

The Law/Gospel Contrast

Themes Protestant Reformation

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This morning I'd like us to continue our study of some of the themes of the Protestant Reformation and we've already seen several of the themes of the Reformation. We looked at the doctrine of the Bible alone, or Sola Scriptura. The Bible itself teaches that the Bible is the sufficient revelation, special revelation of God to men. We've seen the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Sola Fide, that we are not justified or acceptable before God on the basis of our works but only on the basis of Christ's works received by faith alone. We've seen the doctrine of Christ alone, that the Lord Jesus chooses us; that he redeems us in his blood and righteousness; that he is the center of our entire Christian faith. And we've also seen various other themes and we looked even at the doctrine of the law and the Gospel and of assurance of salvation last week. So this week, what I'd like us to do is to see that really an underlying structure in the Reformation was an understanding of how the whole Bible is built on this distinction between the law and the Gospel.

So I would like us to turn this morning to Hebrews 12 which is a key part of the book of Hebrews. It's a turning point to the application from all the doctrine that was taught earlier in the book of Hebrews, and the heirs of the Protestant Reformation understood that what Hebrews 12 is talking about is the nature of the Scriptures and the distinction between the law and the Gospel. So to understand this, we need to understand the problem that was underlying this book of Hebrews, that the author of Hebrews was addressing, that there were people in this church, maybe Rome, maybe it was in Jerusalem, scholars don't know, but the author of Hebrews wrote this sermon, it was actually a sermon not a letter, to this church warning them not to go back to the law, to Judaism, for their righteousness before God. Warning them, "Do not put yourself under the law as a way of salvation, under the old sacrificial system, under any of the law of God because you're not under law but under grace. You're not under the law, you're under the Gospel." So they were a apostatizing or leaving Christ to go back to Judaism and the author of Hebrews is saying, "Don't do that. Christ is better. He is superior to the old covenant system and he's superior to the law itself as a way of salvation."

So let's look here at this law/Gospel contrast in Hebrews 12, beginning in verse 18. Hebrews 12:18. It says,

18 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly [or church] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

Let's go to him in prayer.

God, we come to you so grateful that Jesus fulfilled all the terms of the law as a covenant, earning salvation in our place, satisfying your justice, fulfilling all righteousness as our substitute and as our mediator, that we don't come to Mount Sinai but that we come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem where Christ is, to his blood and his righteousness poured out for us; that we come to his priesthood and his mediation that we could be reconciled to a holy God who hates our sin but who in Christ forgives every single sin we commit and accepts us and promises us life eternal and gives us the Holy Spirit and every spiritual blessing that we might live for his glory in this world while we yet live, and in the next world while we live forever. We pray that you would help us to understand your word, but more than that, Lord, we know your word is a means of grace to point us to Jesus that we would see Christ more fully this morning, and that seeing him we would love him and worship him and that you would be honored and pleased. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, before getting into this text, I want to show you how important this is, that this law/Gospel contrast is essential to understanding the Bible and the law/Gospel contrast is not a contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant. That's not the contrast that's mentioned here and the big mistake people think is that in the Old Testament people are saved by law and in the New Testament people are saved by grace. That's false. That's not what the Bible teaches and we can see that here in this passage because in Hebrews 12 in the same old covenant, there are two mountains. The old covenant itself had two different mountains: one was Mount Sinai, a figure of the law; and one was Mount Zion, a figure or a picture of the Gospel. So the old covenant itself had a shadow of both the law and the Gospel. It was an echo of the original covenant of works and it was an anticipation of the coming new covenant of grace in Jesus. So Mount Sinai looked back, and Mount Zion looks forward, and both preached the law and the Gospel.

So we see that there is a law/Gospel contrast in the time of Moses but we need to see that this law/Gospel contrast isn't just in Moses, it goes back further. So if we go back to the time of Abraham, we see that it's there too, and those of you who are in Sunday school heard this passage, but flip back with me to Galatians 4:22 for just a moment and we'll see these two covenantx even in the time of Abraham, a law covenant and a Gospel covenant, a covenant of the flesh and a covenant of promise. Here Paul says, "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise." So you hear the distinctions: we have slave and free, flesh and promise. Then it says, "Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants." Two covenants in the time of Abraham. "One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem," that is, the Jerusalem of the Jews of that day, the Jerusalem that was enslaved by Pharisaism, the Jerusalem that was trying to keep the law for their acceptance before God. But then it goes on and it says, "for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother." So two covenants: one is a covenant of works and law, and the other is a covenant of grace and freedom from the condemnation of the law.

So there we've already seen there was a law/Gospel contrast in the time of Moses, but here we see that there is a law/Gospel contrast before Moses in the time of Abraham. Two covenants. We could go back even further all the way to the garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, right after the fall, we would see that God cursed Satan and his seed. That's one line or one covenant, but God promised to bless the seed of the woman and all who are in him. That's another covenant, another line, the line of promise. So in Genesis 3 we see a law covenant that condemns the serpent and his seed, and we see a Gospel covenant of grace through the seed of the woman. Now here's the point: right after the fall, the Old Testament has this law/Gospel contrast running through it, that there is a covenant of works in Adam that condemns all unbelievers, and there is a covenant of grace in Christ that justifies all who belong to him.

This is the structure of the whole Old Testament, but it doesn't end in the Old Testament. If we go forward to the New Testament, we'll see it there as well. Listen to a few verses. In Romans chapters 1 to 3, so now we're in the New Testament in the book of Romans, in Romans 1 to 3, Paul says that we have all sinned and that no one can be justified on the basis of the law. Romans 3:19 says, "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." Now listen, "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." So the law as a covenant of works cannot save you. On your very best day, on your most prayerful day, on the day in which Christ is most full in your mind and your heart, there is enough sin in you too damn you to hell forever. You can never be good enough for God on the basis of your works. The standard is perfect. You can't achieve that because you're a sinner. God's holy law means you are condemned not justified. You can never be saved based on your works.

So that's the law in the book of Romans, but there is a contrast with the Gospel in the book of Romans as well. In chapters 3 to 5 in Romans, we see the Gospel and what Paul says is that we are justified on the basis of an alien righteousness. Not our own righteousness, not our own works of obedience to God's law, but Christ's righteousness. His obedience to God's law is counted or credited to us in the new covenant. Listen to Romans 4:5 and 6, here's the Gospel, "And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works." Now that's good news. That is wonderful news. That is such grace. But to the one who does not work but just trusts in Jesus, God counts righteousness to you apart from works. It's a free gift of his love and mercy toward you. What a beautiful sound that is in the word of God, the Gospel of Jesus; the grace that he obeys the law in your place as a substitute, he pays it's penalty, he earns its blessing, and if you trust in him, you have his righteousness and you live forever.

So that's Romans 1 through 4 and 5, and when we get to Romans 6, Paul applies this law/Gospel contrast as the key to growing in holiness and here's what he says in Romans 6:14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, because you are not under law but grace." Do you hear the contrast? Sin can't dominate you because you're not under law but under grace. That means that in Jesus you are not under the law as a covenant of works. If you were, that would cause sin to dominate you. Do you know how? If you try to work for your relationship with God, you think you can obey God enough to do it and your conscience is numb enough and seared enough to believe you actually are acceptable, you will become proud. You will become a self-righteous Pharisee and your pride will be a horrible sin before God and it will result in all kinds of other sins, and sin will dominate you. If you think that you can obey God's law to be justified, you will be proud and sin will have dominion over you.

But other people if they are living under the law, they don't become proud, they become depressed because they have tender consciences and they realize that they cannot do what the law requires, but they think they should or they think they have to. So they strive and they strive for God to accept them and they think, "If I could just repent better or do more, then God would love me." They still think they need to work and eventually they become so depressed realizing they can't measure up to God's standard, they just quit and they say, "I don't want any of it because I can't do this. I can't be what God requires me to be so I'm stopping. I'm rejecting it all." And they give themselves over to sin and sin has dominion over them.

If you're under law, sin has dominion over you but Romans 6:14 says that you're not under law as a covenant, you're under grace. You're under grace as a way to life and under grace God accepts you freely not because of what you do but only because of what he did in Christ; that Christ's righteousness is imputed to you. That means there is no reason for pride because if you are acceptable before God not for what you do but because of what Jesus did, you're not going to be proud the more you understand that. And it also means there is no reason to be depressed because if Christ fulfilled the

righteous standard of God and has given you himself and life and every spiritual blessing, you have all things, what is there to be depressed about in terms of the law and salvation?

So sin has no dominion over you because you're not under law but under grace, and under grace, you come to understand more and more the love of God for you; that he will never turn away from you; he'll never leave you or forsake you; he'll never cast you off. And under grace you'll see that God calls you to learn obedience not to earn salvation or blessing in terms of salvation from him, but rather to learn obedience as a way to express love to the God who bought you and to learn to enjoy him more and more in this world and to bring honor and glory to him. So you do good works as a Christian to walk in your relationship with God. Sin won't have dominion over you because you're not under law but under grace. You will repent of your sin if you are not under law but under grace and this great Gospel of the covenant of grace fills believers with joy and gratitude and assurance and Jesus saves, Jesus fuels your obedience.

In his work on the grace of Christ, Augustine said this, this is an old church father back in the 400's and he was talking about this law/Gospel distinction and here's what he said, "Thus the law and grace are so different that the law is not only useless but actually an obstacle in many ways unless grace exists. The law commands more than it liberates. It diagnoses illness but it does not cure. Indeed, far from healing the infirmity, the law actually makes it worse in order to move a person to seek the medicine of grace." So the law can't save you. The law can't make you right before God. It only convicts you and shows you your need so you are drawn out of yourself to Jesus, to cast yourself upon him and upon his mercy, and to receive his goodness.

So turn back to Hebrews 12 and we'll see that this is just what this author is teaching, this law/Gospel distinction. Hebrews 12, beginning in verse 18, and this starts with the law of God at Mount Sinai and it's talking about the law as a covenant, as a way to life. So Mount Sinai is a picture of the original covenant of works, "Do this and live. If you do this perfectly, you'll live forever." But that's a killing word because you can't obey God perfectly to live forever. You can't do it so that law is killing.

Look at verse 18 which starts with the law of Mount Sinai. It says, "For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest." Now, this word "for" is a grounding word, and what this is saying is all of chapter 12 if we were to read it, you'd see it's about running the race that as Christians, what are we called to do? Run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus. Now this passage shows us how we can run and you don't run the race looking to Jesus on the basis of the law.

Why should you run the race of faith in Christ? Verse 12 says because you have not come to the law as a covenant of works. There is a metaphor all through chapter 12 that you're being trained by a coach to run a race. What would you do if your trainer tried to train you with threats of the law? How would that affect you? Imagine your running coach talking to you and this is all he said to you, "If you don't get it right, you're doomed. If you make just one mistake, you're out forever. Everything depends on you never stumbling even once." And that's his whole way of talking to you? That's the law as a

covenant. It only condemns. It shows your inadequacy and your inability to save yourself but verse 18 says for you have not come to the law, you have not come to darkness and gloom and a tempest. The law/covenant only pronounces gloom and darkness. There is no power of salvation in the law as a covenant.

Just think what it would have been like for the Israelites to stand at the foot of Mount Sinai. So imagine yourself there in the desert and you're before Mount Sinai when God gives the 10 Commandments and look at what verse 19 says about it, it says, "and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them." So you are standing there at the foot of the mountain and the mountain is on fire. So imagine a blazing fire on this mountain, billows of black smoke wrapping the mountain and the wind is blowing in your direction. You can smell the smoke and it's getting in your eyes and it's clouding your vision and you're coughing. Billows of smoke, foreboding, dark, gloomy. It says there is a tempest or wind blowing so the wind is blowing the smoke, and you see flashes of lightning. You can feel the deep rumbling thunder. Have you ever felt thunder? Loud claps of thunder, you feel them in your body, the vibrations from them. That's what this was like and then in the midst of all of that, the fire, the smoke, the wind, the thunder, there was a loud trumpet blast. This was not a human trumpet. No man blew this trumpet. This is a divine trumpet, a supernatural trumpet, and it's an eerie and strange sound. This is not a joyful noise. It's unwelcoming. It makes you feel how different God is from you. He is holy. You're not holy and this trumpet is a terribly frightening noise.

And the sound of the trumpet, we could imagine, gets louder and louder until it's almost unbearable. It drowns out every other noise. No one can hear anyone else talking. No one can hear anything but this strange trumpet sound and the mountain is on fire and there is thunder and there is lightning, and then the trumpet stops and for just a second it's completely silent because no one is talking, no one is moving. Everyone is still and it's silent and then a deep, powerful, booming voice comes forth from the mountain and verse 20 says here's what that voice says, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." If a beast is to be killed for touching the mountain, it is not even made in the image of God, not even a sinner, a beast is not a sinner, he's cursed but he doesn't sin because he's not a moral agent, imagine what would happen if a human touched that mountain. God is holy. He is utterly unapproachable in his holiness, high and holy and lifted above us.

The law as a covenant is a barrier. You cannot get through it. You may not approach this mountain. There is no way to draw near to God through his law as a covenant for sinners. You cannot do it. You can't do what the law requires. You're absolutely separated from him and if even a beast touches a mountain, it will die. If you approach the mountain, you will die eternally. The law covenant is not welcoming and verse 20 says that the people got the message. It says, "they could not endure the order that was given." Now, that word "could not endure" literally means that it was a crushing order; that is, they couldn't stand up under it. That's the picture. They couldn't bear up under that order. It was like a heavy weight upon them that they couldn't hold.

They could not endure this order. All throughout the Bible when people encounter God in just a glimpse of his holiness, because if you see God in a full picture of his holiness, the Bible says you die. But some people got a glimpse and they didn't die but they all collapsed. They fell on their faces before him in his perfect holiness. They can't keep standing. They are laid out flat and all they can do is beg for mercy. That's what Isaiah did in the temple. He said, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips."

Even Moses was terrified. The Bible says he was a humble man, which means he was holy. It says he was the humblest of all men and Moses was terrified. He was probably the most godly of all the Israelites but in verse 21 it says, "Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I tremble with fear.'" Have you ever been so afraid that you shook uncontrollably? Terrified and you found yourself shaking and you couldn't control it? That's what's happening to Moses here. He was so full of fear he was shaking. When you grasp God's law as a covenant, the perfect holiness and justice of God, his goodness, his purity, and that you can't measure up to his standard and that what you deserve is death, you too will fear.

The law thunders and it terrifies, it lays you low, it shows you you are a sinner with no hope of obeying the law perfectly. God is holy, you are unholy. God is good, you are not good. "There is none good, not even one." God is great, you're not great. God is pure, you are impure in yourself. God is just, you are unjust in yourself and you can't hold up under it. You cannot bear up under this. You will not stand before God and that's the effect of the law as a covenant. It destroys you. There is no hope at all under the law as a covenant. None. But there is good news here. This doesn't stop with the law as a covenant. Verse 18 says it begins by speaking to these Christians and saying, "But you have not come to this mountain. You remember what the mountain was but you have not come to that mountain. It's not your mountain." If you're in Christ, a different mountain is yours.

The law is good, the law is holy, the law is spiritual, but it's not your mountain. You have come to Mount Zion. This is the Gospel. Mount Zion is where, you remember Mount Zion was where the temple was. It is the place of the priesthood and what do priests do? They offer sacrifices for the sins of the people and they pray. This is a mountain that pictured Jesus who offers the sacrifice of himself and he prays for you if you are his.

Verse 22 says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." The picture here, imagine not looking at Sinai as though you are in the wilderness but gazing up at the heavenly city. That's what you're doing now. Imagine that the roof opened here and somehow we could see up into heaven. That's what this is about. This picture, Mount Zion is a picture of the heavenly Jerusalem where Christ is, and notice that it says you who belong to Jesus, have come there. It means you're not trying to get there still. It's actually already yours. If you belong to Jesus, this is your possession. The saints in heaven, they are there already in their spirits and they are experience it more than you but they don't own it more than you own it. They are more happy but not more secure.

Heaven is yours now because of the blood and the righteousness of Jesus. You have come to the city. You have arrived there. Just imagine looking up into this heavenly temple and what do you see? You see Christ there as your High Priest and you know he is sitting, the Bible says. In the temple of the Old Testament, there was no chair. The priest never sat because their work was never done. They constantly offered sacrifices. They were always working. But Jesus has done his work. It's completely finished. He said on the cross when he died, "It is finished!" Tetelestai, it's done and now he sits and prays. That's all he's doing, he is sitting and praying. Sitting and praying for you. No work left for Jesus to do and he's saying, "Father, forgive them." Every time one of his own sins, he says, "Father, forgive them," even when you don't know that you've sinned. Even when you don't think about the fact that you're sinning, he prays for you, "Father, forgive them. Father, strengthen them. Father, help them to repent." And all of his prayers are answered

And as you keep looking into the courts of heaven, this says you see "innumerable angels in festal gathering." That means they are dressed for a royal festival. So imagine angels beautifully dressed, formal, and they are all there, masses of them as you look up, and this is a welcoming party for you. They are looking down upon you, waiting for you to join them there in heaven, inviting you to join them in worshipping the Lord of grace who saved you from your sins. Then verse 23 says that if you are in Christ, if you belong to him, that you have come "to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect." Now this word "firstborn" is about you, beloved. If you are joined to Jesus, you're firstborn because Christ is the only begotten Son of God and in him all of you are only begotten sons of God. You have the same title. It's the gift of the Gospel.

A firstborn son in historical terms is the one who has the right to a double portion of the inheritance and if you have Christ, you have a title to everything he has a title to, which means everything that belongs to God and God himself, all of it is yours. And it's not because you earned it, it's not because you ran so well, it's not because you kept the law or satisfied God's justice or you merited anything, it's only because you're a firstborn; because you are born into it, because you have been joined to Jesus who is the firstborn, and because you have been born again by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, you have a title to the whole inheritance of the new heavens and the new earth and God himself, and everything that belongs to Jesus is yours.

And what is this? Just think about it. It's life everlasting. Into the ages. Eternity to eternity fellowship with God forever. Free access to the Father. Children who dwell in the home have free access to their parents, you have free access to the Father in heaven. You have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You have the love of God that never changes or fades. You have the presence of God in your heart, that he will be present with you in eternity. You have the possession of heaven. You have the Gospel.

You have a title to life and to all things and all this is because you are a firstborn child of God, and because of this, it means you are beloved of the Father. He's a good Father. Not all earthly fathers are good fathers and so sometimes this doesn't translate to people, but God the Father is a good Father, and what that means is he loves you with a Father's love

to do you good, to strengthen you, to assure you, to care for you, to preserve you, and to get you all the way to glory. You are a firstborn. Your heavenly Father is a good gift giving Father. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He gives good gifts. He wants you, he enjoys you in his presence. He welcomes you there. He wants you to know him more and to know his love for you more. He loves you. He enjoys you as a child. He made you just like he did on purpose and he redeemed you because he loves you and he is going to keep you forever.

So God the Father is the Father of all his firstborn and if you are in Jesus, you are a firstborn of God and you have a title to everything that Christ has and the Father loves you as a child. Then verse 23 says that we don't just come to God as a Father, as firstborns of the Father, but it says we come to God, "the judge of all." Now some people might read that and they think, "I'm not sure I want God to be my judge," and you don't, by the way. If you're not in Christ, this is a terrible thing, that you would meet God, your judge, who is against you, who will sentence you to an eternity of hell's condemnation. But in the covenant of grace, God the Father is also God your judge, and God the judge has been satisfied by Christ; that the justice of God is filled up because of what Jesus did. He died on the cross for all of your sins. He kept the law perfectly in your place to satisfy justice and that means there is no fear for you in God's judgment. You can actually look forward to judgment day. That's what 1 John says. We don't fear. We can look forward to judgment day, to God judging us. Your debts are paid in full. The judge is on your side. Your sins have been canceled through the blood of Jesus and God, the judge, declares you righteous and he looks at Jesus in your place and he declares you have a right to live forever because Christ has a right to live forever.

Your judge is completely satisfied with Christ's work on your behalf and so you're looking into heaven and there you see you've already come there. Heaven is your possession and you continue looking up into heaven and you see that God is your Father and you are firstborn, and you see the angels in festal gathering, and you see God as your judge and he is a good judge, a satisfied judge, and you continue to look up into the heavenly city and verse 24 says that we have come "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." Now, Jesus is mentioned here last not because he is least but because he is the greatest. This is the climax. All the other things are wonderful and glorious and beautiful and heart strengthening about heaven, but we have come to Jesus who is the center of it all, the hope of heaven, the reason we enter into heaven and the one with whom we have communion in heaven. He is the glory of heaven, the one seated on the throne and the center of heaven from which the river of life flows. And we worship him. We know him. We know his love and his goodness.

It says he is the mediator of this new covenant. Do you know what a mediator is? He reconciles or tries to, in our world, tries to reconcile two parties. Jesus actually does it. He reconciles us, brings us together, that God the Father, God the judge has a complaint against us but he's the mediator. And how does he mediate? He pays our debt. He is our surety. He satisfies the Father's complaint by accomplishing it fully. None of our complaints are even legitimate. It's really a one-sided conflict. God is in conflict with us.

We have no objection that this is legitimate with God, and so we need a mediator to satisfy God, the party of God.

And Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant and he pays our debt and reconciles us to God. As a substitute in our place, he pays the price, and then it says Christ's "sprinkled blood speaks a better word than Abel." Have you ever thought about what Abel's blood might say? Remember Cain murdered Abel and Abel's blood is spilled onto the ground. That blood of Abel cries out, "Murderer!" It's an accusatory blood. The blood of Abel proves that he was slaughtered by his brother. It's a curse. The blood of Abel is a a cursed blood. It cries out against your sin and says, "You too are murderers." That's the law covenant but the blood of Jesus, the sprinkled blood of Jesus says there is no condemnation. That's what his blood says. It speaks a better word than the condemnation of the law. Christ's blood says, "Grace. Forgiveness. Love."

And so when we look up into heaven, we see innumerable angels welcoming us. We see God the Father, we see God the judge, and we see Jesus whose blood cries out, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and these are powerful reasons to run this race, to stay on Christ and not look away from him, to hold fast to him and to endure in him.

So how should we think about this for our lives? How should we live in light of this great covenant of grace? There are many ways we could think about this but I just want to give you a couple. First, I would urge you to think about the difference between the law as a covenant and the Gospel as a covenant as you run the Christian race. Now here's what I mean. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, I think, is the one who said this but I think he said, "You are the most influential person in your life because you talk to yourself more than anyone else." You tell yourself things about yourself and are you preaching the law as a covenant to yourself or are you preaching the Gospel as a covenant to yourself? Which is it?

Some Christians are tempted to and do talk to themselves like they are still under the law as a way to be saved. They say things like this to themselves, "If I only loved Jesus more, I'd be more like him. If I really believed the Bible, I'd believe it better and I would do more of what it says. I would read it more. I try so hard to resist that sin but then I do it again and again. I can't ever seem to overcome it. I'm a failure." And that's what they preach to themselves, that's the recording in their minds. "If I really loved Jesus, I would love others more." And by the way, the law is true, isn't it? But if you preach that to yourself and you condemn yourself in it, you're preaching the law and the guilt of the law, what is that? That's darkness and gloom and a tempest.

The law points out our flaws and it condemns us and the law is good and holy, but the law's condemnation is an opportunity to remember the Gospel, an opportunity to remember the work of Jesus in the Gospel. And you have come to Mount Zion so listen, the law covenant says, "Love Jesus more and then God will love you more," but the Gospel says this, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins," and you fall on your face and you worship him. The law as a covenant says, "Fight your sin more and then God will justify you if you

obey him," but the Gospel says, "He made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And you rejoice with great joy and gladness. Christ is your righteousness before God. The law covenant says, "You should love God's people more and God will accept you," but the Gospel says that, "Christ loved the church and he gave himself up for her," and you thank God that he loves his people perfectly even when you don't.

And Christ's perfect love counts in your place for your justification, and when we think on the Gospel, here's what it does: it wins our hearts to him. To know his love and to love him back, and loving him, we have strength to run and to endure and do you know what will happen? It must happen but it will, you will repent of your sin and you will keep his commandments not perfectly but you will learn from Jesus more and more how to love God and love men and keep his commandments from a heart of gratitude and joy in the one who has bought you. Not one who stands over you to condemn you or to enslave you or to berate you or humiliate you, but one who celebrates you as his child and wants to give you and will give you every good grace, including God himself. And he says, "Now learn from Jesus how to walk in the way of love so that you can enjoy more fellowship with me and that you can bring glory to me in this world."

Romans 6:14 says sin will have no dominion over you because you are not under law but under grace and so first think about the Gospel as fuel for your Christian life. How are you talking to yourself? Do you talk to yourself with words of condemnation? Maybe even there is someone in your life who does that, talks to you, condemning you a lot, but God preaches the Gospel to you through Christ and you need to preach the Gospel to yourself and believe and repent of your sin.

Secondly, consider an example of a man who feels defeated. His life isn't what he wants it to be and he feels discouraged. Things aren't like he wants them to be at home. He wants to be a better husband. He wants to love his wife more. He wants to lead and to encourage her, and to some extent he does those things, but he sees so many failures as a husband. He also wants to be a better dad than he is. He does spend time with his kids but he sees so many shortcomings and he feels the weight of the fact that his time with his kids is short and he sees that he misses too many opportunities. And he wants to be more faithful in his witness to others at church and in the world and in the workplace, and he thinks, "If I just loved people more, I would be more faithful than I am. If I just believed more, I would invest myself more into other people. If I were just more loving, I would honor Christ more." And when he lets his mind linger on all of his failures and he becomes discouraged, but this man also remembers, though, to think on Christ and the Gospel and he thinks about how he has already come to Mount Zion, that heaven is his. And when he thinks about his imperfections as a husband, as a father, he remembers a few things: he remembers that Christ bled and died for his sins; that Jesus is the perfect bridegroom; that the heavenly Father is the perfect Father; and he remembers that Christ loves his family more than he does and he thinks of the guilt of his sin and he remembers, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and now he learns from Jesus how to love his wife more and love his children more because Christ has first loved him. We love because he first loved us. When you know the love and the

mercy and the goodness and the grace of God toward you, a sinner, you will love him and you'll have a heart full of gratitude and you'll repent of your sin and you'll treat others and learn to treat others more and more the way you've been treated, serving them, loving them, protecting them, caring for them. And he thinks on all these wonderful Gospel truths and this man is strengthened to run. These promises don't make him lazy, they strengthen him to love, to fear God and keep his commandments.

May I ask you today how is your heart? The Gospel is that Christ died for sinners and if you're in him, then he died in your place. He kept the law in your place. He mediates for you. You are enrolled in heaven based on his blood and righteousness alone. That's the Gospel of Zion and if you come to Zion, you won't be able to help but to love Jesus from the heart, not perfectly but truly, and you will learn more and more how. The Gospel wins your heart, not the law covenant. And you will love Jesus because he first loved you and Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Let's go to him in prayer.