here, as participants, that we fall under Paul’s guidelines of doing everything to God’s glory. Of course, Paul did not contemplate our government, but we are not left without good instructions!

Where does this leave the law for governments? Are governments to follow the morality of the law? Should the criminal penalties line up? Do we demand an eye for an eye? Is the death penalty appropriate? If so, is it appropriate for the same crimes? Paul does not give us these answers. They need the prayerful consideration of believers, and are worthy of more study time than we get as we explore Paul’s theology!

NEXT WEEK

Next, we take a one-week recess to answer questions that have come up in class over the things taught thus far! So, bring your questions (and your appetites for food) to our breakfast next week!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”* Matt. 5:17.

All of our points return to Jesus. There is a reason Paul was able to tell the Corinthians of his resolution to know nothing among them but Christ, and him crucified. When it all boils down, the core of faith is Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Savior. Jesus has not abolished the Law. Jesus has fulfilled it. He lived it without error. He died under it for the sins of all others. Yet Jesus was resurrected in righteousness and ushered in his new covenant. Praise God for Jesus crucified. Embrace him tight! He is the answer, in some way or another, to all life's questions.

2. *“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”* (Rom. 6:15).

Holiness. You and I are blessed to have the opportunity to walk in it. Empowered by the Spirit, released from the bondage of sin, we can daily grow in the Spirit's fruit and see God's plans unfold before our eyes. What an honor! How cool! Are we walking in that? Is holiness our priority? Do we stand out from the unsaved by the way we live our lives?

3. *“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”* (Rom. 7:12).

Just because we do not live under the law's bondage, does not mean the law has no role in our lives. We never want to abuse the law by giving it power it should not have. It does not save us. It never has; it never will. It helps us understand how to live. It shows us our Savior. But should we not relegate it to history as unimportant for today. We learn from it individually, as a church, and as a society. Teach us, O Lord. May his Law be in our mediation!