

## Chapter Fifteen

## What The Law Could Not Do

The Law of God is holy, eternal, perfect and good! It is the divine pattern of righteousness that God demands of those who would be saved by their own works, merits, and efforts. The Law of God is powerful, demanding punishment for each transgression. It is absolutely just in treating all alike, and there is no respect of persons under the Law of God. There are no exceptions, for “*the soul that sins, it shall die*” – [be eternal cut off from God] – It is inflexible, and rigid, so that it make no allowance for effort, no matter how sincere, if that effort fails to measure up to every single demand of the perfect Law of God. The Law condemns and curses every sinner. It knows no distinction between little sins and big sins as far as guilt is concerned. The demands of the law of God are absolute.

*Cursed is every one that continueth not **in all things** which are written in the book of the law to do them.* (Galatians 3:10)

God’s Law recognizes neither wealth – nor influence – nor position – nor station, but says:

*...there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:22-23).

The Law of God is eternal and stands today as the pronouncer of wrath upon all who refuse to accept, by simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s means of deliverance from its power and condemnation and curse. It is important to re-emphasize these assertions concerning the Law, because those who believe that grace and freedom from the Law for *believers* in Christ are constantly accused of making void the Law, as though it did not exist any more, or had no application to this Age of Grace. This is a false accusation, but the Apostle Paul already answered it over 2000 years ago. He too has been slandered and condemned for preaching liberty and deliverance from the Law. To answer these critics, I offer the words of Paul in Galatians 2:21,

*“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain”* (Galatians 2:21).

Paul has been accused of making void the Law. In Romans 3:31 he answers his critics:

*“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law”* (Romans 3:31).

Stop and think about these momentous verses for a moment. Paul says, “*If man could obtain righteousness by keeping the Law, then Christ has died for nothing.*” Consider carefully the implications. If any human being could possibly be saved by the Law of God, then why did Jesus have to die for those who were able to save themselves? It certainly would be a tragic mistake if God should demand the death of His Son to save those who could save themselves without the sacrifice of Jesus. And this holds true even for the believer after he is saved. If the believer, once saved, were able to keep

himself saved by the works of the Law, then why do we need Christ to intercede daily for us at the right hand of God? (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25) Just think for a moment – What a terrible accusation to bring against God, to say He wasted the work of Christ on the cross for those who were able by their own work to attain righteousness. If that is so, then “*Christ is dead in vain.*” His death was wholly unnecessary and uncalled for.

### We Establish the Law

Now notice the same truth as expressed in that other verse – Romans 3:31,

*“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law”* (Romans 3:31).

By confessing that we cannot keep the Law, we are not debasing or downgrading the Law or weakening it, but instead *we establish the Law*. By our admission that we were unable to meet the demands of the Law of God, we prove its perfection. We elevate it high above man’s fallible efforts and works. To say that man can keep God’s holy Law, is to drag it down to our own imperfect level. I confess that God’s holy Law is so high, so good, so perfect, so holy, that I, a poor, weak, depraved sinner cannot in myself meet its high standards. I extol the holiness of the Law and exalt it, and so establish its perfection by not lowering it to the depths of my imperfection. I establish the Law by admitting that its standards cannot be attained by me, a depraved sinner, and that I therefore must turn to another for mercy, pardon, and forgiveness. It must ever be,

Nothing in my hand I bring;  
Simply to Thy cross I cling  
Not the labor of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy Law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
These for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone!

This is “*Bible salvation.*” How conclusive the words of Paul:

*“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness”* (Romans 4:5).

### What The Law Could Not Do

We have seen that the Law is powerful in *condemning* the sinner, but at the same time the Law is also powerless to save the *same* sinner. It is also powerless to condemn the believer in Christ. The child of God is free from its condemnation. After Paul has given us a picture of the struggle between the two natures within him, he cries out for deliverance:

*“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Romans 7:24).

It is clear that Paul does not claim sinless perfection even under grace. He is still conscious of the presence of his old nature, and admits his defeat. Listen to his testimony:

*“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do”* (Romans 7:18-19).

Remember, this is Paul’s testimony some twenty-five years *after* he had been saved. He still acknowledges the presence of his old nature and confesses his defeat. He continues to tell us of his earnest striving to please God, but how he fails in his own strength:

*“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Romans 7:21-24).

Notice that Paul says, *“I delight in the Law of God after the inward man.”* This *“inward man”* is the new man, the new nature, that is, the life of Christ that the believer received at conversion. This new nature delights in the Law of God. It is the perfect desire of Paul to keep God’s Law perfectly. The new nature seeks to keep God’s commandments. But alas! Paul says, *“I have to contend with another law – the law of sin and of death that is in my members.”* As much as Paul’s inward man desired to measure up to the Law’s perfection, he found his old nature opposing him at every turn, or as he puts it:

*“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”* (Romans 7:23).

And then recognizing the futility, the hopelessness of gaining victory in his own strength, and the utter defeat that results from his trying to keep God’s perfect Law by himself as long as the old nature is within him, he turns from his own efforts, and cries out:

*“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Romans 7:24).

And then he finds the answer: He must give up all confidence in his own efforts, and turn the whole matter over to another, and so he concludes:

*“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 7:25).

Christ is our victory; and even when we fail, it is *His* victory that is credited to our account. The chapter (Romans 7) closes with this confession:

*“...So then with the mind [spirit] I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).*

This is the answer to the verse with which we began:

*“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18).*

But, thank God, that is not the end of the story. The eighth chapter should follow the seventh without a break. After Paul admits his failure he cries out in Romans 8:1,

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”*

In spite of our failures, in spite of our weakness of the flesh and our old nature, in spite of our defeats, ***there is not condemnation!*** We are still saved! Our failures and defeats may bring on the chastening of the Lord, and cause us to “*suffer loss*” at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but *no condemnation!* Christ has made provision for our security. There is cleansing, deliverance and victory, but not condemnation.

Romans 8:1 does not say, “*There is no condemnation for the believer if he keeps the Law perfectly.*” Paul had admitted his failure to do that in no uncertain terms in chapter 7. Many would try to read it that way; but it says, “*no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*” There would be absolutely no point in saying there is no condemnation to those who keep the Law. That goes without saying, for it is perfectly clear and evident that the Law does not condemn those who keep it. The Law does not condemn the righteous, but the sinner, and those who break the Law.

However, there is no condemnation even for those who have broken the law but who are “*in Christ Jesus.*” There is even “*no condemnation*” for believers even through they break the Law after they are saved. Don’t let this startle you. “*There is no condemnation*” for those who are “*in Christ,*” even though they fail to keep the Law perfectly. There will be chastening, to be sure, if we are disobedient; there will be punishment if we stumble and fall; there will be a judging of our sin – *but no condemnation!* If this were not so, then it would mean that each time the believer sins, he would again come under condemnation of the same Law and be lost again, and have to be saved all over again. That ***cannot*** be! Who is there that can honestly say at the close of day, “*This day I have not sinned in either thought, or word, or deed. This day I have kept the whole Law of God perfectly, without an evil thought or a hasty word or a selfish act.*” God has made provision for our sins after we are saved. We have a High Priest interceding, and we can by confession receive cleansing. Thank God for this marvelous provision, that

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

But No Condemnation!

I must point out the reason why there is no condemnation even through we fail as believers. Here it is:

*“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).*

God sees us “*in Christ*” as perfect and sinless, and accepts us not on the basis of our own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness the law could not give us. It was way beyond our reach, and Scripture therefore says,

*“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).*

The fact then that the law cannot save the sinner, nor keep the saint, is not the fault of the Law, but of sinful flesh. That which the Law could not do, was because of man’s sinful nature. And because we could not attain unto righteousness by our own efforts, God sent His Son into the world to satisfy the Law for us, by paying its penalty on the cross, and then offering us His righteousness, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled *in us*. Notice, Scripture does not say that it might be fulfilled by us, but “in us.”

Let me ask you at this point, “*Have you been trying to make yourself fit for salvation by your own efforts? Have you tried to earn God’s favor by doing your best?*” I tell you – your best is not good enough. Why not accept Christ’s righteousness, and be able to say:

*“I’ve tried in vain a thousand ways  
My fears to quell, my hopes to raise;  
But what I need, the Bible says,  
Is ever, only Jesus.”*