The purposes of the Law:

1. To show men the righteous requirements of God
2. To lead us to Christ
3. To guide Christians how to live a godly life

The other day we’re asking each other who the worst sinner in the Bible is. Some said Paul, because in his letter he wrote he was the worst sinner of all. Some said Moses, because he broke the ten commandments all at once. The stone tablet, you know! Others disagreed and said it must be Adam or Even, because they sinned even without the sinful nature. But I said, the worst sinner must be Jesus. Hey James, be careful, that’s blasphemy! But I mean it, each one of us only carries our own sin, but our Lord Jesus took all our sins upon Himself. You have no idea how dreadful it is to drink the cup of full wrath of God! Today’s message is all about the Gospel.

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

If we break any one point of the law, we are guilty of breaking all of it, and breaking the law is sinning against God, and the penalty of sin is death, eternal death in hell. We are all doomed!

What then is the purpose of the law? To condemn us all? Well, unless you can keep the whole law. But can anyone? Let’s consider the 10 commandments to see if anyone can keep them.

The 10 commandments consist of 2 parts: to love God and to love your neighbor.

Matt 22:37-40 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The first part of the 10 commandments:

* You shall have no other gods before me
* You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything
* You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God
* Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

Can we keep these commandments? No, impossible! Idolatry is deeply rooted in the heart of every human. We, by our nature — our sinful nature, are idol worshippers. Our ancestors worshiped the sun and the moon and the stars, mountains and rivers and trees, mortal men who died and even animals and reptiles! And today we worship money, fame, and jobs! And worse, from ancient times up now, human beings have always been worshiping all kinds of false gods that don’t even exist!

But we’re Christians, we worship the true God. Really? Have we not built our security on worldly wealth and systems? Have we not loved worldly pleasure? If we have, that’s idolatry! Our Lord Jesus teaches what it means to love God: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

Indeed, it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for us to keep these commandments.

Let’s now turn to the second part of the 10 commandments and see if we can find any comfort:

* Honor your father and your mother
* You shall not murder
* You shall not commit adultery
* You shall not steal
* You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor
* You shall not covet … anything that belongs to your neighbor

I think for any single one of these commandments, if you allow others to confront you and if you have any sense about yourself, in less than a minute you will have to confess that you have broken the commandment. Well, the less obvious ones may be murder and adultery. However, in Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus explains being angry with our brother or neighbor or call them fool is equivalent to murder. For adultery, isn’t this just for married people, so singles are safe; but let me remind you: we are all married to Christ. And James 4:4 calls those who have friendship with the world adulterous people.

So there is no exception, we can’t keep any of the commandments. We are all doomed!

Why did God give the Law knowing that we cannot even keep any one of them? What’s the purpose of the Law then?

Romans 7:7 gives the answer: What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”

Therefore, the first purpose of the Law is: to show men the righteous requirements of God. For this purpose, we have preached an individual sermon for each of the ten commandments, what each commandment means and what God demands from us for the commandment. Therefore, we know the commandments and we have no excuse. Indeed, Romans 1:32 also warns us: Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

In fact, this doesn’t just refer to the ten commandments and the law of Moses, but also the moral law that God has put in the heart of every human being. Romans 2:14-15: when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

The law was given to everyone, Jews and non-Jews. Indeed, if we take a careful look at the ten commandments, it’s not difficult to see that the ten commandments essentially contain every other law that regulates our life. In fact, to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself, do summarize every law that guides our life and regulates our society. Therefore, the Law of God serves as our moral compass and without it, men would become utterly evil and the society would be in utter chaos, in fact, there wouldn’t be any society without the law.

The Law requires every human, not just the Jews or Christians, to obey God. Romans 2:12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

Jews and non-Jews, Christians and non-Christians, are all under law and therefore all under sin [Romans 3:9]. There is no exception. If any one does not carefully observe the law, he is storing up wrath against himself for the day of God’s wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed [Romans 2:5].

But can we observe the law? For thousands of years the Jews have shown that they failed and failed miserably. And the Scripture clearly tells us in Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law. We are all doomed! No hope! But that’s precisely the design of the Gospel of Christ: against all hope, in hope we believe and are justified and saved. So as Galatians 3:24 tells us: the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

That brings us to the second purpose of the Law: To lead us to Christ. The Gospel!

Romans 8:1-4 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us …

The law is good, holy and righteous, but it’s used by sin to produce death in us [Romans 7:7-12]. But what the law was powerless to do because of our sinful nature, Christ overcame and triumphed on the cross by his blood and death as a sin offering, and He fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law for us who believe in Him. He took away our sins and credited to us the righteousness He earned by fully observing the Law.

Now to Christians, this has become a standard formula: everyone is a sinner because he cannot keep the law of God, but there is a solution, the Gospel, put your faith in Christ and you will be saved.

We’ve heard this a thousand times, there’s nothing new. Well, I wish I could give you something new, something more exciting, but I really can’t. I can’t give you a better news, a better gospel. But I would like to ask you to take a moment, to carefully think about what the Law of God demands from you and what the Gospel really means to you.

To help you think, let me ask you some questions. What did you learn from each of the previous ten sermons about the ten commandments? Did you learn how you are able to keep each of the commandments? Or did you learn how incapable and hopeless you are in keeping any of the commandments? Did you clearly see the Gospel in each of the sermons? If you did feel the hopelessness and see the Gospel, did you also at the same time find the Gospel sweet and wonderful? Or you had not much feeling because you already well accepted that you’re a sinner and sinners sin, that’s ok since we’re already saved?

I hope none of us has become numb to the Gospel, because if we no longer find the Gospel sweet, it means that we have stopped seriously thinking that we’re sinners and we have become numb to sin. I am afraid that we have become so easy to confess our sins knowing that we’re forgiven, and there’s little change of heart, and slowly, we no longer take many of the sins seriously and have become accustomed to living in the world.

But I hope that’s not true for us who’re sitting here, I hope all of us still find the Gospel sweet every single day, that we know how badly we still fall short of the glory of God, how little we can keep the commandments of God, and therefore how much we need Christ and His grace every single day.

But does grace free us from keeping the Law? Paul in Romans 6 categorically rejects any idea that we should still live in sin after we have received grace.

Romans 6:1-2 Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:14-18 For sin should not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey --- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Every Christian has died with Christ to sin, and Romans 7:1 says this: the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives. This means that Christians who died with Christ are no longer under law, but under grace. Therefore, we are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to obedience that leads to righteousness. What does slaves to obedience mean? It means that we should now keep the Law of God — being obedient to righteousness simply means keeping the Law of God.

Wait … didn’t we conclude earlier that no one can keep the Law? And we need to keep the Law again now? That comes to our last point, the third purpose of the Law: To guide Christians how to live a godly life.

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First of all, I’d like to emphasize that the Scripture everywhere affirms that the Law is good and holy.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and in fact the longest chapter in the Bible, and you will find the whole psalm talks about how good the Law of God is and how the author desires the Law of God.

Psalm 19:7-11 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is Your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Therefore, the Law is good, but only because of our sinful nature we cannot keep it. But for Christians, Romans 8:2 affirms that through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death. This means that the Spirit has enabled us to obey God in a way that is pleasing to Him which we could never do in our sinful nature [Romans 8:4-8]. So now, we can love the Law of God as the author of Psalm 119 does and the author of Psalm 19 does.

What, then, is the purpose of our keeping the Law now? After we died with Christ and raised again with Him to live a new life in Christ, we no longer keep the Law in order to earn our salvation because Christ has already earned it for us, but we keep the Law to please God and to glorify His name.

So what shall we do then? Again, Paul gives the answer in Romans 12:1-2 offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God --- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is --- His good, pleasing and perfect will.

First of all, we must have our mind transformed and renewed so that we may desire to obey the Law of God. To do this, there are a number of ways to help you:

1. Read the Bible regularly (better, habitually memorize Bible verses, passages and chapters, feed on the word of God)
2. Study the Bible regularly (by yourself, joining a small group or Sunday Bible study)
3. Pray regularly (by yourself and with others)
4. Listen carefully and prayerfully to each sermon, and do not be a hearer only but be a doer as well
5. Find a good accountability partner for your spiritual growth
6. Do not become too busy: if today you can’t find time for God, for His word and for prayers, there is a good chance that you can’t find time tomorrow too!

Some have told me that we also need to avoid the danger of being legalistic in keeping the Law of God or living a strict Christian life. Certainly we should not be like the Pharisees, so always examine your heart and do not let it deceive you. A good accountability partner and small group will certainly help prevent you from being legalistic as I think it would not be difficult for others to observe legalistic behaviors. But I am actually not too worried about any of us becoming legalistic. I think at least we Christians here in Hong Kong and in this church are pretty far away from being legalistic. On the contrary, I worry that we have often taken the Gospel for granted and become numb to sin, this is a much greater danger to us. So I would like to close today’s sermon by:

Hebrews 10:26-31 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, “ and again, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We have received the Gospel, we have tasted the grace of Christ, and therefore we cannot keep on sinning. Otherwise, we’re treating the Gospel as trash and trampling the Son of God under foot. It is a dreadful thing to drink the cup of God’s wrath! But Hebrews 4:15-16 also gives us the comfort and confidence: we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we did --- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

May the Lord help us love His Law and overcome our sin!