

Psalm 19
Psalm 19
Galatians 3

“The Perfect Law of the LORD”

March 12, 2023

In the evening we are going through Leviticus,
exploring how the Law of God applies today in Jesus Christ.

For those who haven't been able to come on Sunday evenings,
let me summarize the whole Pentateuch!

The five books of Moses start in Genesis in the Garden in Eden –
with man dwelling with God in perfect harmony.

The five books of Moses end in Deuteronomy –
with the new humanity (Israel) preparing to enter the Promised Land,
where they are called to dwell with God in perfect harmony.

Exodus tells the story of how God redeemed Israel from Egypt
and – in spite of their grumbling –
brought him to worship the LORD at Mt. Sinai.

Numbers tells the story of how Israel grumbled in the wilderness
and refused to enter the Promised Land – and so wandered for 40 years –
but God still brought his grumbling children to the Land of Promise.

Leviticus is at the center of the Pentateuch for a reason.

Leviticus is dealing with the question of how can humanity enter the presence of God?
God has called Israel to dwell with him.
He had them build him a tent so that God could go camping with his children!

But when the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle –
no one could enter the holy place.
How can grumbling, sinful Israel live before God?

That's what Leviticus is all about.

It's why – at the center of Leviticus – is Leviticus 16 –
(the five books of Moses all center on this one chapter!)
the way in which the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year!
God is opening a way for his people to dwell with him!

The first half of Leviticus is all about how to approach God.
It's all about justification!

The second half of Leviticus is all about how to live before God.
It's all about sanctification!

But the heart of Leviticus is about Israel being united in the person of the High Priest

who enters the Holy of Holies and bears all Israel into God's presence!

And we've been seeing how Book One of the Psalter teaches Israel to see themselves "in David" in a very similar way.

This is why we sing Psalm 19 in Christ.

And Psalm 19 teaches us to sing this way by giving the direction at the beginning:
To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

As Israel was to sing this song "in David" – so we sing it "in Christ."

What does it mean to sing Psalm 19 "in Christ.?"

It means that we sing Psalm 19 in the light of what Jesus Christ has done.

When we say "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul,"

we do not limit the "law" simply to the five books of Moses.

We sing Psalm 19 with the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ in view.

So let us rejoice in God's law together by singing Psalm 19!

Sing Psalm 19

Read Galatians 3

When Paul speaks of the "law" in Galatians 3,
what is he referring to?

Some have tried to say that Paul is speaking of the ceremonial law.

But that will not do—because he cites a part of the civil law in v13.

No, Paul is thinking of the whole law in this context.

But he is thinking of the whole law considered as a covenant.

This is clear from v17:

"The law, which came 430 years afterward,
does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God,
so as to make the promise void."

When Paul thinks of the covenant which God made with Israel through Moses,
he thinks of a temporary arrangement that was in force only so long as Israel was a child.

When Israel was a child, the law was good and necessary
in order to train Israel to look for the Messiah.

But now that Christ has come (v24-26),
the purpose of the law (as covenant) has been fulfilled.

Paul uses the illustration of a child explicitly in 4:1-7

Sure, Israel was the Son of God—but Israel was the Son of God in his minority.

And the law was our pedagogue –
the pedagogue, in Greco-Roman culture,
was a servant who made sure that an under-age son
did what he was supposed to do!
The pedagogue was not a teacher –
but was assigned the task of keeping pre-teen or teenage sons in line.

That's a hard assignment!

But think about how that connects to the *law*!

The Law was the pedagogue that God assigned to Israel
to keep Israel in line – until the Seed – until the Offspring – Christ – grew up!

Now that Christ has come, however,
the Son of God has reached maturity.
Since Jesus has sat down at the right hand of the Father,
we know that the Son of God has received his inheritance.
Therefore, Paul says,
all who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

(And remember what we saw last time –
“Christ” – or “Messiah” – refers to the Anointed One – the Son of David.
So all who are baptized into the Son of David have put on the Son of David.)

And in Christ, you are all sons of God through faith,
and therefore you are heirs according to the promise.

The law was never intended to be a means of salvation.
It was intended to discipline the Son of God in his youth,
to prepare him for adulthood—for the coming of Jesus Christ.

So once the son has grown up –
what do you do with the pedagogue?
When you were a child you found the pedagogue really frustrating!
But when you grew up – and remember this is *God's* pedagogue here! –
you realized that your Father loved you,
and he gave you that pedagogue because he knew that you needed it.

How would you treat the pedagogue?
You would *love* the pedagogue!
He was a faithful servant!
He did his job well.
He showed you the path that your heavenly Father wanted you to walk!

Now, would you let him beat you up any more?
Of course not!

And yet we can still say with Psalm 19
that the law of the LORD revives the soul!

Because David understood that God's law is more than just the pedagogue!

We are no longer under the law as a covenant.
But that does not mean that the law is irrelevant.
Paul speaks of "the law of the Spirit of life" (Romans 8:2),
or "the law of Christ" (1 Cor 9:21).

Considered as a covenantal arrangement,
the law is outdated and to go back to the law is to reject Christ;
but considered as God's instruction, as God's direction for how we are to live before him,
the law still shows us the path that our heavenly Father wants us to walk.

And this is *exactly* what Psalm 19 is doing.
Why do I say that?

Psalm 18 opened "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer."
And in the superscription of Psalm 18 it identifies David as "the Servant of the LORD."
Psalm 19 closes with a reflection on the Psalmist as "your servant" –
and identifies God as "my rock and my redeemer."

So the end of Psalm 19 very intentionally connects us back to the beginning of Psalm 18.
Why is this important?

This is something that happens periodically throughout the Psalter.
Psalm 18 is all about David as the LORD's anointed – the Messiah.
Psalm 19 is all about God's law – God's *Torah*.

This connection between Messiah and Torah happens three times in the Psalter.

We saw it in Psalms 1-2 at the very beginning.
We see it again here.
And we see it again in Psalms 118-119.
Each song that celebrates God's law is paired with a song that celebrates the Messiah.

Over the next few weeks we'll see a similar pattern in how Psalms 20-24 celebrate Messiah,
followed by Psalm 25 reflecting on the teaching and instruction of the LORD.

This connection between Messiah and Law

is at the heart of what Paul says in Galatians 3!

The Law was all about the coming of the Seed – the Offspring (Christ!).

Paul is simply making explicit what the Psalms had been saying for a thousand years!

We start in verses 1-6 with words *about* God:

1. Words about God: The Heavens Proclaim the Glory of God (v1-6)

*19 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above^[a] proclaims his handiwork.*

Psalm 19 does not speak of the earth or the waters,
but fixes our attention on the revelation of God's glory in the heavens.

The language of verses 1-6 is the language of ordinary observation.

The word translated "firmament" or "sky" in verse 1 is the Hebrew word "raqia"
which prior to the development of modern astronomy
was understood to be a solid dome.

This shouldn't surprise us.

After all v4-6 speaks of the sun "rising" and "running" across the heavens,
again using the language of ordinary observation.

The firmament (that blue thing up there that we call the "sky")
proclaims the glory of God and his marvelous skill at crafting such a tent.
All the earth can behold these visible words that God has made.

The more astronomy studies the heavens,
the more we marvel at God's handiwork!

But what do we actually learn about God from the heavens?

His glory.

His handiwork.

But then verses 2-6 say a great deal about the heavenly bodies –
but very little about God.

² *Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

³ *There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

⁴ *Their voice^[b] goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ *which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.*

⁶ *Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,*

and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The glory of God is revealed in the heavens.

All humanity beholds this glory every day.

The heavenly bodies were designed to convey knowledge to the creatures

(God speaks of them as being for signs and seasons in Gen 1)

So it should not be surprising that they accomplish
the purpose for which they were created.

The sun comes out of his tent each morning,

like a bridegroom leaving his chamber – feeling manly!

like a strong man ready to run –

a great warrior setting out to accomplish his task.

But what effect does this have?

What does this communication in the heavens actually do?!

While the heavens declare the glory of God –

seeing that glory – by itself – does not change our hearts –

it does not revive our souls!

General revelation – God’s own revelation in nature –

is true communication!

The problem is while we may be impressed – we may marvel at it –

it does not change our hearts.

It does not revive our souls.

This contrast between part 1 and part 2

shows that these first 6 verses were intended to set up verses 7-11.

What is it that revives the soul?

The perfect Law of the LORD.

God’s general revelation in creation is good and useful,

but it has no power to change us.

But God’s special revelation in scripture is different.

2. Words from God: The Law of the LORD Revives the Soul (v7-11)

⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect,*^[c]

reviving the soul;

the testimony of the LORD is sure,

making wise the simple;

Notice where the power is located.

Yahweh's testimony makes us wise.
Yahweh's law revives the soul.

The word of God is powerful.

Isaiah speaks of the word of God:

“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (55:11)

Hebrews 4:12 says that the “word of God is living and active.”

When you come to the scriptures,
you are not coming to an ordinary book.

You are coming to the Word of the LORD himself –
and the Lord is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

He is the one who revives the soul –
and he revives the soul through his *torah*.

We need to remember that *torah* means more than just “law.”

The *torah* is the five books of Moses.

That means that the story of Abraham is just as much *torah*
as the ten commandments.

The great deliverance from Egypt is *torah* just as much as the holiness code in Leviticus.

And the way that the Psalter stitches together the Messiah Psalm 2 with the Torah Psalm 1 –
or Messiah Psalm 18 with Torah Psalm 19 –
shows us the same pattern.

The Law of the LORD is perfect – reviving the soul.

We were slaves in Egypt – and the Word of the LORD came to Pharaoh –
“Let my people go!”

We were rebels in the wilderness – and the Word of the LORD came to Moses –
“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt...
you shall have no other gods before me.”

The stories – as well as the commandments – are life-giving to the soul –
because the word of the LORD is what gives life to the soul!

The soul is that deepest part of you – who you really are deep down.

We've been reading John Ortberg's *Soul Keeping* in our Shepherding Group.

Ortberg was once trying to figure out how to help his congregation grow spiritually –

so he went to his mentor, Dallas Willard, with a question
what should we do "to help our church experience greater levels of spiritual growth?"

Dallas Willard thought for a moment, and then replied:

"You must arrange your days
so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy, and confidence
in your everyday life with God."

"No," I corrected him. "I wasn't asking about me. I was asking about other people..."

"Yes, Brother John," he said with great patience and care.

"I know you were thinking of those things. But that's not what they need most.
The main thing you will give your congregation –
just like the main thing you will give to God –
is the person you become.
If your soul is unhealthy, you can't help anybody..."

"I'm trying," I said. "I learned long ago about the importance of having a quiet time..."

"I didn't say anything about having a quiet time," he gently corrected again.

"People in churches -- including pastors –
have been crushed with guilt over their failure
at having a regular quiet time or daily devotions.
And then, even when they do, they find it does not actually lead to a healthy soul.

Your problem is not the first fifteen minutes of the day.

It's the next twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes.

You must arrange your days
so that you are experiencing total contentment, joy, and confidence
in your everyday life with God." (p89)

How long do you go in a day in between your thoughts of God?

Remember Psalm 16:8 – I have set the LORD always before me.

Is he before you in the middle of your important business meeting?

Trust me, God is not a distraction from your business!

Your important presentation is *better* when your mind is full of Christ!

Because *he* is far more concerned with that presentation than you are!

(That's what the first half of Psalm 19 just taught us!

All the ordinary things of creation –
including all of your business dealings –
are a part of *his world!*

He is more interested in your business than you are!)

When you are hanging out with your friends,
where is God?

Right there!

He loves them far more than you do.

When your mind and heart are full of him
then you are fully present with them – not distracted and disjointed.

So how does the Law of the LORD revive the soul?

First, the testimony of the LORD is sure – making wise the simple.

When we listen to the word of the LORD – we learn wisdom.

Then, in verse 8:

⁸ *the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;*

God's ways are right.

When we live the way that God says to live,
we find joy.

I recently was going through some very difficult moments –
but when I accepted that God's ways are right –
and his precepts for how to respond –
I found myself weeping with joy at the beauty of God's paths!

Because

*the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;*

When our eyes are enlightened by God's word –
we see things that we had never before imagined;
and our hearts rejoice as we find the right path.

Likewise verse 9 points to the righteousness of God's law:

⁹ *the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;*

Who are you afraid of?

Whose voice matters to you?

Do you fear the LORD?

Or do you fear someone else?

The fear of the LORD is clean!

The fear of the LORD is moving toward holiness –
because when you fear him, you are attentive to his voice.
When you fear him, you never need to fear anything else ever again!

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever!

*the rules^[d] of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.*

The way God orders things is true.
And when people live the way God says –
the result is righteousness – a just community.

That's why David says:

*¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb*

Do you desire God's rules and commandments?

You should.
They are sweeter than honey!

Then why do we find it so difficult to read God's word?
Because we fear man.
We are more concerned with what others think of us –
than with what God thinks of us!

But the question is *not* how much time do you spend reading your Bible.
The question is are you meditating on God's law –
finding your joy and contentment in God himself –
every moment of every day?!

Because if you are – then you will find yourself drawn to his word.
And if you are not – then you will find yourself drifting away from his word.

As David puts it:

*¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Why does the Psalmist so desire law?
Why does the Psalmist relish God's commands and rules?

Because we are forgetful.

Left to ourselves we would wallow in our selfishness and pride.
But God's law warns us—reminding us of the peril of ignoring the law of God,
and also of the great reward that comes from keeping his law.

And that reward is found in the response to God in verses 12-14

3. Words to God: How Should We Respond to Him? (v12-14)

¹² *Who can discern his errors?*

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

¹³ *Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;*

let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,

and innocent of great transgression.

“Who can discern his errors?

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.”

This phrase does not mean, “I am innocent from hidden faults,”

indeed, the force of it is “do not punish me for my hidden faults.”

The Psalmist knows that he has sinned without even realizing it!

But law of the Lord reveals the promises of God,

so David asks God for forgiveness—do not reckon my sin against me.

But also “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins,

let them not have dominion over me.”

Our response to the law should first be to acknowledge our sin and plead for forgiveness,

but then also to ask God “to lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.”

This is true repentance—

not just turning away from sin,

but turning to the grace of God for strength,

and then rejoicing that, in Christ,

we shall be (and indeed, we are!) “blameless and innocent of great transgression.”

Do you really believe that God does what he says?

In Jesus Christ you have been declared righteous.

In Jesus Christ you have been made holy.

Do you believe in the power of the Word of God?

You are no longer the person you once were.

Paul says that “I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,

who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Jesus is not merely the one who *brings* the kingdom.
Jesus does not merely reinstate Moses.
The believer's relationship to the law has changed.
It is the difference between a son who is a child,
and a son who is an adult.

In an ideal father-son relationship,
the adult son lives according to the principles his father taught him.
But he lives according to those principles,
not as a child who will be disciplined if he disobeys,
but as an adult who delights to honor his father through reflecting his father's character.

Now I realize that all of us want to be different in various ways from our earthly fathers;
but our heavenly Father has a character that is worthy of imitation in every way!

We delight in God's law,
not as children fearing punishment from the pedagogue,
but as those who have been united to the firstborn Son –
the one who has “grown up” and entered his inheritance.

And so we pray with Jesus:

*¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalm 18 had opened “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.”

Now Psalm 19 closes with reflections on the Psalmist identifies God as
“my rock and my redeemer.”

When God's Law is our joy and delight –
then *our words* are more and more conformed to *his word*.

And so I ask you, Lord Jesus:
*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*