

Following the Law Through Grace

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Holiness Matters

Text: Matthew 5:17-20, Romans 3:20 (AMP)

Most Christians who desire to live a life that is pleasing to God have all struggled with legalism to one degree or another. Legalism is the term used to describe us trying to keep all the commands and teachings that God has given in our own strength. Many times, we fall into the trap of trying to follow all that our particular culture, denomination or circle of friends have concerning traditions, rules, and preferences. What we find is that we grow frustrated, guilt ridden and then ambivalent about trying to remember and keep them all.

The truth is that there are standards of modesty, appropriate clothing and grooming for both men and women. There is such a thing as proper and acceptable speech and conduct. There are “norms” that help you stand out as a professional and as a person of quality and excellence. These must not be confused with legalism. Holiness does not judge a book by its cover but holiness understands that our outward appearance does hold some indication and bearing on what is in our inner man.

The laws that God has given are established forever. They do not change. As believers we realize that all the law does is point out what is acceptable or unacceptable to God and what is the punishment for not following God’s righteous rules and commands. Jesus never came to change the law but to fulfil the law and to pay the penalty we owe for breaking it. This is called grace. What Grace shows us is that we are all guilty of breaking God’s laws and we all deserve the punishment for disobeying God’s laws.

Romans 3:10-12, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23

Righteousness is rightness of conduct. Holiness is rightness of character. It is possible for people to do right things for all kinds of reasons: self-interest, loyalty, pity, self-fulfillment. True righteousness is inspired by holiness, and holiness in the disciple is an approximation to the character of Christ.

All of us agree that speed limits are good and that stop signs are beneficial, yet everyone of us are law breakers at some point if we drive a car. God’s laws are still the law. The 10 Commandments are still God’s direction and not a suggestion. Yet all of us have broken them. If not directly then in spirit. No punishment or penalty will change the offender. God is not just interested in outward keeping of the law to keep up appearances but the inward obedience out of love for Him.

As Christians we work out our own salvation. Many rely on the law to live holy rather than relying on the Spirit. At first this seems easier because there are things we can list and then check them off. This becomes tedious and ultimately impossible.

Galatians 5:16-17, Romans 13:8-10, Matthew 22:35-40 Walking in the Spirit and being led by the Spirit helps us to fulfill one law and that is the Law of Love. The truth is that GRACE simplifies everything.

Christians who rely on law instead of grace wind up trying to make their own path and end up **striving** for holiness. It is easy to get bogged down in rules we follow and wind up missing the entire point of the grace of God. **Matthew 23:23-25**

Much of Christianity throughout history was rife with legalism and many trying to **earn** God's favor. One of the great breakthroughs came when Martin Luther started the Reformation after studying the Word of God. This brought us out of the Dark Ages with the reintroduction of the understanding of the doctrine of **grace**.

Today, many Christians declare that they are New Testament Christians and no longer worry about Old Testament laws. Many struggle with what they see to be a paradox between law and grace. It is important to understand the Old Testament is still **attached** to the New Testament. It is God's laws that help us to understand and to appreciate His amazing grace.

From the very beginning holiness was about relationship and about **choice**. Man was given free will from the moment of creation. Sin entered in when Eve and then Adam disobeyed God's command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This was the first **law**. Notice sin came in when the wisdom and reasonableness of the law was called into question. **Genesis 3:1-11** Notice once sin entered in through disobedience to God, mankind became aware of the difference between good and evil. While the world condemns naivety, God created us to be pure and **innocent**. **Romans 16:19-20**

To understand what it is to be holy we must understand sin. Sin means to miss the mark of God's perfection and innocence. Sin entered the world through **rebellion**. God gave one boundary, one command to obey. One sin, one act of rebellion had a profound effect upon all of God's creation, including all men and women. The greatest effect was on the relationship we have with God.

Sin is called **lawlessness**. This is where people do what they think is right and correct according to their own ways. **1 John 3:4** Sin is doing anything contrary to what is God's will or **not** doing what we know is righteous and true. **James 4:17** The Bible says that anything not of **faith** is sin. **Romans 14:23b** Remember that faith does not only believe in God but desires to **please** God. This is at the heart of holiness. **Hebrews 11:6** If we do not understand what sin does to us, we will never have the gratitude for Jesus selfless sacrifice for us. **Ephesians 1:3-4** Holiness requires us to understand sin, the law and God's grace **before** we can live a holy life for Him.

All people sin. Everyone. The only person who lived a sinless life was Jesus. While it is possible for someone not to sin, **all do**.

Some people teach the idea of **original** sin. This states that, because we are all descended from Adam and Eve, we all share in their sin and that sin is in man's seed passed on through **conception**. **Romans 5:12-21** Original sin states that from the womb no one is good. They believe in the total **depravity** of man. That even children are tainted, impure and born sinful. They sight scriptures such as **Psalms 51:1-7**

An alternate approach is that we are born into a sinful environment and that because sin surrounds us we are affected by it and eventually commit it because of its constant impact and influence on our lives.

This has great implications because if a child dies before they make a decision to choose Christ as Savior people want to know what happens to them. This is a long study in itself. We believe that a child is pure and holy until the time of something called the age of accountability. This age is different for each child depending upon their maturity, understanding and mental development. Some believe this age is as early as 13 when Jewish tradition says a child becomes a man or a woman. Some believe this is as old as 19. The cutoff age for those who were not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of Israel's disobedience.

Original sin teaches that even after we are saved that we are going to keep on sinning. That once we are saved, we are always saved no matter what we do, intentionally or accidentally. It is important to understand that holiness demands that we walk in the light as He is in the light. Then we will have continued fellowship with God and freedom from sin. **1 John 1:5-9**

While a Christian who is holy will not live in continual willful sin, we will all struggle with momentary sin. A life of holiness deals with sin through confession and repentance. It is like walking into a dark room. We can continue to walk in the dark or we can reach out and turn on the light. Confession brings our sin out of the darkness and into the light so that it can be forgiven.

❖ Holiness principle # 5 – The Law makes me aware of my sin and brings death. Following Jesus teachings and accepting His Salvation fulfills the law and brings victory to me. A life of holiness happens as I continually walk in obedience to His commands and in His forgiveness.

At Mount Sinai when God gave His laws to Moses, He did so in three ways.

- 1) Moral laws –
which outlined relationships between God and man and man and people.
- 2) Civic laws –
which governed Israel as a nation and how people should treat one another.
- 3) Ritual laws –
which dealt with the worship of God and how to perform sacrifices.

Moral laws reveal to us God's character. Christians are to follow them today. The New Testament repeats the moral laws of the Old Testament. A law repeated in both the Old and New Testament are binding upon Christians.

Civic laws are principles, how to relate to other people in an organized and peaceful society and how to bring justice when people do not treat one another correctly. This is so people can dwell safely with each other.

Ritual laws display the **high** standard for the purity of sacrifices so people can receive forgiveness of sin. Sacrificial laws demonstrate the high **cost** of sin and God's standards for a perfect sacrifice. Old Testament sacrifices are a foreshadowing of the perfect, sinless sacrifice that Jesus became for us. **Hebrews 9:11-15, Hebrews 10:1-18,**

It is in the ritual and civic laws that the Christians can discover **principles** of purity. The principles behind the rituals teach lessons that reveal the heart of God. Old Testament narratives present Godly character to emulate and evil character to reject.

The **Mosaic** laws or the instructions and commands that were given to Moses are given in the negative and the positive. The negative tells us what not to do and the consequences that come with disobedience. The positive which instructs us in how we should behave and the **blessings** that comes with obedience. The Law of God acts like a **mirror**, it showed people where they are and what they were doing but left them powerless to change. The Law did not remove guilt or shame it just showed the chasm between God's holiness and our sinfulness.

There is a distinction between holiness and morality and **ethics**. People can practice morality and ethics apart from holiness. Morality and ethics can be practiced apart from a relationship with God. They are things you do and things you believe. Holy is who we are as a child of God and deals with the transformation of not just our behavior and beliefs but every part of us inside and out.

Today people try to separate law and **grace**, the Old and the New Testament. Many see the God of the Old Testament as a God of judgment, justice and law. They see the God of the New Testament as a God of grace and mercy. He is the same God in both Testaments. His character, personality and purity have never changed. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. **Malachi 3:6-7** God displayed His grace and mercy throughout the Old Testament through His goodness and through the sacrificial system.

Under the New Covenant through Jesus, God put an end to animal sacrifice and fulfilled the punishment for all sin. Jesus took the sin of all of humanity from the beginning to the end of history. Once and for all, He defeated death, hell and the grave, He received the **penalty** for our sin. Under the law almost all sin was given the death penalty. Jesus died in our place. This was not only justice fulfilled but grace given.

Because of the blood of Jesus when we renounce our sin and accept His **forgiveness** we are no longer under condemnation. **Romans 8:1** Holiness understands that our guilty verdict along with our guilty conscience are now under the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Under the law, every sacrifice that was given had to die. Under the New Covenant we are introduced to a new way, a **living** sacrifice. **Romans 12:1-2** Under the Old Covenant sin was forgiven once a year. Each year animals had to die.

As Christians, we understand that we die to our old self but that we were raised to walk a new life in Christ. We no longer face death. Holiness understands that each day we are a LIVING sacrifice. Our entire life is an offering to God. **Galatians 2:19-21**

It is important to understand that Jesus **fulfilled** the righteous requirements of the law. **Romans 10:4** Remember Jesus didn't come to do away with the law of God but to complete it. **Matthew 5:17-20** Jesus did this by living a **sinless** life. **Hebrews 4:15**

A Holy God cannot live and fellowship with sinful people. Because He is Holy, He cannot relate because God the Father is not **tempted** by sin. **1 John 1:5, James 1:13** Jesus can relate to us because He was tempted in every way that we are and He was without sin. Because Jesus lived a sinless life, He was not subjected to the laws punishment of death. He chose to die so that He could take the sin of the world upon Himself and destroy it. Jesus fulfilled the law by His sacrifice.

Jesus demonstrated through His life the high standards that God expects of us. When we follow His example and obey Him, the Holy Spirit fulfills the law in us. **Romans 8:2** Under the New Covenant our call is no longer to follow the "letter" of the law but to **obey** the Law of Christ. **1 Corinthians 9:19-22, John 13:34-35, Romans 13:8-10**

The Law of Christ is the Law of **Love**. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Galatians 5:22-23** Let that sink in for a moment – this **simplifies** everything.

The Law of Love and the Fruit of the Spirit give us freedom from all laws. You don't have to remember anything except to love and produce **fruit**. A holy life is not a restricted life it is a life of **freedom**. **Galatians 5:1-6**

It is human nature to fall back into rules and regulations, to rely on programs and prescriptions. Whenever we do, we become entangled again in the fruitless efforts of trying to do things and always coming up **short**. **Colossians 2:15-23** There is no wisdom in getting tangled up in all the laws, simply fulfill the law of love.

It is the Spirit who brings us life through the grace of Jesus. **Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)**