

“The Law of God Is Good and Wise” OT and Epistle 3-4-2018

In a tv movie a well-intended mother secretly sets up her single daughter to meet an eligible young man. Past attempts at matchmaking had been disasters, causing the daughter to resist any more help from mom. She and the man did fall in love, but when she discovers her mother arranged it, she is ready to forfeit her new found joy, because it happened with the help of her meddling mother. She wanted to do it her way. Her pride threatened her new relationship.

Sounds like us, when we ignore the good and wise laws of a meddling heavenly Father, even though they bring us love and joy. We want to find happiness on our terms, in our way. And then we do the opposite of what brings it.

The Israelites thought they knew better than God and lived like pagans instead of like his people. They didn't start the rebellion. When the first two people heard the command, “Don't eat that fruit,” they ate it anyway. As David put it, we have been sinful from birth, since the day we were conceived in our mother's womb.

If sin is so firmly ingrained in us, and even the two who were not sinners from birth rebelled, what good is the law? It certainly did not change the Israelites, who constantly rejected it.

But what will its impact be on us? We will leave here this morning, having confessed our sins, again; having been absolved of them, again; and have heard, again, the commandments God wants us to obey.

And what will we do? Out of carelessness, weakness, or willful rebellion we will not obey them. We'll act out of self-centeredness, convenience, laziness, or various sinful desires. It won't matter that we have the Ten Commandments on a yard sign, on our wall or in our wallet. We can memorize them and their explanations, and still we will break them, in thought, word, or deed, by what we do and don't do.

So why is the law good and wise, if it doesn't make us better? God gave the law to reveal the wisdom of the Gospel, the Good News that He forgives sins for the sake of the death and resurrection of Christ crucified for us.

It seems foolish to the natural mind, but the main purpose of God's law is to show us that it is useless for salvation. We cannot keep it. That's why God will never weaken His laws, change its demands or reduce its punishments. He doesn't want us to fool ourselves into thinking we have achieved something we haven't. He wants us never to live in the fantasy land of self-righteousness. A wise pastor wrote back in 1929, "The whole law must be kept by the whole man during his whole life." The apostle James (2:10) wrote, "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." The qualification for heaven is perfection, and that leaves no margin for error.

So Paul tells us to boast only in the Lord. We boast that he perfectly obeyed commands we cannot keep. We boast that in love he took up his cross and paid the penalty we could never pay. Our righteousness before God can only come by accepting it on his terms: Letting Christ's obedience and punishment substitute for our own.

Had Israel appreciated that God gave the law after He freed them from bondage, they may have had a different attitude toward it. Likewise, God's mercy that set us free from sin moves us to honor Him with a holy life. The good and wise commandments tell us what that looks like. They tell us not only how to glorify God with respect, love and trust, but also how to glorify him by loving our neighbor. Jesus call us the "light of the world" and says we are to let our light shine so that others may see our good works (keeping of commandments) and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

God's saving love moves us to humbly accept the guidance of his laws as our path to a blessed and joyous life. We won't let our pride push God away, insisting we can find it our way. The good and wise law not only turns us to the Gospel, but it shows how to live the Gospel in love for God and one another.

May we love the good and wise law of our Lord, who first loved us. Amen.