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January 29, 2006 by Steve Brandon

The Coming of the Law

Exodus 24:3

1. Hearing the Law (verse 3a)
2. Obeying the Law (verse 3b)

As most of you know, we have been working our way through the entire Bible this year. We began our study on the first Sunday in January with a look at the most foundational truth in all of the Bible: God created the world. And thus, we are accountable to Him. The next week, we saw God's grace at work in the life of Abraham. From all of the peoples of the earth, God chose Abraham to be the one through which He would bless the world. In Genesis 12, God promised three things to Abraham: (1) God would give Him a land; (2) God would make Him a great nation; and (3) God would bless Him greatly. So important were these promises that the entire story of the Bible is the story of God's faithfulness to the promises that He made to Abraham. This is shown in the last portion of the book of Genesis, when God caused Joseph's brothers to sell Him into slavery. Though it was a terrible thing to do, ultimately, it kept God's people alive during the famine that spread across the entire world. Last week, we saw how God kept his promise by delivering His people out of the Egyptian bondage in such a display of power that the Jews are still talking about it today!

This morning, we arrive at the last half of the book of Exodus. At this point, the narrative slows down. There isn't nearly as much action as there had been before. People aren't constantly moving from here to there. There are no major conflicts underway. Dialogue is greatly reduced. Instead, we find God giving His law to the people of Israel, telling them of the way to live. Many of the chapters in the last half of the book of Exodus contain law after law after law. God designed these laws to instruct the people of Israel how to live.

In the history of the life of Israel at that time, there were well over a million people. Whenever you put a million people together as a nation, you need to have a law that guides and governs them, or else there would be anarchy. This guiding law is what God gave to Israel. To open up our text, I want to read one verse for us. In comes in Exodus 24:3, "Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!"

My message this morning will have two points: 1. Hearing the Law (verse 3a), and 2. Obeying the Law (verse 3b). This is how verse 3 breaks down for us. In the first half of the verse, we read of Moses recounting the law before all the people, who had the opportunity to hear it for the first time. In the second half of the verse, we read of the people embracing the law, and pledging their obedience to the law. Let's consider our first point this morning, ...

1. Hearing the Law (verse 3a)

As these people heard the law for the first time, I'm sure that it thrilled their souls. Here was God giving them help and advice and counsel as to how to live in the great nation of theirs. When God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt, they weren't left alone to figure out how the nation should run. On the contrary, God provided them with great detail about how the nation should work. At this point, you need to understand what a great blessing from God it was to give the people of Israel this law. Near the end of His life, Moses will reflect upon the God's kindness in doing so. He will tell Israel:

> See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? (Deut. 4:5-8)

When you think about the other idolatrous nations that surrounded Israel, you will soon realize that idols don't give their people any concrete laws to live by. Indeed, idols can't speak or say anything. So, those who worship them, worship in great ignorance. They don't know that the idol expects of them. They don't know how it is that they ought to behave. They don't know what sorts of things that they ought to do for the idol. This is true today in many idolatrous nations today. People in these nations are religious all right. But, their religion is a clueless wandering in the night. There is no substance to their religion. There is no guidance. Should you ask five different Hindus of what is important in their religion, you will get five different answers. Indeed, this demonstrates that idols give no direction in how to live. But, our God is different. He has given us of His law and instructed us in His ways, that we might know how to live and please Him. This was the point of Moses near the end of his life. He told the people of Israel that other nations would observe the wisdom of Israel and conclude that they have a wonderfully wise God, Who instructed them in the ways of righteousness (Deut. 4:6).

When Moses recounted the law for them, he would have begun with the Ten Commandments, which are found in chapter 20. These commandments are often referred to being the **moral law** of God. I want to read them for you now. Listen to God's word:

Exodus 20:2-17
I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.
You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.
Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.
Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

These words directed Israel in how they were to live before God and how they were to live before others. God was to be the supreme object of their worship. No other god was to have any place in their allegiance. When dealing with others, these commands instructed a kindness and care for them. It told them to honor parents with their lips and respect the rights and property of others. They are very reasonable and very helpful commands. They are worthy of being followed today. They are worthy of being placed in our court rooms. They are worthy of being memorized. They are worthy of being used as a guide in all of our conduct.

As Moses finished with the moral law of God, he would have told them of the **civil law**, which comes in chapters 21-23. These chapters instructed the people of Israel in how they were to conduct their civil affairs. God did this through case law, setting up examples of how to deal with civil conflicts. The law told them of how to deal with slaves and injuries and property rights.

I want to pick out a few of these laws so that you might get a sense of what we are dealing with here. Let's begin in verse 2, "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment" (Ex. 21:2). In other words, slavery was a bit like the army. You couldn't keep a slave in your house forever. He had the opportunity after six years to be set free. But the slave is free to agree to remain under his master if he likes the arrangement. The slave might like this arrangement because the master has provided for all his family's needs in exchange for the slave's faithful labor. In such a case verses 5 and 6 explain that he can voluntarily remain a slave for the rest of his life.

Let's take another. Look over at verses 33-34, "If a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead animal shall become his" (Ex. 21:33-34). Here is a case of criminal neglect: leaving a pit uncovered. An animal falls into the pit and dies. The one responsible for the accident must make financial restitution to the owner of the animal. Look also at Exodus 22:6, "If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field itself is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution." In other words, if a man was responsible for creating a fire which destroyed another's crop, then he shall make financial restitution.

These are the types of civil laws that Moses recounted for the people. In everything, God was concerned about the rights of people. He didn't want people to be exploited through the power of others. He wanted the government to look after those who were victims. It's not so unlike our judicial system today. This is the importance of Exodus 23:8, "You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just."

All of these laws sounded good to the people of Israel. That's why they responded the way that they did, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Ex. 24:3). In later days, they would hear more of the law. In chapters 25-30, the **ceremonial law** was given. God gave instructions regarding the ark of the covenant, and the table of showbread and the golden lampstand that would remain in the tabernacle (Ex. 25). God told Moses of the dimensions of the tabernacle and how to construct it (Ex. 26). In chapter 28, God would tell Moses of how the garments of the priests should be made. Details about how the sacrifices were to be offered came in chapter 29. Details about how the incense was to be burned was found in chapter 30. I have called these the ceremonial laws, because they deal with the religious ceremonies of the priests. [1]

I'm sure that when they heard these laws told to them, the people of Israel were just as thrilled to have them. I say this, because in reading through the Old Testament, the Biblical writers often see the law as something that was wonderful, desirable and worthy of pursuit. The Psalmist would say, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). He also says, "Your law is my delight" (Psalm 119:77). In another place, he says, "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Ps. 119:72). David combined these thoughts in the 19th Psalm, saying, ...

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

> The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
> The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
> They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
> Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. (Psalm 19:7-10)

The law is capable of converting the soul (verse 7). In other words, the law can turn a sinner from the error of his ways to the truth of God. Furthermore, as one contemplates and meditates upon the law, it is capable of making a foolish person eminently wise (verse 7). The law of God is capable of making your heart glad (verse 8). The law can show you good and bad by displaying the things that are pure and lovely (verse 8). The law endures forever and is entirely righteous in all its ways (verse 9). The law of God is something that is very desirable for us. It is compared to our appetites for food (verse 10). The law is lovely and holy and righteous and good!

When Isaiah reflected back upon the words that the LORD had given to Moses, he said that God was pleased "to make the law great and glorious" (Isaiah 42:21). The law that God gave was great and glorious and desirable and perfect! It came with great glory upon the mountain! (2. Cor. 3) When Jesus came to the earth, His view was exactly the same. He said that "not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). Jesus looked to the law of God for His strength in temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). Jesus upheld the law as worthy to be followed (Matt. 19:18-19; 23:23). Even the apostle Paul spoke highly of the law. He said, "The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). On several other occasions, he confessed that "the law is good" (Rom. 7:16; 1 Tim. 1:8).

And yet, there is something about the law that makes it dreadful. Martin Luther, the German reformer said, "Moses with his law is most terrible; there never was any equal to him in perplexing, affrighting, tyrannizing, threatening, preaching, and thundering; for he lays sharp hold on the conscience, and fearfully works it." [2] John Bunyan also knew of the terrorizing effects of the law. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he describes Faithful being overtaken by the law and being beaten up by it. Faithful said, ...

> So soon as the man overtook me, he was but a word and a blow, for down he knocked me, and laid me for dead. But when I was a little come to myself again, I asked him wherefore he served me so. He said, because of my secret inclining to Adam the First: and with that he struck me another deadly blow on the breast, and beat me down backward; so I lay at his foot as dead as before. So, when I came to myself again, I cried him mercy; but he said, I know not how to show mercy; and with that knocked me down again. He had doubtless made an end of me, but that One came by, and bid him forbear. [3]

The apostle Paul spoke of the law in a similar way when he said, "I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment [of the law] came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment [of the law] deceived me and through it killed me" (Rom. 7:9-11).

And so, how should we think about the law? Is it good? Or is it bad? Is it a delight to our hearts? Or, is it the terror of our souls that beats us down and kills us? The key to this answer comes in my second point this morning, ...

2. Obeying the Law (verse 3b)

The people in Moses' day willingly pledged their obedience to all of the law. "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" (verse 3). Later, in verse 7, they affirmed the same thing. After Moses read the law once again for them, they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (verse 7). These are great words of encouragement to us. Oh, that we would have a similar heart today to obey "all that the LORD has spoken!"

Indeed this ought to be your perspective of God's Word. You ought to come, willing to obey. Time and time again, through Scripture, it is those who put their faith into action through obedience who are blessed. This is true of Abraham (James 2:21). This is true of Ezra who set his heart upon studying the law of God and practicing it (Ezra 7:10). Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28)

But it is precisely here, however, that we see the terror of the law come upon us. Because, as we seek to keep all the law, we soon discover how far we fall. And in falling, we come under the judgment of the law. That was the experience of Martin Luther. That was the experience of John Bunyan. That was the experience of Paul. That is the experience of every believer in Jesus Christ.

When the law confronts us, we can easily say with Paul, "the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin" (Rom. 7:14). If you don't see this, it's because you have not read the law correctly. There is a right way to read the law. There is a wrong way to read the law. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:8, "We know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane" (1 Tim. 1:8-9). In other words, the righteous person needs no law to live correctly. The righteous person doesn't need a sign that says, "Shoplifters will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law," because he isn't going to steal anything from the store anyway. The righteous person doesn't need to be told to wait his turn in line, because he will give preference to others in honor and await his turn anyway. The righteous person doesn't need a policeman along side of the road before he hits the brakes and slows down, because he is going the speed limit anyway. The righteous person doesn't need to go through security at an airport, because he intends no harm anyway. But, the whole reason why we have signs of warning and policemen and metal detectors is because there are rebellious people who need to be instructed in the right thing to do. And the whole reason why God has given us law is to show sinful, lawless and rebellious people their sin! Or, to use biblical language, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Revealing sin is one of the great purposes of the law.

The laws which God gave to Moses to give to the people of Israel certainly instructed the people on how to live. And they were to follow the law to the best of their ability. But, to a greater degree, these laws demonstrated how sinful the people were. That's the purpose of the law. It has a great way of doing this.

Let me show you what I mean. Please turn back to Exodus 20. I want to simply walk through the Ten Commandments and demonstrate how they can expose our sin and convict us of it.

1. Let's begin with the first commandment in verse 3: "You shall have no other gods before Me." God is simply demanding that He alone be worshiped. Nothing should rival the priority of God in your life. Nobody should be higher in your affections than God. You are called to love God more than your children, more than your spouse, more than your weekend vacations, more than your technology toys, more than your reputation, more than your retirement, more than your health, and more than your pleasure. In short, this commandment calls you to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength" (Matt. 22:37). Anything less is sin. If you fail in one point, you have become a transgressor of the law (James 2:10).

2. The next commandment comes in verse 4: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them." This commandment is similar to the first commandment in that it calls for your entire devotion to be directed toward God, and not toward the things upon the earth. Strictly speaking, this command is addressing physical idols to which you bow down. In a broader sense, it is also addressing anything upon the earth that would draw us to give our affections that should be directed toward God. Living in the 21st century in America, we are somewhat removed from this danger. Or are we? After all, we don't have statues of Baal on the street corner. And yet, I have heard another preacher speak about the Baal's that are pertinent to us: Footbaal, Basketbaal, and Basebaal. It's true. There are many in America who make their sports heroes their idols. They schedule their time around their sporting events. They speak about their sporting events all the time. They are consumed with them. Perhaps you aren't into sports, and so, think yourself free from such idolatry. Don't think yourself too far from this. We live in the most affluent nation that has ever existed. It is easy for us to love our wealth and materialism. The apostle Paul said that greed is practically the same as idolatry (Col. 3:5). So, here, I ask you, are you greedy? I simply ask you, "How much of your wealth do you give away to others?" Are you free with your money? Or, do you attempt to keep it for yourself?

3. Let's spend a few moments looking at the third commandment. It comes in verse 7, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." In this commandment, our attention is drawn to the words that we say. We are told not to take the name of the LORD our God in vain. The obvious prohibition is the swear word. But, if you think about it, it goes beyond swearing. I believe that the substituted word is just as wrong. "Oh my Gosh" and "darn it" and "Geeeez" reflect a disposition of the heart that isn't right. But, the prohibition here also extends to other well-intended uses as well. It prohibits all misuse of God's name. There is a form of praying where people begin to agree with everything that is being said, "Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus. Yes Jesus." Such usages of the name of Jesus can actually become a mantra and meaningless after a while. When the commandment talks about taking the name in vain, it talks about bringing the high and holy name of Jesus down to the trivial. Taking the name in vain means that we take His name and regard it as empty and meaningless. And dare I say as well that the third commandment can easily be broken at Rock Valley Bible Church when you sing His praise with anything less than a full heart. Because, you are minimizing the name of Jesus. I'm talking about singing while at the same time having your mind disengaged and disinterested. Singing, "My Jesus, I Love Thee, I know Thou art mine. For Thee all follies of sin, I resign" with a disinterested heart makes empty and meaningless the name of Jesus. Oh, how guilty we can stand!

4. The fourth commandment comes in verse 8, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work...." (verses 8-10a). There is great discussion about this commandment. Some would say that this commandment is binding upon us today, believing in a Christian Sabbath, which is on Sunday. Others would say that a Christian sabbath doesn't exist. Rather, all days are alike. Even in the early church this wasn't settled. In Romans 14:5, Paul writes, "One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind." Wherever you land on this, I appeal to you and to your conscience. If you believe in the Christian Sabbath, I ask you: Do you work hard enough for six days, so that you can do no work at all on the seventh day? On that day, do you devote it entirely to the LORD, by resting your body and doing no work? Or, are you out playing on that day? If you don't believe in the Christian Sabbath, I ask you: Do you commit every day as holy unto the Lord? Working for Him? Worshiping for Him? Serving Him? Is every day like Sunday in your heart? Anything less is a transgression of the law!

5. The fifth commandment comes in verse 12, "Honor your father and your mother." It means that you speak well of them. It means that you commend them (in whatever way you can). It means that you serve them willingly. It means that you willingly obey them. This isn't simply for children. This is for adults also. Moses is talking about giving honor to your parents, however old they may be. He is talking about giving honor to your parents, however good or however bad a parent they may have been to you. The commandment means that you provide for your parents financially, should the need arise. It means that you help them physically as they get older. So serious was God about this commandment that He said (in Ex. 21:17), "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."

6. The sixth commandment comes in verse 13. It is as short and simple and to the point as any commandment in all the Bible. It reads, "You shall not murder." In the simplest terms, this means that we shouldn't take the life of another person. All of us her today (I hope) might rest easy that we have kept at least one of the commandments. And yet, when Jesus has an opportunity to speak about this commandment, He digs deeper than the mere fact of murder. Jesus gets down to the motive of murder, which is anger. He said, "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (Matt. 5:22). In other words, your guilt in breaking this commandment comes when you have the seed that will germinate into transgressing this commandment. Have you every been angry at another person? If so, this commandment informs you of your guilt.

7. The seventh commandment works the same way as the sixth commandment. In verse 14, we read, "You shall not commit adultery." This simply means that you should be faithful to your marriage partner. This means that you should be faithful before you are married. This means that you should be faithful after you are married. But far from merely keeping the external technicalities of this command, Jesus again penetrates deep into the heart of the matter. Jesus said in those famous words, "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust

for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). In other words, if it has taken place in the mind, you are guilty. And so, I ask you, "Are you guilty of these things?" It is amazing how deceptive the heart is in these matters. I was recently speaking with a man who was involved in a sinful, sexual relationship. I point blank asked him whether or not his relationship was a pure relationship. He worked very hard so as not to answer the question. I had to ask it several times until he admitted his sin, sort of. "Are you guilty of these things?"

8. The eight commandment is found in verse 15, where we read, "You shall not steal." This refers to taking anything that is not rightly yours. Beyond the obvious burglary and grand theft auto, this commandment applies to cheating on your taxes. It applies to taking an apple off your neighbor's tree. It applies to copying software illegally. It applies to pirating music from the Internet. It applies to plagiarism. It applies to keeping permanently what you only borrowed initially. It applies to cheating your employer of an eight hour day. Have you stolen?

9. The ninth commandment is in verse 16, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This refers to the truthfulness of our words. What comes out of our mouth ought always to be the truth, especially as it relates to other people. This commandment refutes the obvious lie. But, it also refutes the white lie, which seeks to tell the truth, while communicating a lie. This commandment forbids all back biting. It forbids the tearing down of others, placing others in an intentionally negative light. It means that we ought only to speak the truth. Should you so speak the truth, there ought to be no reason why anything that you say about a person in their absence ought not to be readily repeated in their presence. Your words ought to be so true, that you would not be ashamed of them, should they be repeated elsewhere. Do you always tell the truth about others? Or, do you ever cast them in a negative light?

10. The tenth commandment is found in verse 17. We read, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." This simply means that you need to be totally content with what the Lord has given to you. There is nothing before your eyes that your heart doesn't want to have. We live in a covetous society. You watch television, and the commercials are designed to create in you a desire to have something, which will compel you to go out and purchase it. One moment you are thinking only about the ball game you were watching, and the next moment you are thinking about this brand new car that you want to drive! You walk through the malls, and there are displays, which attempt to make the items on the display so attractive that you want to purchase them. You came into the mall with something else in mind. But now, you begin to think that you need this item.

Are you covetous? This is the very commandment that provoked the heart of Paul and demonstrated to him that he was a sinner. When he considered his own standing before God according to the law, Paul had the audacity to say that he stood completely blameless. He said that he was circumcised the eighth day, according to the command of God (Phil. 3:5). He was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, a prestigious tribe (Phil. 3:5). Considering his religious attainments, he was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). He had a zeal for God that was unmatched (Phil. 3:6). And then he said, "as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless" (Phil. 3:6). When Paul, a Pharisee, looked at the law, he distinguished nothing in it that he had transgressed in any way, whatsoever. But, when he began to think about the 10th commandment, he said, ...

> I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died. (Rom. 7:7-9)

God used this commandment to pierce deep into his heart to create in him a knowledge of his sin! This is what the law does. This is what I have attempted to do as I ever so briefly expounded these 10 commandments. I have attempted to show you your sin! Indeed, this is the purpose of the law! Again, Romans 3:20, "through the law comes the knowledge of sin." Next week, as we plunge into the depths of Leviticus, please remember this fact as you reflect upon all of God's instructions to the priests as to how they are to perform the sacrifices. All of it is there to show to us that sin is present and must be dealt with!

So, the way to deal with the law is not like the Israelites, who said with good intentions but with bad theology, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" (Ex. 24:3). Try as they ought, they would surely fail, because the purpose of the law was to show us how we will fail. But here is the good news: Where we have failed to keep the law, Jesus Christ has succeeded in keeping the law. Paul wrote in Romans,

> "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, 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." (Rom. 8:3-4)

As we realize that we have failed God and his legal requirements, we will be brought to our only hope: faith in Jesus Christ. Listen very carefully to Galatians 3:24. Should there be one thought that I want to leave you with this morning, it is this verse: "**The law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.**" (Gal. 3:24)

Perhaps now you can see how wonderful the law is in its destructive work of our souls! The law guides us where we need to go. The law shows us how we can't get there on our own. The law then leads us to Christ. Perhaps this morning finds you apart from Christ. Perhaps you have never quite felt your need for a Savior. It's my trust that you have seen today your need for a Savior, and will cry out to Christ, who alone can save. The promise of the Scripture is clear, "Whoever will call on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Romans 10:13). May the law do its deep, penetrating work this morning in your hearts.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 29, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
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[1] At this point, I feel like a few clarifying remarks might be helpful. There are many theologians who divide the law in the manner in which I did (i.e. moral law, civil law, and ceremonial law). They would then say that the civil law has been abolished (because we are no longer under a theophany, where God is our king). And, they would say that the ceremonial law has also been abolished (because we are under the cross and not under the sacramental system). However, they say, the moral law (i.e. the Ten Commandments) is still binding upon us.

This sounds nice and neat and fine. And there are many helpful usages of such a distinction. However, it is much more difficult to carry out in practice than it is in theory. For instance, there are many moral laws that are woven in and among the ceremonial law code, which we know are still binding upon us today. Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." And yet, the next verse speaks about how you are not to breed two kinds of cattle together or sow two kinds of seed in your field together or wear a garment of two kinds of material mixed together. What is it that qualifies the one command as a moral law, continuing to be binding upon us today, while the other suddenly becomes a civil law that no longer applies.

It's out of the scope of this sermon to fully elaborate on these things. I simply want to warn of the over-simplification that often takes place when dividing up the law in these sorts of ways. If you are interested in further study, I refer you to another message I preached on May 5, 2002 on the text of Matthew 5:17-19. In that message, I deal with a few related topics.

[2] Table Talk of Martin Luther, p. 169.

[3] Pilgrim’s Progress, p. 76.