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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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T4G - Distinct from the World

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for the conference that I'm going to be reporting on. I just again thank you for all work that you did in and through it and in and through us. Again, we just want to pray for your grace and your wisdom and your insight. I just pray again as we are opening up your word to a potentially difficult to grasp topic, that you would accompany us, that you would again by your Holy Spirit's power make this of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well I'm basically giving you a report on the Together for the Gospel conference and I wanted to share with you before that a little miracle that God had done there. We've been going to this conference for about twelve years now and I do the booking, I book it and I book the flights and I book the hotels and that kind of stuff. And for some reason or other this year I messed up. And we got down to the conference which is in Kentucky, and I had wondered why they had not really given me a lot of material. They normally

give you a lot of material ahead of time, and so we got to the -- basically to the conference, they had sent me a registration form, confirmation, you are registered, blah, blah, blah, and I do it for Steve as well. So Steve and I are down there and we are told that we have to go to a certain spot to get our wristbands in order to get in. There's 12,000 people at this conference, so it's a big deal. There's huge crowds that are going into it. And so we get to the place where you're supposed to register, you're supposed to give them your name, they give you the name tag. We give them our names, they don't recognize my name, they don't recognize Steve's name. We go to the help desk and we finally get to somebody. I said you know, "Here's my registration slip." The guy looks at it and he goes, "That's a meal plan." I said, "What? It's got the bar codes, got all that fancy stuff on it," he says, "No, no, that's a meal plan." I said, "Do you think I would come down to Kentucky just like for macaroni and cheese and stuff like that?" You know long story short, I never saw the fact that for some reason or another when I hit the "submit" button in December it never registered. So the gal at the help desk says, "Well, I'm really sorry. We are so oversold at this event. We expected 9,000 people, there's 12,000 people here. And she said there's not a thing that we can do for you. So basically they're saying you're out, you can't get in. What they basically said is if you go on the -- there's an app for it, you can go on the app and ask if

there's somebody that arrived that maybe had a crisis and had to leave, if they would sell you their ticket. And so that's where we found ourselves. And I said, "Oh, Steve, I messed this up big time." And you know Steve, he's patting me back, "There, there, it's okay." And so we were basically sitting on the curb outside the venue trying to figure out how we going to get in. As we're there -- I should back up a little bit, just to point out my sister-in-law, brother-in-law work as volunteers, they've been working there for -- ever since it started. And we're sitting there trying to figure out what to do and my sister-in-law comes out of the door and she waves us in, says, "Come here, come here." So we come in and she basically says -- she hands me this thing, and she says, "You guys are now volunteers." So this is the t-shirt that they gave us and you know, the people who show up as volunteers, they get there a day early, they get thoroughly briefed into what's going on and so we came in and met with a gal there who said, "Here's your assignments," and she gave us whole bunch of assignments and told us what we were going to do and we are clueless, completely, you know, some of the -- you're supposed to just stand there with these t-shirts on so people can see you, come up to you ask you how do I do this. And we're like, "Help desk is over there." That's basically what we were doing. And the neat part about all of this was the gal who kind of gave us the assignments -- and they were real assignments, and we did do a

day's worth of volunteer work, they let us just go after a day, maybe it was because of our incompetence, but there were 400 volunteers at this place, and it turns out that the gal who assigned us our assignments had heard my name and she had heard my name because her father was an elder in a church in western New York pastored by Matt Wolfe. Now, if you all remember, Matt Wolfe came here for about a year and a half and we were greatly enjoying him and greatly enjoying his time here but he moved on and somehow it's just amazing to see how God kind of works all of these things together. At the very worst situation when it was looking very bleak, I said to Steve, I said, "We've got to pray." So we just went off to the side and started praying and in Steve's prayer, he said, "God, you can make a way when there is no way." Sure enough, that's exactly what God did. So I just want to thank God for us having that opportunity to be there. We shouldn't have been there. And saved the church 500 bucks. So there you go. All right. Now to the actual message.

One of the things I do when I start these and I do this every other year is I usually trot out an old analogy about the great nuclear submarines that if they need to, they can spend months and months beneath the Arctic ice but they don't, they surface on regular intervals to recalibrate with the stars because no matter how fine the instruments are on those submarines, they can still lose their

calibration. And as local church leaders, so can we. And so the conference really for us represents a much needed periodic recalibration to a spiritual "true north" of Bible centered Spirit gifted teaching. I mean the conference really, it gives us an opportunity to sit under highly gifted Bible teachers such as John MacArthur, John Piper, Mark Dever, David Platt, Matt Chandler and others. And I mention these men not just because they're known, everybody knows them for their giftedness but they're also known for their faithfulness. And they instructed and exhorted and encouraged the leaders of the local church to cling to an authentically biblical vision of what the local church is supposed to be. And they always focus on the authority of the Bible, the meaning of the gospel and the nature of truth itself. The format's basically ten summons that are delivered over three days and it's kind of interspersed with breakout areas and discussion panels. And as you can probably imagine, that's an enormous amount of material to take in. I mean, Steve and I both say your brains ache after you've been there for a while. It takes a lot of time to process all of the information, to digest it and really to kind of get what God wants us as leaders to take away from the conference.

Well the theme from this year's conference was the phrase:

"Distinct from the World." Let me quote Mark Dever, one of the organizers here, this is what he said. He said: "This year, we

pay special attention to the distinctness of the church from the world. Part of our fulfilling Christ's great commission is following his example of faithfulness in the face of opposition and marginalization. Many brothers and sisters around the world have great experience with this today -- from North Korea to Cuba, Iran to Saudi Arabia. Now in God's strange providence, he is making sure to underline his people's distinctiveness from the world even if too many of us are reluctant to do so. And yet, we must remember that Jesus prayed for the Father to preserve us even as he left us in a hostile world. Surely we can trust His provision for us even when all men speak evil of us."

And Mark Dever was the first one to deliver the message and in his message he posed a question that God asks in 2 Peter. The question is: *What type of people are we in the church supposed to be?*

Here's what the question appears. This is 2 Peter 3:10. It says: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

Well, God's answer to the question of what we in the church should be is in a word holy. The word "holy" means separate, it means

distinct, different, it means set apart. God says in *1 Peter 2:9*:
But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. See, the task of the shepherds of the church is to grow a covenant community of people who understand just what that statement is all about. It is about creating a community in which the beauty of holiness is what matters. It's about creating a community of people who see their greatest joy and deepest pleasure in their lives as being shaped and molded into the very image of Jesus Christ for his glory. And let me tell you, that's no easy task. In fact it's a task that probably has far more failures than it has successes and that's because the enemy of our souls is constantly tempting us to look for a way to reduce our relationship with Jesus Christ down to some simple rules, just some simple regulations that we choose either consciously adhere to or to consciously refuse to adhere to. And it can be very confusing. So I want to explain there are two different poles that pull within Christianity and all they may appear to be pulling in opposite directions. They are really two expressions of the very same thing, and that is a failure to understand the nature of the grace of God in Christ.

I run the risk of oversimplifying here but I think we need to

discuss these two different poles. They consist of legalism and antinomianism. Now I know those are fifty cent words, bear with me, I will kind of try to explain them, what they mean. It's important that you understand what it means. The word "antinomian" in Latin means "anti," against, nomen means law. It means anti law. Antinomian rejects any claim of God's law on his life. For all practical purposes when I say "law," I'm usually referring to what we now understand as the ten commandments. These are the guidelines that God gave us literally as a gift. And even though you might not think about it, to the extent that you adhere to these commands, your life is going to work. Whenever and wherever you find somebody whose life is spinning out of control, I will guarantee you that you will find one or many of these guidelines that have been ignored or defied. And because the law is so critical to human flourishing, the devil has a great desire to monkey wrench every single expression of it. Let me tell you, antinomianism is one of his finest monkey wrenches. It sees the ten commandments as something more akin to an Old Testament set of rules that were made obsolete and of no effect by the fact that Jesus Christ has gone to the cross and paid the sin debt for all rule-breaking Christians. And since the debt has been paid at the cross, it therefore follows that the law of God has no more effect on us. Now all of that is absolutely true. *Romans 6:14* says: *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but*

under grace. But that doesn't mean that God's law is null and void. Antinomianism is commonly translated today as the notion of easy believism. It sort of defines a faith without any laws that's easy to believe and even easier to practice. And it's been around for many, many years. I first met an antinomian 40 years ago in San Francisco. He and a group of other Christians had discovered what they called "new freedom in Christ." And they said now that Christ has paid the price of your sin, you're free to do whatever you want, so he wanted to express his newfound freedom and his newfound enjoyment by inviting us to come party with him and get high. I told him I just wasn't interested. Now technically he was absolutely correct. I mean, if your sin is paid for, you are completely free from its penalty. But our answer to that notion back then was, yeah, you know, we are free to do whatever we want, but now as believers in Christ, that sin is something we simply no longer want and that, too, is absolutely true. But it takes a great deal of unpacking to make this make sense and that's what I want to attempt to do this morning.

Take the notion of Christ's death on the cross paying the penalty of sin which it certainly did and that grace itself covers all of my sin which it definitely does, well the antinomian takes that grace and he or she twists it into license, into a license to engage in sin that because of Christ on the cross no longer has any

consequences or costs. As the hymn says, says: "Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow." Well, some how the "all to him I owe" part gets lost. The antinomian thinks since all my sins are paid for, well, why not indulge in them? But grace is not a license to do as you please thinking that any and all sin has already been paid for at the cross. Paul said this in *Romans 5:20*, he said: *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* But then he goes on to say in *Romans 6:1*: *What shall we say then, are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* See the antinomian still lives in sin because he thinks God went to the cross to provide him with a means to continue in sin.

Probably the best example I can give of that scandal, of the scandal of antinomianism is the reaction that one of my non-Christian employees had, when I ran my woodworking business, I had a non-Christian employee and he reacted, he was reacting, we talked about this a lot, he reacted to a group of self-professed Christians that he described that used to be at his former place of work. And he said these Christians are very, very vocal about Jesus and what it was that they believed in. He said they knew their bibles well and they spent lots of time speaking among themselves in what I call Christianese. You know what Christianese

is? It's that inside gospel language that we sometimes are guilty of using, I know I've been guilty of using, it's insider baseball knowledge, that sort of thing that has to do with it, the Bible and doctrines and church and that sort of thing. He said this group of Christians always spoke that kind of hidden language that you couldn't really crack. He said but in addition to that, he said, they were mean-spirited, they were click-ish, they were exclusive. He went on to say they were constantly breaking the rules and doing things that he knew were wrong while claiming the grace of God almost as an excuse. And I'll never forget how this non-believer described them. He said as far as he could see, they saw Jesus as their own personal cosmic butler whose primary job was to follow after them, cleaning up their messes. That's quite an indictment. I mean would you like to have that thought of you and your relationship with Christ? Well, it's proof that as much as they champion grace and rebel against the law, antinomians really don't understand the law and the beauty and the richness that God has given us through his law. See, before the fall of Adam, the law was actually inside Adam and it was inside him as an unconscious way of bearing the image of God. It was something that Adam did automatically and really without thinking. But when he rebelled, he changed everything including the way he related to God and God's law. It was no longer a natural part of Adam. It became something written only deeply within his conscience, it became something now

given by God externally to the Jews at Mount Sinai in the form of the ten commandments. And whether it was naturally within Adam or externally given at Mount Sinai, the law was always a part of God's nature that was designed to give us the best possible way of living life here on earth. I mean the law was God's road map to human flourishing. We took the law and we turned it into yet another way that God was trying to restrict us. You know for Adam and Eve, it was the forbidden fruit. For us it's the ten commandments.

Instead of seeing them as the outflow of God's love for his people, we turned them into a battlefield between two different errors. I mean the antinomians say faith alone is what saves and once again they're absolutely correct, but as Martin Luther observed, we are saved by faith alone by a faith that is never alone. It is always accompanied by a change in attitude, a change in heart. And that attitude, that change in heart actually goes back to the pre fall days when Adam had God's law within his heart. You see, when we get saved, God does a heart transplant for us. God takes the heart of stone out of us and he puts a brand new heart within us.

Ezekiel 36 says this, it says: God says: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. See, brand new born again believers have a heart of flesh that has replaced their heart of

stone, and that new heart of flesh has a brand new set of hopes and desires that are much more like the original pre fall Adam. I mean it's the desire to bear the image of God, that's what we were created for. I mean antinomians say we're free from the bondage of the law and again, that is true. Genuine born again believers have a brand new heart of flesh within them that sees the law as it really is, and that is God's best road map to human flourishing.

The legalist on the other hand, he sees the law as a means to an end because he, too, has a warped understanding of the grace of God and he sees law keeping as a means to put God in his debt. The legalist says that faith is not nearly enough and that added to faith must be a whole set of works that must be adhered to according to whatever rules they want to set up. See, legalism pursues the law as a means of earning God's approval and love and that at its very worst what it says to God, it's basically telling God, you know, the cross was not enough, that sending your Son to die in my place could not be enough to satisfy God's justice. What is also necessary is my own personal efforts. What is crucial is my efforts and then you fill in the blanks.

Perhaps the best example of legalism that we're all aware of was the Pharisees. You know, they added hundreds of laws to the ten commandments that God had given us and then they saw that obedience

to these laws was the source of their righteousness instead of simple faith like Abraham had. God says in *Romans 4:3*: *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Now for a legalist that belief, that faith is never, never enough. Present day legalists may not have the 600 or so commandments that the Pharisees had but they can easily make it up with the modern equivalent of laws telling you that you have to dress a certain way, you have to act a certain way, you must eat only what they approve, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Well time and again it was stated in the conference that for many, many years, legalism really was pretty much the hallmark of evangelical churches. We defined ourselves by what we did not do. We don't smoke, we don't drink, we don't chew and we don't hang out with those who do. I don't know if you ever heard that, but that kind of defined many, many evangelicals. But for the last 10 or 15 years, there's been a wholesale reaction to that approach and a lurch into antinomianism that suggests that any application of the law in any way is legalism when it is not.

For the last few decades the church has tiptoed around the error of legalism and they wound up tiptoeing directly into antinomianism, and the result has been catalogued, it's been catalogued in a devastating study conducted by Christian Smith on the one group who could effectively reveal where it is, the church today, the modern

church today is going. Christian Smith targeted the one group who represents the canary in the coal mine. He studied teenagers. He studied 3,000 teenagers who had a religious affiliation. And the study shows just what happens when you overreact to legalism by being afraid to state clearly and objectively just what the law of God is. Basically Smith said the vast majority of young people see faith today in terms of moralistic therapeutic deism. Here's how Al Mohler described it. He says: "As described by Smith and his team, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism consists of beliefs like these five. 1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. 5. Good people go to heaven when they die. That, in sum, is the creed to which much adolescent faith can be reduced. After conducting more than 3,000 interviews with American adolescents, the researchers reported that, when it came to the most crucial questions of faith and beliefs, many adolescents responded with a shrug and a "whatever." The kind of responses found among many teenagers indicates a vast emptiness at the heart of their understanding. When a teenager says, "I believe there is a God and stuff," this hardly represents a profound theological

commitment. Smith and his colleagues recognize that the deity behind Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is very much like the deistic God of the 18th century philosophers. This is not the God who thunders from the mountain, nor a God who will serve as judge. This undemanding deity is more interested in solving our problems than in making people happy. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: He is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."

That's where we are today, folks. You know how this kind of god gets created? It gets created when the god of this world, Satan himself, who is far more clever than we ever give him credit for, you see, he studies us until he thoroughly understands our weaknesses and then with cunning brilliance and great patience, he designs good things to steal away our great things, and the greatest thing we have is the glory of God. Legalism and antinomianism are the enemy's primary tools in stealing from God's church God's glory. Both have to do with not understanding on the most basic level the glory of God in the goodness and the grace of God. Legalism separates the law of God from the goodness of God by seeing God's laws as merely hoops to jump through in order to get his approval. Antinomianism separates us from the law of God by

turning Christ's sacrifice into kind of a cosmic "get out of jail free" card. As Tim Keller puts it: "It is a fatal pastoral mistake to think of legalism and antinomianism as complete opposites. Rather, they are 'non-identical twins from the same womb.'" Both, he says, can be traced back "to the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden, namely, that you can't trust the goodness of God or his commitment to our happiness and well-being and that therefore if we obey God fully, we'll miss out and be miserable."

You see, much of the church's reaction to present day legalism is really a form of antinomianism that presents a Christ who instead of making you conform to a list of do's and don'ts, he wants only to help you live a more satisfying Christian life. You see, according to this view, Christ came to save us not to bring glory to God but really just to get us into heaven. And before that to ensure that we have healthy marriages, solid finances and blessed children and along with that a host of other good things that tend to strangle the best thing, and the best thing is still captured by the first question of the *Westminster Catechism* which says: What is the chief end of man? Well, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. You know it's easy to simply identify with the first part of that answer and then really forget about the second part. The second part says we are going to enjoy God forever, because glorifying God is the deepest and most satisfying

endeavor any human being can ever undertake. It's what we humans were designed for in the first place. I mean, have you ever thought about what are we going to be doing in eternity? If you ever think about what you do for enjoyment, whether it's hobbies or sports or cooking or eating, whatever, it doesn't really matter, just, just imagine a heaven that consists of nothing but that. I mean multiply any or all of the activities that you love, multiply them by 100,000 years and I think you can easily see how boring and tiring anything of earth can become. And if you don't think that you're going to grow bored after 100,000 years, it doesn't matter, make it a million years or make it 10 million because we're going to live forever. Eventually the things of earth are going to bore you because that's not what we were made for. I mean nothing that we can experience here on earth will be capable of satisfying us for eternity with one exception. That exception is God. I think most folks if they're honest, would admit that what they really think about when they think about an eternity with God, they think of kind of sitting in a church pew listening to hymns forever. That doesn't sound very appealing to me, but that's because most of us barely recognize that we were created to find our greatest and deepest enjoyment of God by God in God. Heaven is a place where appetites that you've never even imagined are going to be eternally satisfied in ways you cannot begin to describe. God even tells us so. In *1 Corinthians 2* he says: But as it is written: "EYE HAS

NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

See, the only appetite we have that is eternal that grows more and more satisfying as it is fed more and more is the appetite that we barely tap into the here and now, it's the appetite for God. Jesus said he came to give us eternal life and this is not life that starts when you die. It's life that starts right at the moment that Christ comes into your life. You know, people use the term "human flourishing" today to describe what is the very best experience of being a human being, and I can tell you without a doubt that the height of human flourishing lies in fully understanding God's plan to shape and mold you into the very image of his Son. I can also tell you that it is critical that we understand the grace of God and the laws of God in order to do that. The grace of God and God's laws were often said to be in opposition to one another although they are not, but folks find themselves pulled constantly between the forces of legalism and antinomianism. And the key to living a healthy vibrant life, the key to Christian flourishing is understanding the tension between law and grace and that tension can be a good thing. Let me explain.

You know, you may have heard this before but it's been said that

any commercial airliner flying from point A to point B is off course 90 percent of the time. That's because the pilot or the autopilot system is constantly course correcting as the plane flies, I mean, the plane itself may go off course west and be corrected east, then it may go off course east and be corrected west, so that in reality only 10 percent of the time it's actually dead on right on course. That's also true for much of our Christian life. We tend to go off course all the time. And thankfully we have God's Holy Spirit within us who monitors our direction and is constantly applying course corrections. So picture your Christian walk as a journey where the goal is to be in that sweet spot between law and grace and not off course to the east or the west or the left or the right. Now in order to do that, it's helpful to know just what it looks like when you are off course to the left or off course to the right. So understand what Paul said in *Romans 5:20*, he said: *Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* Well, if your plane is going off course here, you're probably in the antinomian camp which says Jesus paid it all, so we may as well live however we want knowing that our sin debt is paid. But Paul doesn't leave it there. He goes on to say: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?* See, if your plane has gone off course in this direction, you may

well find yourself thinking that the Christian life is not so much about glorifying God by being shaped and molded into the image of his Son but more about finding the least painful way of conforming in the least possible way to something that's only going to be of value to you when you die. I mean since Christ paid the price of your sin, why not enjoy life now and the benefits that Christ has purchased for you by seeing your sin, past, present and future as already paid for, all of which is absolutely true, but then thinking that your Christian life and benefit is not going to really kick in until after I die. If that's the way you think, why not sin more that grace will abound even more? You see, believe that way and you will find as my employee found, that Jesus becomes nothing more than your cosmic butler coming up behind you to clean up after your messes.

If you're in the legalist camp, if your plane's going off course in the other direction, you're saying here are the rules that we who died to sin must keep in order to be worthy of heaven. And as you make up your list of do's and don'ts in order to protect your position, consider what God says in *Colossians 2:20*. He says: *If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations -- "Do not handling, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used) -- according to human*

precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. You see, the legalist really has a very low opinion of God. I mean he or she has no concept of a loving God creating guidelines that would result in human flourishing.

You know, I'm really struggling to help you understand this 'cause this is not an easy concept to grasp. I was trying to come up with an example that would illustrate the reason why God gave us his law, and the closest I could come came from an evening that I spent going to Lauren's class. Lauren Mortenson is my daughter-in-law, Seth's wife, she has a physical fitness studio in Port Jervis which aims to help people grow more physically fit through a routine that involves rowing machines. I thought you just went there and she showed you the machines, here's how it works, you got 20 minutes, go for it. I was completely wrong. You know, she put you threw a routine. I said the first time I was there, I said, "You're going to need to park an ambulance out there for me." But she put you through a routine that for 40 or so minutes has every single second taken up with rest periods, different types of exercise, different activities between stretching and exercising your core, doing this, doing that, there's no down time at all. And so in essence Lauren for 40 minutes is barking orders at people who are paying her to do

that. I mean the reason she's giving out orders is because she wants people to benefit from this time by growing more and more fit. And as she sees it, this is the best possible way for them to get there. Now the people who participate in her class obviously agree and they're happy to be under the law that she is barking out because they see the benefit that she is giving them. Well, God gave his law because he knew without a doubt it was the best possible way for us to get to the place where we as human beings could truly flourish. We seldom see it that way. And we spend the last few minutes looking at how we respond to it because it's so easy to get it wrong.

Sinclair Ferguson has an excellent book on this very topic entitled: *"The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism and the Gospel Assurance,"* and in it he gives an imaginary conversation between God and Adam that illustrates well why God did what he did in the Garden of Eden. Ferguson imagines God speaking to Adam and Eve and this is what he says. He says: "I am giving you everything in this garden. Go and enjoy yourselves. But just before you head off, I have given you all of this because I love you. I want you to grow and develop in your understanding and your love for me. So, this is the plan: There is a tree here, "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Don't eat its fruit. I know, you want to know why, don't you? Well, I have made you as my

image. I have given you instincts to enjoy what I enjoy. So, in one sense you naturally do what pleases me and simultaneously gives you pleasure too. But I want you to grow in trusting and loving me just for myself, because I am who I am. You can only really do that if you're willing to obey me, not because you are wired to, but because you want to show me that you trust and love me. If you do that, you will find that you will grow stronger and that your love for me will deepen. Trust me, I know. That's why I have put the tree there. I so want you to be blessed that I am commanding you to eat and enjoy the fruit of all these trees. That's a command! But I have another command. What I want you to do is one simple thing: Don't eat the fruit of that one tree. I'm not asking you to do that because the tree is ugly. Actually it's just as attractive as the other trees. I don't create ugly, ever! You won't be able to look at the fruit and think, that must taste horrible. It is a fine looking tree. So it's simple. Trust me. Obey me, and love me because of who I am and because you are enjoying what I have given to you. Trust me, obey me, and you will grow."

Well, we all know what happened next. I mean somehow with the help of the serpent Adam and Eve translated God's generosity and love into a monstrous perversion. The serpent said: *For God knows that in the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you*

will be like God, knowing good and evil. Well just like Satan it was a perfectly backwards lie. I mean Adam and Eve were already like God, in fact they were made in his image. And so in eating the fruit, their eyes were indeed opened but they were open to see that they were no longer like the God who created them. I mean the enemy had convinced them that what God had intended for their absolute good was now designed by God to deny them what they were entitled to. And ever since that fateful day when they ate that fruit, the enemy has tried to repeat that lie, that God's law is designed to restrict us, to inhibit us, even to harm us when in reality God's law is a gift designed to help us flourish.

You see, we are, all of us, like that airliner. We spend time careening from legalism to antinomianism while the Holy Spirit constantly course corrects us into the sweet spot that sees that everything that God has done including the law he has laid down is for our benefit. And so we come to the conclusion when it comes to the law that we are free from the law entirely. Because Christ has paid the price in its entirety, we are free to do anything we want. But now we have as believers in Christ new hearts of flesh, hearts that want nothing more than to grow into the very image of Jesus Christ and so we now find ourselves with new wants as well. We find ourselves free to do whatever we want but wanting only to do that which pleases Christ. And folks, that's the sweet spot.

That's what we aim for. It's not legalistic because we know that the gift of God's love is freely given, that it was never earned, that it could never be earned because it's a gift. It's not antinomian because we know Christ paying the price of sin frees us up to live a brand new life. *Romans 5:20* says: *But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Well, that eternal life began the day you gave your life to Christ. Your heart of stone was replaced with a heart of flesh that began to pursue a life where God's glory matters more than life itself. And so we choose to follow the glory of God not because we have to but because we want to. That's the answer to Mark Dever's question. At the beginning of this message, I spoke of the question he posed: What type of people are we in the church to be? Well, the answer to that is simple. We are to be holy, separate, and committed to the glory of God. That's what believers in Jesus Christ believe; that's what they do. Let's pray.

Father, again, I just want to come before you this morning. We've been looking at some difficult concepts to grasp, sometimes it feels like Jell-O, every time you try to grab it, it just kind of squishes away. I pray that you would give us the ability to pursue the sweet spot, pursue the spot where we know that we are separate,

we are holy, we are committed to being shaped and molded into the very image of your Son for your glory. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.