

Laying Hold of The Hand of God Part 2

Ezra-Nehemiah

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ezra 7. We are continuing a message we began last week, actually a two-part message that we entitled "Laying Hold of The Hand of God." Laying hold of the hand of God. So we started last time and covered the first part of this subject, laying hold of the hand of God, part 2. We draw this from the fact that a key phrase or actually clause in the repeated passage, repeated in these two chapters, chapters 7 and 8 of Ezra, is the phrase "the hand of God." The hand of God was upon him, three times in chapter 7 the text says, "The hand of God was upon Ezra, was upon him, was upon him, was upon me," once he says in the first person. Three times it says in chapter 7, "The hand of God upon him." Three times in chapter 8 it speaks of the hand of God upon the people of God in general. The hand of God upon us. The hand of God upon them. And so we see that Ezra was a man whose hand, who had God's hand upon him and because God's hand was upon him, God's hand was ministering through him to others and was upon those around him. The hand of God is an important concept in the Scripture. It speaks of the power of God, the mighty accomplishing power of God.

1 Peter 5:6, "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you." We find this phrase first used in the book of Exodus. It's used a number of times in the book of Exodus. In Exodus 7, the Lord speaking to Moses says, "I will lay My hand upon Egypt. I will stretch out My hand upon Egypt and do great wonders and signs." So the hand of God being stretched out, the hand of God being active is his mighty power being made known. In fact, in chapter 13 of Exodus, three times Moses says to the people, "Remember that by a powerful hand the Lord brought you out of that place. By a powerful hand," he says then, "the Lord brought you out of Egypt." Third time, "By a powerful hand the Lord brought you out of the house of slavery."

So the hand of God is the power of God, the accomplishing power of God, and so what could be more wonderful, what is more necessary than having God's hand at work in our lives? And if it's at work in your life as Ezra, at work through your life to bless others. I mean, what areas of your life right now do you need God's hand at work? Where is the bondage in your life and my life that we need to be delivered from? In those around us that we love? Do we want to see God's hand at work in their lives to draw them out of the things that are binding them up in their Christian walk?

We have here before us an example that we can follow, that we can emulate. Ezra, truly a man of God, a man used mightily of God that we can be people now used by the Lord and this way it won't always be visible, of course, and in fact, the way that God worked through Ezra was not so visible miraculously, it wasn't like he was doing miracles but God, well, God was doing miracles but they weren't quite as sensational as other miracles we see in the Scriptures but they were no less glorious, no less real. And so if we want the Lord's hand at work in our lives, laying hold of the hand of God, if we want God's hand to be at work in our lives, we have before us a model, an example.

What we said last time was that Ezra had God's hand at work in his life, God's power was at work in his life. He was laying hold of the hand of God because Ezra had made his own agenda, he had dispensed with it and he made God's agenda his agenda. He made the priorities that God has his priorities. He redirected his whole life and centered it on God's agenda and in this way he exemplifies what can happen when we redirect our whole life and make God's agenda our agenda instead of trying to make him do what we want. Too often our prayers are that way, aren't they? We pray, "Lord," you know, essentially we pray, I was reading someone the other day talking about this in a book, he said, "We, our prayers are really kind of cowardly. We pray, 'Lord, make me more comfortable. Protect me from the things that would not be comfortable and if I'm uncomfortable now, promise me I will be comfortable soon.'" That that's what we pray rather than praying for the glory of God to be made known; for us to experience the wonder of his power and his goodness at work in our lives. That's because our agenda is clouding our vision. We need to get on God's agenda.

And what we see and just kind of a summary and help you as you look at this, that the focus for Ezra, the two things that he understood that were priorities for God that were the central realities that God wanted him to order his life on, there were two: the house of God and the law of God. That's what Ezra was committed to. God wanted him to be committed to the house of God, to the temple, to be restoring it, beautifying it. The purpose of his return was to beautify the temple. That was one of the main, that was one main focus that God was sending him back to do was to beautify the temple, to restore it, the house of God. We looked at this one last week. We saw that that needs to be our agenda, to restore and beautify the house of God, that is, to make worship a central focus in our lives, worship with the body of Christ, offering sacrifices. That's what we talked about last time. Ezra was committed to that through restoring temple worship to its rightful place in his own life and in the lives of the people of God around him.

So he had two priorities, I mean, two main issues that he was focused on: the house of God and the law of God. We're gonna see today, we're gonna look at the law of God, what it meant that the law of God was at the center of his life. This is what we see modeled for us. In fact, the phrase "the law of God" occurs seven times in the seventh chapter. We're gonna read most of the seventh chapter. We're gonna start reading at verse 6 and we'll read all the way to the end of the chapter. Ezra 7:6,

6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted

him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him. 7 Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. 10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

That's the secret of Ezra's life. He centered his life on the law of the Lord. That's why God's hand was upon him. Now we come to the letter that King Artaxerxes sent him. This is a pagan king to whom Ezra has gone before and requested something and God has moved his heart to basically tell Ezra to do what God's told him to do, to commit yourself to these two priorities: the house of God and the law of God. Look at how God makes this pagan king, this unbelieving king, moves his heart to command Ezra and the people to do exactly what God wants them to do.

Verse 11 of chapter 7,

11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: 12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now 13 I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand, 15 and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, 16 with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; 17 with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. 18 Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. 19 Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide for it from the royal treasury. 21 I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the provinces beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently, 22 even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine,

100 baths of oil, and salt as needed. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons. 24 We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God. 25 You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment." 27 Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the LORD my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

Let's pray and ask the Lord's blessing.

Our Father, we ask that You might now bless us by opening our eyes, opening the eyes of our minds and our hearts to see and understand wonderful things from Your law, to be brought to see ourselves and our sin and our need, and to be brought to see the glorious provision of Jesus Christ, His glorious sacrifice and the sufficiency of it for all that we need. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

So laying hold of the hand of God. We could read it as we read that passage, you could see the two realities that Ezra was charged by the king to do, to restore the house of God and to restore the law of God; that over and over those are the emphases, the house of God and the law of God. And so in reality what you and I need to make our priorities about are the house of God and the law of God.

Now the house of God for us doesn't mean this building itself, it means the people themselves. The New Testament makes clear that the temple has now been replaced. There is no temple in Jerusalem. It was destroyed in 70 AD and now the temple according to the Scriptures is the people of God who love Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2 makes this clear. You are, you come to him as a living stone. He's the foundation stone, the corner stone and you as you come to place your faith in Christ, you are a stone built upon that foundation, built into a spiritual house to offer up sacrifices and praises to God. 1 Corinthians 3:15, Paul says, "You are the temple of God." That's one of those plural "you's" in the Greek. It means you, plural, are the temple of God. He's speaking to the church at Corinth and he says, "You are the temple of God." And so we are the temple of God.

So if the house of God is going to be a priority in our lives, it means the people of God must be a priority. We must make corporate worship a priority, relationships in the body of Christ, the offering of sacrifices which we talked about last time, but we also must make the law of God a priority. We must see that this is what we're here to do. If you belong to Jesus Christ, your central work is the house of God and the law of God. That is what you're called to do. In a sense, you're called to beautify the house of God, you're a part of the house of God if you belong to Jesus truly, if you repented and placed your faith in Christ, you are part of the house of God, you're called, you and I are called to beautify the house of God really by using the law of God. So we're called to be committed to both of these realities, beautifying God's house through the use of God's law.

So we're committed to both. We're going to see that how do we do that? What's that really look like? We want to understand that particularly focusing on how the law of God being put at the center of our lives enables us to do that. Ezra had the law of God at the center of his life.

So there are two points this morning. They're the same as we had last week. The first main point is if we're going to put the law of God, how do we put the law of God at the center of our lives so that we can really be powerfully used by the Lord to beautify his temple, to be part of what he's doing? We need to realign our priorities. First of all, realign your priorities. That's the first point.

I mentioned a moment ago that the person who belongs to Jesus Christ, we have many different vocations and this is one of the things that was beautiful about the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation started under Martin Luther and Calvin and Zwingli, it recovered the nobility of work. That is, that every profession was now seen to be something good and noble because God made man to work. He made man, that we worked in the garden before sin entered the world. Man was put there to work. Man, male and female, to work. Work is noble and one of the things the Reformers saw was that every type of work is noble.

I remember reading about like an early billboard, you know, before they're not, I guess they're riding their wagons through town, there was some kind of billboard up that said in London, "These three men preach the Gospel in London every day." It was a picture of like a baker, a butcher and a cobbler. A guy who bakes bread, a guy who butchers meat, and a guy who makes shoes. These men preach the Gospel every day through their profession. They're going about their work, they're doing it with excellence, they're doing it honestly for the Lord but they're using that as a platform for what their real work is. Their real work is to further the kingdom of God, the Gospel. Everything else is secondary. That is the means, important they are, that they are the means to extending the kingdom of God. That's what we were created to do and if you're a believer, that's what you were recreated to do, the renewal that has happened.

So that's what Ezra is teaching us, this book is teaching us, that our priorities, that the reason God's hand is not at work in our lives is because these things aren't our priorities.

We're not really committed to the house of God like we need to be. We're not really committed to the law of God like we need to be and when we are, we will see God working because he's faithful to his promises. He won't necessarily do the things that we want him to do, he doesn't guarantee that. He will do the things that further his kingdom and bring glory to his name and the things that if we had any sense, we would want him to do more than anything else. Our problem is that we don't have any sense.

But the law of God, to make the law of God the center of your life, we have to realign our priorities. So we're looking at that, the law of God, putting it at the center of our lives. What does that mean? Well, first of all, let's just see how it's so clear that Ezra had done this. As we read in chapter 7, verse 6, he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses and he got all that the king requested, I mean he requested from the king because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. He was skilled in the law of Moses. The term "skilled" means he was quick; he could move around the word of God with ease and skill; he was very familiar with the Scriptures.

Verse 9 says again that he was able to bring the people in four months, this large number of people, large caravan that we saw in recent weeks, about \$175 million worth of gold and silver without any protection from Babylon to Jerusalem. No armed escort. It's like, you know, you see, I was driving the other day and I drove by one of those it wasn't a Brink's truck but it was one of those, Loomis, I think, you know, it's an armored truck. Whenever you see those at the grocery store, I always want to try to act very, I don't want to act strange at all. You know, you're afraid somebody is gonna come out and throw you down to the ground if you act like you linger at the back of the truck. You stop and take a call and suddenly you're....anyway. But I was driving by the guy and I was thinking about, you know, that's an armored truck. Well, this is like they took all that stuff and there was no armored truck. They're just sending the money down the road with, you know, just some people on wagons.

So the fact that they made this journey and were protected was evidence that the hand of God was at work. That's what he means in verse 9 when he says that. They came to Jerusalem because the good hand of his God was upon him. Why was the good hand of his God upon him? That key word in verse 10, "for." For. You could say because, because Ezra had set his heart, he had fixed his heart, he had established his heart to do three things: to study the law of the Lord and to practice it and to teach it. He had put this at the very center of his life, the law of the Lord. "I want to know it. I want to do it. And I want to share it." This was the secret of Ezra's usefulness. He had realigned his priorities. He had understood that the law of God was to be at the center of everything in his life.

It's interesting, the hand of God was upon him. It's interesting how the text uses the word "hand." The hand of God is upon him we saw three times in the chapter, right? But you also see Ezra has his hand is mentioned twice. In verse 14, the king says, "You were sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of God which is in your hand." Or in verse 25, "You, Ezra," still the king talking, "according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand." God's hand

was upon him because God's law was in his hand. When you make the law of God your food, then God empowers you to do his will.

So this says realign our priorities means that there's really two subpoints under this. I want to take this idea of making the law of God as a priority, I think there's two things we need to see about that Ezra did. So this is 1A and B. We're realigning priorities, A: my personal obedience to God's word is central, is my central work in the law of God. Now so if the law of God is to be at the center of my life, it's not just to study, it's to study it to practice it, to do it. It's not just to know it. It's not just to accept it. It's not to say even that I believe it. It's to live it. This is something that the Bible makes emphatically clear again and again and again and it's something with which I think the Hebrew mindset was different than our Western mindset. You can see this in the New Testament. The mindset of the Greco-Roman culture was already vastly different than the Hebrew mindset. In Hebrew there are actually words that are translated "obey" that mean "hear." It's like the Semantic range of the word "to hear" in many cases the range of meaning included "obey." In other words, to hear is to obey. If you don't obey, you really didn't hear. You see, for the Jewish mind, that's how they thought. To really attend to the law of God means to not just to hear it, it means to do it, and for the Greek and Roman mind, often just to think about it, to accept it intellectually was enough. Paul describes the Athenians who loved to sit around on Mars Hill and listen to new philosophies. "Hey, let's hear some more on this tomorrow. We'd like to hear you more on this. We just want to hear and the titillating ideas that you have." That's an unbiblical mindset. If it's truth, it's truth to be obeyed. It's truth to be lived and we all have to see how much we need to understand that.

Isn't it easy to hear something from God's word, to be challenged by it, to accept it, even to love it and delight in it, and yet not to do it. God help us. We have to set our hearts not just to study, we have to set our hearts, determine we're going to do it. This is what it means to make the word of God a priority, central in your life, to realign your priorities. My obedience, my personal obedience is the work I'm called to do in beautifying God's house. So the law of God, my obedience to the law of God. I'm putting the law of God at the center. I'm going to obey it. I'm going to make that my charge and this will beautify God's house.

It's interesting actually, the word "adorn" that we saw in verse 27, Ezra said, he breaks out in praise in verse 27 after the reading of the decree ends in verse 26. Then Ezra speaks and says, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD," that is, to beautify, to glorify the house of the Lord and he's glorifying the house of the Lord through all the silver and gold that's going but also through the obedience of the people, by giving him the authority to make sure that the law is kept. An interesting parallel concept is found in Titus 2:9-10. Titus there is exhorting different people in the church, older men, younger women, and he says at one point, "Slaves, be obedient to your masters," and he says, "Don't be pilfering but really working for your master in a way that seeks to bless him," and he says this, "so that in every way you may adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior," that even the way we act in situations where, you know, things aren't as just as

they should be, that the bigger issue is the Gospel, that Christians are defined by the fact that the bigger issue to us is always the Gospel, but the point is the way that you live can adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior. The way you live, the way I live. When we are trusting in God's goodness in the midst of our lives, the difficulties, the challenges, when we're walking with him, we are actually and the word "adorn" in Greek, kosmeo, is the verb, cosmetic comes from that. You're beautifying the doctrine by your life.

So this is what Ezra realizes and he's been sent back to restore the house of God, to beautify the house of God, and part of that beautification is going to be in helping the people of God, himself and others, to be obedient. So the first point we said, first subpoint, first point, realign your priorities and the first subpoint, 1A was my personal obedience is central to this work. The second subpoint, 1B is I also have a responsibility to help my brothers and sisters obey. This is what's kind of counterintuitive for us in our day. In one way it's counterintuitive because we start saying that, "Hey, we're not to meddle in each other's lives," but in reality the way we live, don't you tend to in your selfishness want to make your spouse's obedience more important than your obedience? Sometimes you're more concerned about their lack of obedience than your lack of obedience. Isn't that natural? But when it comes to getting outside of the family, now you say, "Well, we're meddling."

Well, what we see here in Ezra is what we see in the New Testament and that is that the obedience of other believers is also a part of my responsibility and your responsibility, that we're not, that you are your brother's keeper, ironically. We see it in Ezra's example, first of all, that he had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to practice it and to teach it. That word "teach" is actually, there's like eight or nine words in Hebrew that can be translated "teach." Interesting, isn't it? Part of that is that the Old Testament was written over a thousand years, from 1400 BC to 400. So you have a language around for that long, you develop some more words along the way. But there's eight or nine, I think maybe it's nine different words that could be translated "teach." This one is a word which has a very practical focus, even more than the other words. It's the most practical of all the teaching words and to show you this, a form of this particular Hebrew word is, you know, a derivative of it is the word for oxgoad. You know what an oxgoad is, it's a pointed stick that teaches the ox. You want to teach the ox to obey the commands, you want to teach the ox to pull the plow and do what he's supposed to do in a response to you as the owner. Well, one of the ways that you teach him is you jab him with a pointed stick. It's not very pleasant to get jabbed with a pointed stick, I wouldn't think. That's not got to be a fun thing for the ox but that's something that you have to do to train an ox. This happens to be some of the idea of the word. It's not exactly that, I mean, it's a derivative so it doesn't mean we're supposed to go around goading each other. "You know, I'm doing this in Christian love." Bam! No, but it does mean that we have a responsibility in teaching to help each other, it doesn't just mean that when we talk to someone and we're sharing something, that we just hope they understand. No, we hope they apply it just like we hope we apply it and we have a responsibility to help each other follow Christ.

This is where the "one anothers" in the New Testament, more than 50 times you have different commands in the New Testament with a direct object being "one another" and the idea is that the Christian life and our sanctification, and our sanctification is our growth in grace in Christ. Our sanctification is a community project. This is just the way the Bible makes it clear. God intends us to help one another follow Christ. That's why he had all these "one anothers." You know, teach one another. Admonish one another. Admonish means show them they're wrong. In fact, that's important.

You know, when it talks about, sometimes this verse is misused, "Don't judge lest you be judged." Sometimes it's often quoted by people who don't want to submit to the law of God. Don't judge lest you be judged. Jesus said that. Well, he did say that. Yes, he did, but if you read it in context, what he said was, "Before you help your brother get the speck out of his eye, first get the log out of your eye." He didn't say don't get the speck out of your brother's eye, he said first get your log out, then you will see clearly to get the speck out. So you are supposed to help each other, you're just supposed to start with yourself. That's why we started with ourselves too and that's what Ezra did. Study the law of the Lord, practice it and then teach others. So you're always starting with yourself. We have to always be looking and part of this means we should be looking for help from others as we go about life together. We should be cultivating a mind that says, "I'm gonna be corrected. I need to be corrected." A wise man loves reproof, Proverbs tells us. Now I don't naturally love reproof, do you? I have to cultivate a heart to love reproof. How do you do that? You believe what God's word says. You meditate on it. Look, I don't see what I need to see. I don't see myself clearly. I need other people to tell me what's wrong in my heart, in my life. I need you to give me feedback, say, "Ty, this seems to bother you a little more than I think it should. Tell me what's going on." I don't recognize that.

So there are areas in your life you don't recognize unless somebody else helps you, lovingly helps you to see what God wants you to see. This means when we come to the people of God, to be with the people of God, we should come with a mindset that we're humble and ready to learn but we're also ready to serve and we're willing to invest ourselves and take the risk of having sometimes difficult conversations. Do you love Christ enough to take that risk? We have no choice.

So my personal obedience. Realign your priorities. My personal obedience is the central work of my life and my brothers' and sisters' obedience is secondarily to that also a primary calling in my life. That's what it means to realign your priorities to God's priorities, the law of God being at the center. Now second main point is redefine your practice. It's one thing to realign your priorities to say, "Yes, this is going to be a priority. I'm going to make my personal obedience the issue." It's a second, it's a very important issue though that how do you really, how does that work out in your life? It's not just intellectually accepting, it's doing something. That's why the second major point this morning is redefine your practice and we'll look at these two subpoints again, the same two subpoints: my personal obedience and my responsibility to help others obey, A and B.

So redefine your practice. If my obedience to God is to be a central work of my life, this is my main job to beautify God's temple is to make my life more and more obedient to him, to obey his law more and more and more, what am I working on? What are you working on right now in your life? Tell me. I mean, if I was to be able to say to each one of you individually, "Tell me what you're working on in your life. What areas are you really trying to bring into submission to God right now that you recognize?"

We've been around our house the last couple of weeks, we've been doing fall cleaning. I mentioned this last week. You know, come to our... Well, the bathroom drawers, we've got them all, you know, they're just like almost better than when we moved in originally. And the closets, the garage. You don't want to see my basement yet. We're working on it but it's in a project. The garage, every different part of the house, the pantry, everything. I mean, I think mostly everything. You know, you think everything and then you find something else and you're like, "Wow, I haven't even thought about that drawer or that cabinet." But anyway, when you do that, think about that. Now you're gonna reorganize your basement or your garage. It takes intentionality and focus. It means you've got to set aside time to do it and it's a project that you're gonna work on and you're going to aggressively deal with and assess what needs to be done and you're gonna do it. That means things like you're gonna have trash bags there to throw trash away, you're gonna have maybe some bags or boxes that you can take stuff to Goodwill or to give away or to put away for a garage sale, and you're going to have your broom and maybe your mop, whatever you've gotta have, your spray thing, all kinds of paper towels, you know, and you're going to go at it. If we give that much effort and attention to the things of this life, how much more important is that for our souls? For your inner life? Your heart?

God wants us to be people who are opening up the parts of our hearts and saying, "This is not good, what's here," and we're to be intentional about working on it. This is what the law of God does for us. In fact, that's one of the things that's really important, a subpoint here or a side point is that the law of God has an abiding place in the life of a believer. This is something that's often misunderstood and there's some false teaching out there. I mean, I don't think it's not necessarily the people are espousing it are heretics but they're missing something. There's a lot of antinomianism now. Antinomianism, you have the word "anti" and the word "nomos." It means "against law." Antinomian means that, well, the basic idea of antinomianism is that the law has no place in the life of the Christian. That's essentially the idea of antinomianism. People tend to think it's the opposite of legalism. At first glance it seems so. At first glance. Legalism is the idea that the law or the misunderstanding where the law has too much of a place in the life of the Christian. Legalistic Christians are all about law and there's no grace. Antinomians tend to run away from legalism and they really end up running away from the Bible because the Bible, the biblical teaching is the law has an abiding place for Christians, that you never get beyond needing the law of God.

This is biblical Christianity. The law of God are the commands of God. In fact, the New Testament is filled with commands of God. Even stuff like, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church," that's law. "Do everything without grumbling or complaining," Philippians 2, "so that you may be blameless and pure children of God."

That's law. The problem is that antinomianism in its reaction to legalism fails to understand that the remedy for legalism is not to run to antinomianism, that's where you think that the law basically legalists, the worst case of legalism that keeps people from heaven is thinking that your works somehow merit salvation. That's completely unbiblical. And then a legalistic spirit can still come into Christians who accept Jesus by faith, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and yet then believe that their status before God is completely dependent upon how they live; that your standing before God is only based on who Jesus Christ is and what he's done, his finished work, this is the Gospel. But it doesn't mean the law has no place in your life.

This is where a really helpful book on this subject is kind of a, there's a lot of complexity to it but it's a very good book by Sinclair Ferguson called "The Whole Christ," and he talks about antinomianism, legalism and he basically makes the point that you tend to think they're opposites. If you ask somebody the opposite of legalism they'd say antinomianism and what Ferguson says, "No, the opposite of antinomianism..." What's the opposite of antinomianism? People would say legalism. He says, "No, the opposite of antinomianism is the grace of Jesus Christ." It's the same thing as the opposite of legalism. Both of them, the opposite is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the finished work of Christ. The antinomian thinks that God, they have a problem understanding the law of God. They don't see the law of God as it is in the Scripture, it's a reflection of the heart of God. They separate the law of God from God himself. God's law shows you who he is. It shows you his holiness. It shows you his goodness.

So when you come to Christ, you're, now this is the Gospel, you realize you can't, the law comes to you and shows you you have no hope. In fact, this is the really the key, why the law is essential for the believer. Galatians 3:24 says this: the law was a tutor to lead you to Christ. The law was given, Paul says, as a tutor to lead you to Christ. The word is, the Greek word paidagogos. Anyway, we get the English word "pedagogy or pedagogue" from. It means "teaching." It means "tutoring; instructing." In the time that word was used by the Apostle Paul, the pedagogue was a Greek or Roman man who taught like an 11-12-year-old boy until he became a man, and his father would basically turn over the instruction to this pedagogue and he would basically teach and discipline this boy to become a man. An example of it was Alexander the Great had a pedagogue, his name was Aristotle. Pretty good tutor, I guess. Bang for the buck was pretty good for that one. But anyway, he was instructed by Aristotle and raised up but part of what the pedagogue did was he taught and he disciplined. I mean, it was a part of it was, you know, he beat him as needed. I'm talking about, you know, with the rod. It was sometimes a brutal thing. And they brought the young man up until he's now, he delivered him to manhood.

So God says, Paul says that the, God says through Paul that the law was your pedagogue to bring you to Christ. The law was given by God to deliver you up to Jesus. It does it by beating us down. Now the law is not bad, though. The law is good and holy. Paul says this in Roman 7:12, "The commandment is good and righteous and holy." What's the problem? We're sinners, so when the law comes to us, it shows us how ugly we are. You know when we were looking at James 1 and he said be doers of the word and he talked about that to be a doer of the word means that when you come to the perfect law of

liberty and you see yourself as in a glass, a looking glass, you see what's wrong and if you don't change yourself, you're not being a doer of the word. A doer of the word comes to the law of liberty and sees what's wrong and runs to Christ and then in the power of Christ, his finished work, you enjoy again your forgiveness and you access his power, the power of his death and resurrection, and then you go back and you do what he commands in his law. This is why the law still needs to be there. It continues to show us how much we need Jesus and then it shows us how to be like Jesus.

That's the biblical use of the law. The law is to be a rule of life. It is to be something we're looking at continually to show us ourselves. Look at what's wrong with me. Run to Jesus, and not just run to Jesus and thank him for forgiveness, run to Jesus and access his power. His death and resurrection, his death that has paid for my sins, his resurrection that has declared God accepted his gift, is not only deliverance from the penalty of sin that I'm now saved, it's deliverance from the power of sin so that I can now walk out.

Let me show you this actually, Romans 8. Let's turn over there for a moment, a key passage to show you the law still belongs in the life of the believer. This is Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." No condemnation. To be in Jesus means to be delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin forever. To repent and place your faith in him, to no longer trust in your own works but to trust in everything Jesus did, that God treated Jesus as if he lived your sinful life on the cross and he poured out all of his wrath against every sin of thought, word or deed that you would ever do, he poured out his wrath and Jesus took all of that wrath away on the cross. And not only that, but Jesus gives you his perfect righteousness and this happens through his sacrificial death at Calvary and his resurrection. This is the Gospel.

So, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh," look at verse 4, "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." What he's saying is, listen, we no longer go to the law as a means of obtaining righteousness. We go to the law to see ourselves, we run to Christ. But the law, then, now that we run to Christ, we live out the law, we meet the requirement of law, we are holy. 1 Peter 1, "Be ye holy for I am holy." The person who's truly been born again has in them a seed that longs to be holy, sometimes it's hard to find it in our hearts but it's there if you truly love the Lord and we are called, then, to live out a righteous life. You need the law of God to send you to Christ and also to show you how to live.

Let me give you one more example and I encourage you to read this this week. Some people will say that now I know the law of Christ is the law of love. It is the law of love but it's also the law of God. Christ is not different than the Father. The Father who gave the law and Christ who gives his law in the New Testament are one.

And what does it mean to love somebody? What does it mean to love somebody? Do you know what it means to love somebody? Jesus said two commandments, love God, love your neighbor. How do you love your neighbor? You realize those two commandments correspond to the 10 Commandments? The first four commandments in the 10 Commandments relate to loving God. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make an idol. Don't take the name of the Lord in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Those are loving God. What does it mean to love your neighbor? To love your neighbor, it means you're not going to murder him. To love your neighbor means you're not going to commit adultery. To love your neighbor means you're not going to steal, you're not going to lie, you're not going to covet. You can say you love them but if you then covet or murder with angry words and harsh attitudes, you are not loving.

Love needs the law to work itself out. In fact, this is what I wanted to say, I said 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 4-8 actually, that's the great love chapter. It starts out, "Love is patient, love is kind," and in the Greek there is no "is patient." Do you know what it says in the Greek? It says, "Love suffers long." That's what it says literally in the Greek. It's a verb. It's not an adjective, patient, after a being verb, love is patient. No, literally it says, "Love suffers long." I say that because that chapter that describes love has 16 verbs. No states of being. Sixteen active verbs which are either this: love suffers long, love acts kindly, love does not keep a record of wrongs, love is not easily provoked, love does not rejoice in truth but love rejoices in righteousness, love bears all things, love believes all things, love hopes all things, love endures all things, love never fails. Essentially you have love does this, it doesn't do that. What does that sound like? Don't do this, do this? The law. A transformed heart, now it's like you have the energy and the law gives you the direction of how to do it. You're not doing it to please God, you're doing it because Jesus has pleased God and out of gratitude you want to love God and express your love to God with an obedient life.

That's how the law of God continues to be an abiding part of our life and it's necessary because we need it to show, I need it to show me, "Ty, you're being too sensitive. You're keeping a record of wrongs. You're being easily offended." That's not love. So I go to Christ, "Lord, look at me. Why do I have such big toes? Lord Jesus, I want to be like You. Thank You that You forgive me, that You now, I stand before God in Your righteousness. It's as if I lived like You lived and so I can come directly into the throne room of God by grace. I can enter the throne room of grace boldly because of the great High Priest I have." But when I go in there, I'm not just going to just rejoice in my forgiveness, I'm going to ask him to make me holy and obedient to his law. That's why I'm going. That's the grace I need, to be different. But it's all by his power.

So this means that my obedience is about, it's about building and beautifying the temple is making my own life more obedient. I need to be addressing all the issues in my life. I need to be looking in the corners of my life at what's a mess and what am I working on. And we really ought to, we ought to cultivate this, I'm encouraging us November 24, 2019, to start asking each other, let's give each other two weeks and feel free to start asking someone, "Hey, what are you working on in your life? What kind of spiritual

projects do you have going on?" And we have to remind each other, I know sometimes I get, I'll ask my family to go over the sermon, you know, and I'm kind of depressed by how little we sometimes remember, even sometimes myself, actually. I have to get, "Well, what did I preach on last week?" But to remember, listen, this is what, if we're about building the house of God, beautifying the house of God and obedience to the law of God is key to that, then I've got to be addressing things in my life.

One of the really helpful things that I had in the introductory class to our doctoral program at Southern on Biblical Counseling which I'm taking, Southern Seminary right now, the class that I had where one of the requirements was a self-counseling project. Identify a need in your life where you are not walking with Christ the way you should and counsel yourself. Part of the encouragement was to get somebody else to be an accountability person. I did that and I thought as I did this, this is something I should be doing all the time. I should always have somebody that's helping me work through an issue, and we really all should.

You know, isn't it funny, I talked about our cleaning project at home. You know, we're gonna get, you get an area clean and you just wonder how long is it gonna last? You know, like what's the expiration date on this cleaning? Well, we always need to be doing it so if we can commit to, "I want obedience to be what's happening in my life," then there's always a project I'm working on, and then every day to continue this metaphor, every day as you go about life, what do you do? You make messes, right? You know, just living, you take your shoes off, you don't put them in the right place. Go put them in the right place. Put stuff back where it belongs. Clean up the mess. You spilled some milk, wipe it up, clean it up. Well, the Christian life is big projects and little things like that every day spiritually where we should be helping each other clean up the little messes that come along each day and dealing with the big things too. If obedience to God's word is the central focus of my life, then that's what I've gotta do. I've got to actively work on this and if it's true for other people too, then that's the second subpoint, I kind of touched on it already, obedience, my brothers and sisters is also my responsibility.

So I have a responsibility of asking, "Hey, how are things going?" And we have to be loving and wise about this. We don't want to always be every time we get together with somebody you feel like, okay, you know, kind of like those, have you seen those things where the monkeys are eating the bugs off each other? That was a bad illustration. That's one of those not in my notes. Not in my notes, I can tell you that. Well, there's a principle there I'm not gonna work out for you. You can think about it yourself.

But seriously, the Lord wants us to be obedient. That's what beautifies his house, holiness. He wants me to be holy. He wants you to be holy. And that's our work. We've got to get to work. That means we need to spend time with each other. You can't help someone else clean up their mess if you don't know them. You're not gonna see it unless you're in their life enough to be allowed to open a drawer, to be allowed to see what's going on in the house of their life. We have to love people. We've got to know them. We have to learn to ask questions. And we have to be willing to open our hearts to others, be ready. Sometimes you think you're gonna help somebody and you end up finding out that

they're helping you and that you needed the help a lot more than you thought they did. Paul Tripp talks about how we have a spiritual farsightedness. We can see with great clarity what's wrong with our brother and we miss what's wrong with us. We've got to remember that as you go about it, just kind of expect. Sometimes I'm gonna be having a conversation with somebody and I'm gonna find out that really the big problem was me and that's okay, in fact, that's great news because this means I can clean this thing up, and the joy of getting that all cleaned up or making progress.

You know, in a fallen world, you never get everything perfect, right? You've got to lower your expectations. It's never going to be perfect but you're making progress. So today I went over to help my brother deal with a project I thought he needed to have and I talked to him about it and I found out there was a bigger project in me. Praise the Lord. The kingdom of God is going forth. The temple of God is being beautified. The Lord Jesus Christ is being exalted.

That is a wonderful wonderful calling. It changes the way we see these things. Conversations, every conversation is an opportunity for the Lord to do work, temple work, work on the house of God. May the Lord help us do that and seriously in a few weeks, be feeling free to ask me what I'm working on and I may ask you too.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the glory and beauty of Your word. We thank You that it is a perfect word. Every part of it is profitable. Every part of it is powerful. It accomplishes the purpose for which You send it every time. It never returns to You void. So Lord, have Your way in our hearts. Father, we just confess how easy it is to be distracted from the real work that You've called us to. There are so many things that just living our lives, so much to do, but if we're not doing the one thing that we're called to do, Lord, it's all a waste. So help us to be doing the one thing of building Your kingdom even as we do all the other things. Help us get on Your agenda to beautify Your house and to walk in Your truth, and as we're on Your agenda, Lord, let Your hand mightily work to do what only You can do. We thank You that Jesus Christ has accomplished everything necessary for everyone who will repent and believe in Him. And we pray in His glorious name. Amen.