

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 8: SANCTIFICATION — THE PROGRESSIVE WORK OF GRACE

Conformed to the Image of Christ

Lesson 24

The Role of the Law in Sanctification

The Third Use of the Law — A Guide for the Grateful

Not Under the Law as Condemner, Fully Under the Law as Teacher

“O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day”

Key Texts: Psalm 119:97, 105; Romans 6:14; 7:12, 22; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 5:13–14; James 1:25

“O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”

Psalm 119:97, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Few theological questions generate more pastoral confusion and more theological controversy within evangelical Christianity than the question of the law's role in the life of the regenerate believer. On one side stand those who argue that the Christian is entirely free from the law in every sense, that the gospel's proclamation of freedom from the law's condemnation means freedom from the law's moral demands, that the New Testament's consistent and emphatic "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14, NASB 1995) means that the Ten Commandments and the moral teaching of the Old Testament have no normative authority over the believer's life. On the other side stand those who argue that the law's demands remain in full covenantal force for the Christian, that the obedience to the law's requirements is the ongoing condition of the maintained standing before God, and that the failure to perform the required obedience puts the justified standing at risk. Both of these positions are errors that the Reformed tradition, with its carefully nuanced account of the law's threefold use (*usus triplex legis*), has consistently identified and opposed: the first is antinomianism; the second is legalism.

This lesson develops the Reformed doctrine of the law's role in sanctification through the organizing framework of the threefold use of the law (*usus triplex legis*): the civil use (*usus politicus* or *civilis*), which employs the law as a restraint on evil in society; the pedagogical use (*usus elenchticus* or *paedagogicus*), which employs the law as the instrument of conviction and as the tutor that drives sinners to Christ; and the normative or didactic use (*usus normativus* or *tertius*), which employs the law as the guide and the standard for the grateful, Spirit-empowered obedience of the justified believer. The third use is the one that concerns this lesson most directly, because it is the use that governs the law's specific role in the sanctification of the regenerate, and it is the use that is most consistently distorted by both antinomianism (which rejects it) and legalism (which confuses it with the law's condemned and abolished covenantal function).

The governing conviction of the lesson is the Westminster Confession's formulation of the third use, which states that the law "is of great use to them [the regenerate], to show them how much they are bound to Christ for His fulfilling it, and for their partial observance of it, and constraining them to more thankfulness, and to express that thankfulness by greater care to conform themselves thereunto" (WCF XIX.6). The law does not condemn the regenerate believer (justification has removed the curse); it does not merit acceptance for the regenerate believer (that acceptance has been permanently established by the imputed righteousness of Christ). What it does is teach the regenerate believer what the will of God looks like in practice, show her the specific character of the holy life toward which the Spirit's sanctifying work is conforming her, and give the gratitude she owes to Christ a specific, concrete, morally defined shape. The law is the grammar of holiness, the set of rules that defines what it means to speak the language of love in specific, concrete, morally formed situations.

The lesson will proceed through seven major sections: the threefold use of the law in its historical development; the first use (civil) and its continuing relevance; the second use (pedagogical) and its driving of the sinner to Christ; the third use (normative) and its role in sanctification; Psalm 119 as the Old Testament's most extended meditation on the regenerate heart's love for the law; the Reformed balance against antinomianism and legalism; and the law and love as the convergence point at which the law's demands and the believer's deepest motivations meet in the specific, Christ-shaped, Spirit-empowered obedience of the sanctified life.

I. The Threefold Use of the Law

Usus Triplex Legis, Three Purposes, One Holy Law

A. *The Historical Development of the Threefold Use*

The threefold use of the law (*usus triplex legis*) is one of the most important and most practically useful theological frameworks developed by the Reformation, providing a coherent account of how the same holy law of God functions in three distinct ways in relation to three distinct audiences. The framework was not a Reformation innovation; traces of it can be found in the church fathers and the medieval tradition. But it was Calvin who gave the threefold use its most systematic and most theologically developed form, particularly in his careful account of the third use in the *Institutes* (II.7.12–13) as the “best instrument” for the sanctification of the regenerate. The Lutheran tradition, following Luther and Melancthon, gave the greatest emphasis to the second use (the law as the means of conviction and as the tutor that drives sinners to Christ), while the Reformed tradition, without diminishing the second use, gave the greatest emphasis to the third use (the law as the guide for the grateful believer’s obedience).

The distinction between the Lutheran and Reformed emphases on the uses of the law is not a contradiction but a difference of pastoral priority. The Lutheran tradition’s concern was that the third use, in the hands of those insufficiently careful about the law-gospel distinction, would become a vehicle for works-righteousness, that the law’s instruction to the believer would produce the impression that the justified standing depended on the quality of the instructed obedience. The Reformed tradition’s response was that the third use, properly understood, presupposes the law-gospel distinction rather than undermining it: the law guides the believer in the grateful expression of the acceptance already secured by grace, and the gratitude that motivates the obedience is the specific fruit of having understood the gospel’s liberation from the law’s condemnation. The obedience flowing from gratitude is not works-righteousness; it is the specific, Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered response of the justified soul to the grace that has freed it from the treadmill of self-justifying performance.

B. *The Character of the Moral Law*

Before examining the three uses in detail, it is important to establish what the “law” under discussion is and what it is not. The law in its fullest biblical sense encompasses the entirety of the divine revelation of His will, the moral law, the ceremonial law, and the civil law of ancient Israel. The three categories have different ongoing relationships to the new covenant believer. The ceremonial law (the sacrificial system, the priesthood, the feast calendar, the purity regulations) has been fulfilled and therefore abrogated in Christ, who is the ultimate sacrifice, the eternal high priest, the fulfillment of every feast, and the true purity that the ceremonial system anticipated. The civil law of ancient Israel governed the political life of the theocratic nation and is not directly applicable to the political life of nations in the new covenant era, though its general equity (the underlying moral principles it expresses) retains a continuing relevance as the expression of God’s moral will for human society.

The moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments and expressed throughout the Old and New Testaments as the permanent, creation-grounded, cross-confirmed declaration of what God requires of human beings as His image-bearing creatures, retains its full moral authority in the new covenant era, though its covenantal and

condemning function has been transformed by the gospel. Jesus' declaration in Matthew 5:17 that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and His subsequent Sermon on the Mount deepening of the law's demands from external compliance to internal transformation, establishes the moral law's continuing authority in the life of the new covenant community. Paul's declaration that the law is "holy, and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12, NASB 1995) and that the regenerate person "joyfully concurs with the law of God in the inner man" (Romans 7:22, NASB 1995) establishes the law's continuing normativity for the believer and the regenerate heart's affectionate relationship to it. It is this moral law, in its continuing authority as the expression of the divine character and will, that is the subject of the threefold use.

II. The First and Second Uses of the Law

Civil Restraint and Pedagogical Conviction

A. *The First Use: Civil Restraint (Usus Politicus)*

The first use of the law is its function as the civil or political instrument by which God restrains evil in human society, maintaining the minimum level of external order that makes human life possible and that preserves the social fabric from the complete dissolution that would result from the unconstrained operation of human sinfulness. The civil use of the law does not save, does not regenerate, and does not produce genuine inward transformation; it operates on the external level, through the threat of civil penalties and the fear of societal consequences, to constrain the worst expressions of human sin even in those who have no genuine love for God or desire for holiness.

Romans 13:1–4 provides the New Testament's most direct account of the civil use of the law as it operates through the institution of civil government: "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God... for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (NASB 1995). The civil magistrate functions as the instrument of the divine restraining will, not the instrument of saving grace, but the instrument of the preserving order that holds the worst consequences of human sin in check, making possible the social conditions under which the gospel can be preached and received. The Christian's obligation to the civil authority is grounded in the civil use of the law: the governing authorities are, in their function of restraining evil and protecting the good, doing the work of the divine will in the civil realm.

The first use of the law continues to operate in the new covenant era, and the church's recognition of it has important practical consequences. It provides the theological ground for the Christian's engagement with the political order: Christians participate in civil society as those who understand that the political order's function of restraining evil is a provision of the divine common grace, and whose presence in that order is an expression of the love for the neighbor that the law's third use commands. It also provides the ground for a realistic account of what civil law can and cannot accomplish: it can restrain external behavior; it cannot regenerate hearts. The law's civil use is not the gospel's substitute, and the Christian who confuses the political order's function of external restraint with the church's function of spiritual transformation has misunderstood both.

B. The Second Use: Pedagogical Conviction (*Usus Elenchticus*)

The second use of the law is its pedagogical or convicting function: the use of the law as the instrument by which the Holy Spirit produces in the sinner the specific conviction of sin, guilt, and the need for a righteousness she cannot produce on her own, driving her from the false confidence of her own moral performance toward the Christ who is the only sufficient ground of acceptance before the holy God. Galatians 3:24 provides the classic New Testament statement of the second use: “The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith” (NASB 1995). The word translated “tutor” (*paidagogos*) refers in the first century to the slave who was responsible for the physical custody and moral discipline of a child on the way to school, not the teacher himself, but the guardian who brought the child to the teacher. The law is the *paidagogos* that brings the sinner to Christ: it does not save; it convicts; it does not justify; it condemns; and by condemning, it drives the condemned sinner toward the only One who can accomplish what the condemnation has established she cannot accomplish on her own.

The second use is the use that both Luther and the Lutheran tradition rightly emphasized as the law’s most essential function in the context of the Reformation’s battle with the moralism of late medieval piety. The person who has never been genuinely convicted by the law’s demands, who has never understood that the standard is not merely external compliance but the inner transformation of the whole person, that the demand is not merely “do not kill” but “do not be angry without cause,” not merely “do not commit adultery” but “do not look with lust”, has not been driven to Christ with the urgency that the law in its second use is designed to produce. The false confidence of the person who thinks she is “good enough” must be shattered by the law’s uncompromising exposure of the depth of the divine demand before the gospel’s offer of the alien righteousness will be received with the specific, personally urgent gratitude that it deserves.

The second use of the law continues to operate in the life of the regenerate believer, though its primary function in relation to the regenerate has been transformed by the justification that has removed the condemnation it would otherwise produce. The regenerate believer continues to encounter the law’s conviction of specific sins, not the global condemnation of the unjustified sinner but the specific, targeted, Spirit-applied conviction of particular failures that drives the believer toward repentance, renewed dependence on grace, and the fresh reception of the forgiveness that justification has permanently secured. This ongoing convicting work of the law in the regenerate is not the re-introduction of the law’s condemned function; it is the law’s continuing role in the maintenance of the honest self-knowledge that genuine repentance requires.

III. The Third Use of the Law

The Normative Guide for the Grateful Believer

A. The Third Use Defined

The third use of the law (*tertius usus legis*, also called the *usus normativus* or *usus in renatis*, the use for the regenerate) is the law’s function as the normative guide and the concrete standard for the Spirit-empowered, gratitude-motivated obedience of the justified and regenerate believer. The third use does not condemn the believer (the justification has permanently removed the law’s condemnatory power over those who are in Christ), does not merit acceptance for the believer (the acceptance has been permanently established by the imputed

righteousness of Christ, not by the quality of the law's-obedience), and does not produce the genuine desire for obedience that the regenerate heart experiences (that desire is the Spirit's work through the new nature, not the law's threatening demand). What the third use does is give the desire for holiness that the Spirit has produced a specific, concrete, morally defined shape: it tells the believer who genuinely wants to please God what pleasing God specifically looks like in the concrete situations of daily life.

Calvin's account of the third use in the *Institutes* is the locus classicus of the Reformed doctrine: "The third use of the law, the principal one, and more closely connected with its proper purpose, has reference to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns... Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it. It is as if someone said that the servant who has determined to please the master will benefit from a set of instructions for guiding him in his conduct more than the one who does not care for the master at all. For this reason, the prophet, although he is speaking of the perfect law which contains the rule of life, calls it 'a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.'" Calvin's image of the servant who has determined to please the master is precisely the image of the regenerate believer in relation to the law: not the slave who is compelled to obey under threat of punishment, but the willing servant who wants to please the master and is grateful for the specific instructions that tell him how.

The third use is the "principal" use for the regenerate precisely because the regenerate are the ones for whom the law functions as Calvin describes: as the best instrument for understanding the specific content of the divine will toward which the regenerate heart already aspires. The law does not need to threaten the regenerate believer into obedience (as the first use threatens the unregenerate through the fear of civil consequences); it does not need to convict her of the futility of self-justification (as the second use convicts the self-confident moralist); it needs to instruct her in the specific content of the holy life she genuinely desires to live. This is the specific, indispensable contribution of the law's third use to the sanctified life: without the law's normative instruction, the regenerate believer's genuine desire for holiness lacks the specific definition that it needs to know what holiness actually looks like in the ten thousand specific situations of daily life.

B. The Content of the Third Use: The Moral Law and the Ten Commandments

The specific content of the law in its third use is primarily the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, not because the New Testament's ethical teaching is restricted to the restatement of the Ten Commandments, but because the Ten Commandments provide the most comprehensive and most enduring summary of the divine moral will for human life as the image of God bears it. The Westminster Larger Catechism's treatment of the Ten Commandments (Questions 91–148) provides the most sustained and most detailed account in the Reformed tradition of the specific moral content that the third use of the law delivers to the regenerate believer: each commandment is read in its fullest positive and negative dimensions, covering not merely the specific act prohibited or required but the entire range of sins against and duties toward the value expressed in the commandment.

The New Testament's ethical teaching is the fulfillment and the deepening of the moral law's third use, not its replacement. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Paul's ethical sections (Romans 12–16; Ephesians 4–6; Colossians 3–4; 1 Thessalonians 4–5), and the general epistles' moral instruction all operate within the framework of the moral law's demands and consistently deepen them toward the inner life, the motivations, the affections, and the specific concrete expressions of love toward God and neighbor that the law's summary ("love the Lord your God...

and love your neighbor as yourself,” Matthew 22:37–39, NASB 1995) requires. The third use of the law in the New Testament context includes the whole of the New Testament’s ethical instruction as the most complete and most clearly Christ-centered expression of what the moral law’s positive demands look like in the life of those who are indwelt by the Spirit of the Son.

IV. Psalm 119 and the Regenerate Heart’s Love for the Law

Meditation All the Day

A. The Psalm as a Portrait of the Third Use in Practice

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the entire Bible, and its subject, from beginning to end, across 176 verses organized into 22 eight-verse stanzas (one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet), is the psalmist’s love for and delight in the law of God. The psalm is, in the Reformed tradition’s account, the most extended and the most emotionally rich portrait of the third use of the law in operation: the regenerate heart’s genuine, Spirit-produced, contemplative, worship-saturated engagement with the divine instruction as the expression of the divine character and as the normative guide for the grateful life. The psalmist does not engage the law as a condemned person under its threat; he engages it as a beloved person who finds in the law’s instruction the specific, reliable, life-giving guidance of the One whose character the law expresses.

Psalm 119:97 provides the most cited and most personally revealing verse of the whole psalm: “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (NASB 1995). The “O how I love” is the doxological exclamation of one who has been genuinely moved, whose affective response to the divine instruction is not the reluctant compliance of the commanded but the spontaneous, overflowing love of the liberated. The love for the law is not the love of the legalist who finds in the law the path to merit; it is the love of the one who finds in the law the character of the beloved, who sees in each commandment the specific expression of the holy God who gave it, and who loves the commandment because she loves the Commander whose will it expresses. And the meditation is “all the day”, not the formal religious exercise of the morning devotional but the continuous, throughout-the-day, spontaneously-recurring engagement with the law’s instruction that characterizes the person for whom the divine will is genuinely the deepest and most persistent concern of the whole of daily life.

Psalm 119:105 provides the metaphor that Calvin cited as the classic expression of the third use: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (NASB 1995). The lamp and the light metaphors capture the specific function of the third use precisely: the law does not carry the pilgrim along the path (that is the Spirit’s work and the believer’s effort); it illuminates the path, revealing where the path is, showing where the obstacles are, and making visible what would otherwise be obscure and dangerous. The believer who knows the law as lamp and light walks with the confident, directed assurance of one who can see where she is going, rather than the stumbling uncertainty of one who must feel her way in the dark. The law in its third use is not the engine of the sanctified life; it is the map and the lamp that make the journey intelligible and directed.

B. The Law as the Expression of the Divine Character

One of the most important pastoral and theological dimensions of the third use of the law is the recognition that the law is not an arbitrary set of divine demands imposed on human beings from the outside, but the specific,

written expression of the divine character, the revelation of what the holy, loving, just, and faithful God is in Himself, and what it looks like for His image-bearing creatures to reflect that character in their lives. To delight in the law as Psalm 119 does is to delight in the character of the God who gave it; to meditate on the law's instruction is to contemplate the specific dimensions of the divine holiness that each commandment expresses. The first table of the law (commandments 1–4: no other gods, no images, no misuse of the divine name, the Sabbath) defines the specific shape of the creature's love for the Creator; the second table (commandments 5–10: parents, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, coveting) defines the specific shape of the creature's love for the neighbor. Together, they trace the outline of the divine character as it expresses itself in the specific moral obligations of the creature who bears the divine image.

The regenerate believer who understands the law as the expression of the divine character finds in the third use of the law not a burden but a gift, not the external imposition of alien demands but the internal recognition of the specific shape of the holiness toward which the Spirit's transforming work is moving her. Romans 7:22's "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" is the regenerate heart's recognition that the law's demands are not alien to her deepest identity but are the specific expression of the divine character that the Spirit is progressively forming within her. The law instructs the new nature; the new nature loves the instruction, because the instruction is the specific description of what the new nature, in its most genuine and deepest expression, most desires to be.

V. Against Antinomianism

Free from the Law's Condemnation, Not from the Law's Instruction

A. The Antinomian Error Defined

Antinomianism (from the Greek anti, against, and nomos, law) is the theological error that claims Christians are entirely free from the law in every sense, that the gospel's liberation from the law's condemnation means liberation from the law's moral demands, that the justified standing removes all obligation to the law's instruction, and that the regenerate believer who is indwelt by the Spirit has no need of the law's normative guidance because the Spirit's direct leading is sufficient. In its most extreme form, antinomianism has claimed that sin itself is transformed in the believer's life, that what would be sin in the unregenerate is not sin in the regenerate because the Spirit's indwelling has transformed the moral status of the believer's actions. In its most common form, it simply argues that the New Testament's announcement of freedom from the law means that the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament's moral instruction have no normative authority over the new covenant believer.

The antinomian error arises from a misreading of the New Testament's law-freedom texts that fails to distinguish the different senses in which the believer is and is not free from the law. Paul's declaration in Romans 6:14 that "you are not under law but under grace" (NASB 1995) is not the declaration that the moral law has no normative authority over the believer; it is the declaration that the law's covenantal function as the basis of the condemned standing, the law as the covenant of works whose demands must be perfectly fulfilled as the condition of continued life and whose penalty is the death of the transgressor, has been set aside for the justified believer. The believer is free from the law as a covenant of works (the law's perfectionistic demand for merit as the condition of life, Romans 6:14) and free from the law as a system of condemnation (the law's penalty for transgression,

Romans 8:1). She is not free from the law as a rule of life (the law's instruction in the content of the divine will, Romans 7:12, 22).

The distinction that addresses the antinomian misreading is Paul's own distinction in 1 Corinthians 9:20–21: "To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law" (NASB 1995). The phrase "not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ" (*mē ōn anōmos theou all' ennomos Christou*) is Paul's explicit denial that freedom from the Mosaic law's covenantal authority means freedom from all law: the believer is "under the law of Christ" (*ennomos Christou*), which includes the moral law in its Christ-interpreted, Spirit-applied, gratitude-motivated form. The "law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2) is not a different law from the moral law but the moral law as it is received, interpreted, and applied in the light of Christ's fulfillment and in the power of the Spirit's regenerating work.

B. The New Testament's Positive Engagement with the Moral Law

The New Testament's positive engagement with the moral law's continuing authority is extensive and consistent, and it stands as the most direct refutation of the antinomian claim that the new covenant believer has no obligation to the moral law's instruction. Jesus' declaration in Matthew 5:17–20 that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and His subsequent intensification of the law's demands from external compliance to internal transformation, establishes the moral law's deepened authority in the new covenant era. The Sermon on the Mount is not the replacement of the law by a new standard; it is the exposition of what the law always demanded at the level of the inner life, which the Spirit's regenerating work now makes possible to pursue genuinely.

James 1:25 introduces what may be the most striking metaphor in the New Testament for the law's role in the sanctified life: "but one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does" (NASB 1995). The "law of liberty", a phrase that sounds paradoxical in a culture that defines liberty as freedom from law, is James's description of the moral law as it functions for the regenerate believer: not the law of bondage (which is how the law functions for the condemned sinner under the second use) but the law of liberty, the law that the regenerate person is free to obey from the inside rather than being compelled to comply with from the outside. The law of liberty is the law that the new nature delights in (Romans 7:22) and that the Spirit empowers the regenerate to keep, within the limits of the progressive sanctification's ongoing imperfection.

The antinomian response to the law of liberty is that the Spirit's direct leading is sufficient, making the law's instruction unnecessary. The Reformed response is that the Spirit works specifically through the Word, including the law's moral instruction, rather than instead of it, that the Spirit's sanctifying work is mediated through the means of grace of which the law's normative instruction is an integral part. The regenerate believer who dispenses with the law's specific instruction on the grounds that she is led by the Spirit is susceptible to the self-deception that her own inclinations and preferences are the Spirit's leading, without the check of the specific, objective, externally-given standard that the law provides. The Spirit leads through the Word; the Word includes the law's instruction; and the believer who refuses the law's instruction has, in practice, refused one of the primary means through which the Spirit does His normative work in the sanctified life.

VI. Against Legalism

Obedience from Gratitude, Not from the Desire to Merit Acceptance

A. *The Legalist Error Defined*

If antinomianism errs by removing the law's normative authority from the sanctified life entirely, legalism errs by using the law's demands as the means of earning or maintaining God's acceptance. The legalist is not necessarily the person who scrupulously observes the law's external requirements; she is the person who understands the law's obedience as the ground of or the contribution to the acceptance before God that justification has declared to rest entirely on the alien righteousness of Christ. The legalist may be the morally scrupulous person who fears that her failing to keep the law's demands will jeopardize her standing before God, or the spiritually satisfied person who believes that her consistent law-keeping gives her a right to the divine approval that the imperfect Christian lacks. Both are operating with the same fundamental error: the law's demands as the basis of the relationship with God rather than the expression of it.

The Reformed response to legalism in the context of sanctification is the gratitude-motivation, the specific and decisive shift in the motivation for obedience that the gospel of grace produces. The Heidelberg Catechism's structure is paradigmatic: Parts I and II address the Christian's guilt and her deliverance from that guilt through the grace of the gospel; Part III addresses the gratitude that the delivered sinner owes to God as the motivation for the obedience that Part III then details through the exposition of the Ten Commandments. The logic is: (1) you are completely accepted; (2) the acceptance is entirely by grace, through faith, in Christ, for God's glory; (3) the gratitude that the received grace produces is the specific motivation from which the obedience flows. The obedience is not the payment of a debt to maintain the acceptance; it is the expression of the love that the acceptance has produced.

Romans 6:14–15's "you are not under law but under grace" is Paul's declaration of the freedom from the law's covenantal function as the basis of the accepted standing, and the immediate question that follows ("Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!", v. 15, NASB 1995) establishes that freedom from the law as a covenant of works does not produce freedom from the moral obligation to holiness. The answer to the legalist's motivation (obey to maintain acceptance) is not the antinomian's license (no obligation at all) but the gospel's transformation of the motivation: obey, not to secure the acceptance, but because the acceptance has already been secured and the love it has produced is looking for its specific, law-defined, Spirit-empowered expression. The law's demands remain; the motivation from which they are met is transformed from the anxiety of the unaccepted to the gratitude of the loved.

B. *The Grammar of Gratitude*

The concept of the law as the "grammar of gratitude", not an original phrase but one that captures the specific function of the third use with particular clarity, illuminates the relationship between the justified standing, the gratitude it produces, and the law's instruction as the guide for the gratitude's expression. Grammar is not an external imposition on language; it is the internal structure that language must follow in order to communicate meaningfully. The believer who is genuinely grateful to God for the grace of the justified standing is not free to express that gratitude in any way that happens to feel like love; she is called to express it in the specific, morally defined, law-shaped ways that the divine instruction has established as the genuine expression of love toward God and neighbor. Without the law's grammar, the gratitude is a warm but formless feeling; with it, the gratitude

becomes specific, directed, concrete, and effective in producing the kind of life that genuinely honors the God whose grace produced it.

Paul's account of the law and love in Romans 13:8–10 provides the New Testament's clearest statement of the law's role as the grammar of the grateful love: "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (NASB 1995). The relationship between love and law in this passage is not that love replaces the law's specific demands ("if you love, you don't need the commandments") but that the specific commandments are the concrete expressions of what love looks like in practice. To love the neighbor is to fulfill the law; the law's specific commandments tell you what love looks like when it encounters the neighbor's life, fidelity, property, and dignity. The love does not replace the grammar; it speaks through it.

VII. The Law and Love

The Convergence of Gratitude and Obedience

A. The Law as the Definition of Love in Practice

Romans 13:10's declaration that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (NASB 1995) is simultaneously the most liberating and the most demanding statement in the New Testament's ethical teaching. It is liberating because it establishes that the law's demands are not alien impositions on the believer's life but the specific shape of the love that the Spirit has poured into the heart through regeneration. To love God and neighbor is to fulfill the law; and since the Spirit produces genuine love for God and neighbor in the regenerate heart, the regenerate believer is not being commanded to perform something foreign to her nature but to express what her new nature most deeply is. It is demanding because it establishes that the love the gospel calls for is not a vague, feeling-based, non-specific warm regard for God and neighbor but the specifically-defined, morally-shaped, commandment-expressed love that the law's instruction articulates in concrete detail.

The love command of Matthew 22:37–40, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (NASB 1995), is the summary to which all of the law's specific commandments reduce and from which they all derive their authority. The specific commandments are not a collection of arbitrary rules alongside which love operates; they are the specific articulations of what love requires in relation to specific aspects of the neighbor's life and dignity. "You shall not murder" is the specific expression of love for the neighbor's life. "You shall not steal" is the specific expression of love for the neighbor's property. "You shall not bear false witness" is the specific expression of love for the neighbor's reputation. The law tells love what it looks like when it encounters the specific dimensions of the neighbor's existence.

Galatians 5:13–14 provides Paul's own convergence of the freedom language and the law-love connection: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor

as yourself.” The freedom from the law’s covenantal condemnation (“for you were called to freedom”) is not freedom from the law’s moral demands (“only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh”) but freedom for the law’s deepest intention (“through love serve one another... the whole Law is fulfilled in one word”). The freedom of the gospel is the freedom to love genuinely, freed from the performance anxiety of the condemned, freed from the self-justifying effort of the legalist, freed from the fear of the slave, and to let that genuine love express itself in the specific, law-shaped service of the neighbor that the whole law is fulfilled in.

B. The Reformed Balance in Practice

The Reformed balance on the law’s role in sanctification, neither antinomian (the law has no normative authority for the regenerate) nor legalist (obedience to the law earns or maintains acceptance) but the third-use account (the law guides the gratitude-motivated, Spirit-empowered obedience of the justified), has specific practical implications that the believing community must inhabit and the preacher must communicate. The believer who has genuinely understood the Reformed balance approaches the law’s instruction with the specific combination of freedom and seriousness that characterizes the life of the one who knows herself to be both completely accepted and genuinely obligated.

She is completely accepted: the law’s demands do not threaten her standing; the condemnation of her failures does not undo the justified verdict; the imperfection of her progressive sanctification does not place the acceptance at risk. She can read the law’s instruction honestly, without the defensiveness of the one who must manage the law’s assessment of her performance, because the law no longer has the authority to condemn her. She is genuinely obligated: the law’s instruction is the specific content of the divine will toward which the Spirit’s transforming work is moving her, and the failure to take it seriously is the failure to take the sanctifying work seriously. She reads the law not to establish her standing before God but to understand what the standing she already possesses looks like when it is lived out in the concrete situations of daily life.

The preacher who has understood the Reformed balance will preach the law with both the urgency of the second use (conviction of specific sins, driving toward repentance and renewed dependence on grace) and the warmth of the third use (instruction in the specific shape of the holy life, grounded in the gratitude that the gospel produces). She will not preach the law in isolation from the gospel (which produces legalism, the impression that the acceptance depends on the quality of the law-keeping), nor will she preach the gospel in isolation from the law (which produces antinomianism, the impression that the gospel’s grace has no specific moral demands). She will preach law and gospel together in their proper relationship: the law as the specific instructor in the divine will, the gospel as the ground of the acceptance from which the instruction is received, and the law as the grammar through which the gratitude the gospel produces expresses itself in the concrete, morally-defined, neighbor-serving, God-honoring life of the sanctified believer.

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Romans 13:8, 10, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Usus Triplex Legis	Latin: “threefold use of the law.” The Reformed theological framework that distinguishes three distinct functions of the divine law in relation to three distinct audiences: (1) the civil use (<i>usus politicus</i> or <i>civilis</i>), the law as the restraint on evil in human society through the threat of civil penalties; (2) the pedagogical use (<i>usus elenchticus</i> or <i>paedagogicus</i>), the law as the instrument of conviction that drives sinners to Christ; and (3) the normative use (<i>usus normativus</i> or <i>tertius usus</i> , the “third use”), the law as the guide and standard for the grateful, Spirit-empowered obedience of the justified and regenerate believer. Calvin gave the third use its most developed account, calling it the “principal” use and “the best instrument” for the sanctification of the regenerate.
First Use (Usus Politicus)	The civil or political use of the law: its function as the restraint on evil in human society through the threat of legal penalties, administered by the civil magistrate who is described in Romans 13:4 as “a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” The first use does not save, does not regenerate, and does not produce genuine inward transformation; it operates on the external level to constrain the worst expressions of human sin among both the regenerate and the unregenerate, maintaining the minimum social order that makes human life possible and the proclamation of the gospel feasible. The first use is the basis for the Christian’s engagement with the political order and the ground of a realistic assessment of what civil law can (external restraint) and cannot (regeneration of hearts) accomplish.
Second Use (Usus Elenchticus)	The pedagogical or convicting use of the law: its function as the instrument of the Holy Spirit’s work of producing conviction of sin, guilt, and the need for a righteousness the sinner cannot supply, driving her from the false confidence of her own moral performance toward the Christ who alone can justify. Grounded in Galatians 3:24 (“the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ”). The <i>paidagogos</i> (tutor/guardian) image captures the function: the law brings the sinner to Christ but is not the teacher herself. The second use continues to operate in the life of the regenerate believer as the Spirit-applied conviction of specific sins, driving toward repentance and renewed dependence on grace, not the global condemnation of the unjustified sinner but the targeted conviction of particular failures.
Third Use (Usus Normativus)	The normative or didactic use of the law (<i>tertius usus legis</i> , <i>usus in renatis</i> , the use for the regenerate): its function as the guide and standard for the Spirit-empowered, gratitude-motivated obedience of the justified and regenerate believer. Calvin called this the “principal” use of the law and “the best instrument” for the sanctification of the regenerate. The third use does not condemn (the justification has removed the law’s condemnatory power) and does not merit acceptance (established by Christ’s righteousness, not law-keeping). It instructs the regenerate believer whose new nature already desires to please God in the specific, concrete content of what pleasing God looks like in daily life. Psalm 119 is the Old Testament’s most extended portrait of the third use in operation.
Antinomianism	From the Greek <i>anti</i> (against) and <i>nomos</i> (law): the theological error that claims Christians are entirely free from the law in every sense, that the gospel’s liberation from the law’s condemnation means liberation from all moral obligation to the law’s instruction. In its common evangelical form, it argues that the New Testament’s announcement of freedom from the law means the Ten Commandments and Old Testament moral instruction have no normative authority over the new covenant believer. The Reformed response: the believer is free from the law as a covenant of works (the condemning, merit-demanding function) and as a system of condemnation, but not from the law as a rule of life (the third use, the normative instruction). Addressed by 1 Corinthians 9:21 (“under the law of Christ”) and Romans 6:15 (“Shall we sin because we are not under law? May it never be!”).

Legalism	The theological error of using the law's demands as the means of earning or maintaining God's acceptance, treating obedience as the ground of or contribution to the justified standing rather than as the fruit and expression of it. In the context of sanctification, legalism produces either the performance anxiety of the believer who fears that her law-keeping failures jeopardize her standing, or the spiritual pride of the believer who treats her law-keeping consistency as the basis of her confidence before God. The Reformed response: obedience flows from gratitude (the Heidelberg Catechism's Part III pattern), not from the desire to merit acceptance; the law guides the grateful expression of the acceptance already secured by grace, not the earning or maintaining of it. Addressed by Romans 6:14 (not under law as covenant) and Galatians 5:1 (stand firm in the freedom Christ has given).
Law of Christ	Paul's description of the moral law as it is received, interpreted, and applied in the light of Christ's fulfillment and in the power of the Spirit's regenerating work, used in Galatians 6:2 ("bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ") and implied in 1 Corinthians 9:21 ("not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ"). The law of Christ is not a different law from the moral law but the moral law understood in its fullest Christ-centered expression: the inner transformation rather than merely external compliance (Matthew 5:17–20), the love fulfillment of the law's deepest intention (Romans 13:8–10), and the Spirit-empowered keeping rather than the willpower-driven compliance of the unregenerate. Under the law of Christ means under the moral law as Christ has interpreted and fulfilled it.
Law of Liberty	James's description (James 1:25; 2:12) of the moral law as it functions for the regenerate believer: the law that the regenerate person is free to obey from the inside because the Spirit has produced the desire for holiness within her, rather than being compelled to comply from the outside under the threat of condemnation. The "liberty" is the freedom of the regenerate will that the Spirit has renewed, the freedom to obey genuinely rather than merely performatively, to love the law's instruction because it expresses the character of the beloved rather than to resent it as the imposition of the demanding master. James 1:25's portrait of the one who "looks intently" and "abides by" and "does" is the portrait of the person for whom the law is genuinely liberty rather than bondage.
Paidagogos	Greek: "tutor," "guardian," the slave responsible for the physical custody and moral discipline of a child on the way to school. Used by Paul in Galatians 3:24 ("The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ") to describe the second use of the law: the law as the guardian who brings the sinner to Christ but is not the teacher himself. The paidagogos's role ends when the child reaches the teacher; the law's pedagogical function in driving the sinner to Christ is completed when the sinner arrives at Christ and is justified. The law no longer functions as the condemning tutor for the justified believer, it now functions as the normative guide (third use), though its convicting work continues in the maintenance of the honest self-knowledge that genuine repentance in the sanctified life requires.
Tertius Usus	Latin: "third use," specifically the third use of the law (tertius usus legis), the normative or didactic use of the law as the guide for the grateful, Spirit-empowered obedience of the justified and regenerate believer. The German Reformed tradition, following Calvin, gave the tertius usus the greatest theological weight among the three uses, in contrast to the Lutheran tradition which gave the greatest weight to the second use. Calvin's argument: the third use is the "principal" one because it is the use that most fully accomplishes the law's proper purpose, not the restraint of sin through fear (first use) or the conviction of sin for the purpose of driving to Christ (second use), but the positive instruction of the regenerate in the content of the divine will toward which the Spirit's sanctifying work is moving them.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the moral law retains its full normative authority in the life of the new covenant believer, not as the covenant of works whose demand for perfect obedience is the condition of the maintained standing before God (that function has been abolished for the justified), but as the rule of life that defines the specific content of the holy life toward which the Spirit's sanctifying work is moving the adopted child of God. This means reading the Ten Commandments as the continuing revelation of the divine will for the believer's life, treating the Sermon on the Mount as the deepening of the law's demands toward the inner life (not the replacement of the law by a higher standard), and engaging the New Testament's ethical instruction as the specific, Christ-interpreted, Spirit-applied expression of what the moral law requires in the life of those who are indwelt by the Spirit of the Son.

We must believe that the motivation from which the law's obedience is rendered is as important as the obedience itself, that the law-keeping that flows from the anxiety of the unaccepted (legalism) and the law-keeping that flows from the gratitude of the accepted (the third use) are not the same act with different emotional atmospheres but fundamentally different orientations to God and to the law's demands. The Heidelberg Catechism's insistence that gratitude is the motivation for the obedience it details in Part III is not a Lutheran moralizing addition to the evangelical gospel but the specifically Reformed account of how the law and the gospel relate in the daily life of the sanctified believer: the gospel's grace is received; the gratitude it produces is genuine; and the law's instruction is the specific guide for expressing that gratitude in the concrete situations of daily life.

We must believe that Romans 13:10's "love is the fulfillment of the law" is a claim about what love requires as much as about what the law means. Love does not replace the law's specific demands; it fulfills them, which means it meets them in their fullest and deepest expression. The believer who claims to love her neighbor but dismisses the specific commandments' instruction in what love requires toward the neighbor's life, fidelity, property, and reputation has a concept of love that is too formless to produce the specific, concrete, morally-defined care for the neighbor that the law instructs. Love needs the law's grammar; the law is the specific shape that love takes when it enters the concrete situations of the neighbor's existence.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Desire Psalm 119:97's love for the law as the genuine, Spirit-produced, doxological expression of the regenerate heart's relationship to the divine instruction. Not the performed enthusiasm of the person who knows she should love the law, but the specific, affective, "O how I love!" of the one who has genuinely encountered the divine character in the law's specific demands and found in each commandment the specific expression of the holy God whom she loves. Ask the Spirit to deepen the love for the law that the new nature is capable of, the love that comes not from the law's threatening but from the law's revealing, not from the fear of its condemnation but from the recognition of its Giver's character in its specific demands.

Desire the specific freedom from performance anxiety that the Reformed balance on the law's role in sanctification provides. The believer who has understood that the law does not threaten the justified standing is free to engage the law's instruction honestly, without the defensiveness of the one who is managing her moral performance as evidence of her acceptance. The freedom is not the freedom to ignore the law's demands; it is

the freedom to hear them clearly, without the distorting anxiety of the condemned, and to let the hearing produce the Spirit-empowered, gratitude-motivated pursuit of holiness that the law's instruction describes. Desire this freedom for yourself and for those in your pastoral care who are most burdened by the legalism that treats the law's demands as the condition of the maintained standing.

Desire the pastoral capacity to handle the law's preaching with the precision that its threefold function requires: to apply the second use with the urgency of conviction (specific sins, named and pressed, driving toward genuine repentance) and the third use with the warmth of instruction (specific commandments, taught and applied, expressing the gratitude the gospel has produced). The preacher who can make the movement from the law's convicting work (you have sinned; repent; run to Christ) to the law's normative instruction (having run to Christ, here is what love looks like in practice) in the same sermon, with the theologically precise transitions that the movement requires, is the preacher who has internalized the Reformed balance at the level of homiletical instinct. Desire that instinct.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read Psalm 119 in a single sitting, or at minimum read the first four stanzas (vv. 1–32), attending specifically to the psalmist's emotional vocabulary for the law: love (v. 97), delight (vv. 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174), meditation (vv. 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148), longing (vv. 20, 40, 131), and rejoicing (vv. 14, 162). Ask: does this vocabulary describe your own relationship to the moral law's instruction? If it does not, if your relationship to the law is more characterized by reluctance, resentment, or the performance anxiety of the one who feels threatened by its demands rather than the doxological delight of one who finds in it the character of the beloved, what specific change in your understanding of the law (the shift from the second use's condemning function to the third use's guiding function) would most help to produce the psalmist's vocabulary in your own experience?
- Study Romans 13:8–10 and Galatians 5:13–14 as the two key Pauline passages on the relationship between love and law. In Romans 13:8–10, trace the argument: the debt of love (v. 8), the specific commandments as the expressions of love (v. 9), and the summary claim that love fulfills the law (v. 10). Ask: how does Paul's argument establish that love does not replace the specific commandments but fulfills them? And in Galatians 5:13–14, trace the movement: the freedom from the law's covenantal condemnation (v. 13a), the warning against using freedom as license (v. 13b), the command to love in service (v. 13c), and the summary that the whole law is fulfilled in the love command (v. 14). Ask: how does Galatians 5:13–14's structure express the Reformed balance, free from the law as covenant, under the law as rule?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 as Paul's account of the flexibility and the limits of his law-freedom. Note the phrase in verse 21 ("not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ") and identify what it establishes about the scope of the believer's freedom from the law (freedom from the Mosaic law's covenantal authority, not from all law) and the continuing obligation (under the law of Christ, which includes the moral law in its Christ-interpreted form). Ask: what specific behaviors or attitudes in your own life might reflect the antinomian error of treating gospel-freedom as freedom from all moral obligation? And what specific behaviors or attitudes might reflect the legalist error of treating obedience as the condition of the maintained acceptance? Name both specifically.
- Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) slowly as the third-use instruction, the specific, normative, gratitude-guiding expression of what love toward God and neighbor looks like in the ten dimensions the commandments address. For each commandment, ask: (a) What specific positive duty does this commandment require (not merely what does it prohibit, but what does it command in its positive form)?

(b) What specific failure in my own life does this commandment's instruction most pointedly address? And
(c) How does knowing myself to be completely accepted by God transform the way I hear this commandment, from the threatening demand of the one whose standing depends on compliance, to the loving instruction of the Father whose accepted child is being guided in the specific shape of the holy life?

- Prepare a brief homiletical outline (10–15 minutes) on a single text that illustrates the Reformed balance on the law's role in sanctification: a text that moves from the gospel's grace (establishing the acceptance and the gratitude) to the law's instruction (defining the specific shape of the grateful expression) without either moralistic separation (law-keeping as the condition of the acceptance) or antinomian reversal (gospel-freedom as the end of moral obligation). Possible texts: Romans 12:1–2 (therefore by the mercies of God... present your bodies); Ephesians 4:1 (walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called, grounded in the Trinitarian grace of 1–3); 1 John 4:11 (beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another). Bring the outline to your study group and discuss: does the movement from indicative (what God has done) to imperative (what the believer is called to do) accurately express the Reformed balance?

Key Texts: *Psalm 119:97, 105; Matthew 5:17–20; Romans 6:14–15; 7:12, 22; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 9:20–21; Galatians 3:24; 5:13–14; 6:2; James 1:25; 2:12; Matthew 22:37–40*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before studying this lesson, which of the three uses of the law were you most familiar with, and which was most alive in your practice of the Christian life, the civil use (the law as the restraint on social evil), the pedagogical use (the law as the instrument of conviction driving to Christ), or the normative use (the law as the guide for the grateful believer's obedience)? And between the two errors the lesson addresses, antinomianism (the law has no normative authority for the regenerate) and legalism (obedience to the law earns or maintains God's acceptance), which do you encounter more frequently in the evangelical culture you inhabit, and which are you more personally prone to?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Romans 7:7–25. In verse 7, what is Paul's answer to the rhetorical question "Is the Law sin?" ("May it never be!"), and what specific function of the law does he cite ("I would not have come to know...")? In verse 12, what three adjectives does Paul use to describe the law ("the Law is... and... and...")? In verse 14, what is the specific contrast Paul draws between the law and himself ("the Law is spiritual, but I am of...")? In verse 22, what is Paul's description of the regenerate person's relationship to the law ("I joyfully concur with...")? And how do the three adjectives of verse 12 and the joyful concurrence of verse 22 together establish both the law's positive character and the regenerate heart's genuine appreciation of it?
- Read Galatians 3:19–25. In verse 19, what is the specific function of the law that Paul names ("It was added because of... until...")? In verse 21, what does Paul say the law is not ("Is the Law... contrary to the promises? May it never be!"), and what would be true if the law could give life? In verse 24, what is the paidagogos function of the law in Paul's account? And in verse 25, what has changed now that faith has come ("we are no longer under...")? How does the "no longer under a tutor" of verse 25 relate to the continuing normative authority of the law's moral instruction, does it mean the law's instruction has been set aside, or that a specific function of the law has been completed?
- Read Psalm 119:1–16. Note the different Hebrew words for law, testimony, precepts, statutes, commandments, and ordinances, all synonyms for the divine instruction that the psalmist addresses throughout the psalm. What specific emotional responses to the law does the psalmist express in these sixteen verses (note: blessed, delight, rejoice, love, meditate, long for)? What does the psalmist ask of God in relation to the law (vv. 5, 10, 12, 17–18), and what does the asking establish about the psalmist's understanding of his own adequacy to keep the law without divine help? And how does the combination of the doxological emotion and the dependent asking model the specific posture of the believer who is engaging the law in its third use?
- Read Romans 13:1–10. In verses 1–7, what is the basis of the Christian's obligation to civil authority, and what does the magistrate's function in verse 4 ("a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath") establish about the civil use of the law? In verses 8–10, what is the debt the believer owes (v. 8a), and what does Paul argue that the one who loves has done (v. 8b)? In verse 9, how does Paul relate the specific commandments to the love command? And in verse 10, what is the summary claim about the relationship between love and law? How does the argument of verses 8–10 establish that love fulfills the law rather than replacing it?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and James 1:19–27. In 1 Corinthians 9:21, what is the specific phrase Paul uses that places him simultaneously outside the Mosaic law's covenantal authority and under a continuing legal

obligation (“not being... but...”)? In James 1:25, what is the description of the law and what are the three characteristics of the person who properly relates to it (looks intently... abides by... does...)? What does the word “liberty” in James 1:25’s “perfect law, the law of liberty” convey about the law’s relationship to the regenerate believer? And how do Paul’s “*ennomos Christou*” (under the law of Christ) and James’s “law of liberty” together describe the specific character of the third use?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents the Reformed tradition’s claim that the third use of the law is its “principal” use, as opposed to the Lutheran tradition’s emphasis on the second use as primary. Evaluate this claim. Does the New Testament give more weight to the law’s convicting/driving-to-Christ function (second use) or to the law’s normative/guiding function (third use) in the life of the regenerate believer? What specific New Testament texts support each emphasis? And what is the pastoral consequence of each tradition’s emphasis, how does the relative weighting of the second and third uses shape the practical preaching and pastoral care of the congregation?
- The lesson argues that Romans 6:14’s “you are not under law but under grace” is not the declaration that the moral law has no normative authority over the believer, but that the law’s covenantal and condemning function has been set aside for the justified. Evaluate this interpretation. What are the exegetical grounds for reading “under law” as referring specifically to the law’s covenantal and condemning function rather than to the law’s moral instruction in general? And how does the broader context of Romans 6 (freedom from sin’s dominion, not freedom from the obligation to righteousness) support the reading that freedom from the law does not mean freedom from moral obligation?
- The lesson presents the law as “the expression of the divine character”, not an arbitrary set of divine demands but the specific, written revelation of what the holy, loving, just, and faithful God is in Himself. Evaluate the theological and pastoral implications of this claim. If the law expresses the divine character rather than merely expressing the divine will, what does the believer’s love for the law (Psalm 119:97) reveal about the relationship between loving God and loving the law? And how does the recognition of the law as the expression of the divine character transform the emotional register of the believer’s engagement with the law from obligation-performing to character-admiring?
- The lesson distinguishes the antinomian error (freedom from the law means freedom from all moral obligation) from the legitimate freedom the gospel grants (freedom from the law as a covenant of works and system of condemnation). In practice, many evangelical Christians operate in the space between full antinomianism and the Reformed account, treating the New Testament’s ethical instruction as authoritative while dismissing the Old Testament’s moral law (including the Ten Commandments) as no longer relevant for the new covenant believer. Is this mediating position, sometimes called “New Testament ethics only”, a coherent account of the believer’s relationship to the moral law, or does it represent a modified form of antinomianism? What specific arguments does the lesson provide for the continuing authority of the moral law (including the Decalogue) in the new covenant era?
- Romans 13:10’s “love is the fulfillment of the law” is sometimes interpreted as meaning that love renders the specific commandments unnecessary, that if a person genuinely loves, she does not need to know or follow the specific moral instruction of the commandments. Evaluate this interpretation. How does the lesson’s “grammar of gratitude” concept address this reading? And what specific pastoral problems does the “love replaces law” interpretation produce, what happens to the believer’s moral life when she tries to

navigate the specific situations of daily life guided by love as an undefined feeling rather than love as informed by the law's specific moral instruction?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the motivation from which law-obedience is rendered is as important as the obedience itself: the obedience flowing from the anxiety of the unaccepted (legalism) and the obedience flowing from the gratitude of the accepted (the third use) are fundamentally different orientations. Examine the primary motivation from which your own obedience to the law's moral demands flows. Is it primarily the anxiety of someone who is using law-keeping to maintain or improve her standing before God? Or primarily the gratitude of someone who is accepted and is expressing that acceptance in specific, law-defined love for God and neighbor? What specific changes in your understanding of the justified standing and its relationship to the law's obedience would most help to shift the motivation from the first to the second?
- The lesson presents the preacher who can make the movement from the law's convicting second use to the law's normative third use as the model for Reformed balance in preaching. In your own preaching or teaching, which use of the law is most developed and most consistently present? If the second use dominates (the sermons consistently convict and drive to repentance but rarely arrive at the specific instruction in what the grateful life looks like), what specific changes in sermon structure, application, and theological emphasis would produce the third-use dimension? If the third use dominates (the sermons consistently instruct in moral living but rarely address the deeper convicting work that the law's demands produce in honest self-examination), what specific changes would produce the second-use urgency?
- The lesson closes with the image of the law as the "grammar of gratitude", the specific, concrete, morally-defined instruction that gives the believer's gratitude a particular shape in practice. Identify one specific dimension of your daily life, a specific relationship, a specific pattern of behavior, a specific area of conduct, in which the law's instruction (in its third-use form: specific, gratitude-motivated, Spirit-empowered) most urgently needs to be applied. What specific commandment or New Testament ethical instruction addresses this dimension? How does the command change in character when it is heard as the grammar of the grateful expression of the accepted standing rather than as the condition of maintaining that standing? And what specific Spirit-empowered, concrete change in this area would express the love that the law says love looks like there?
- The lesson describes the pastoral value of the Reformed balance for those in the congregation who are most burdened by legalism, those who are using law-keeping to earn or maintain God's acceptance and who are living under the performance anxiety of the unaccepted. Identify one such person in your pastoral sphere. What specific theological misunderstanding about the law's function in relation to the justified standing is most active in their experience? What specific aspect of the Reformed account of the third use, the acceptance is already complete; the law guides its grateful expression; obedience flows from gratitude rather than the desire to merit, would most directly address their specific burden? And what specific text, illustration, or pastoral approach would most help them to receive the third-use account as the liberation from the legalist treadmill?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading Psalm 119:89–104 slowly, attending to the psalmist's specific vocabulary of relationship to the divine instruction: the meditation of verse 97 ("it is my meditation all the day"), the wisdom of verse 98 ("Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies"), the understanding of verse 99 ("I have more insight than all my teachers", because of meditation on the divine testimonies), the restraint of verse 101 ("I have restrained my feet from every evil way", so that the word might be kept), the sweetness of verse 103 ("How sweet are Your words to my taste!"), and the direction of verse 105 ("Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"). Let the psalmist's vocabulary become the vocabulary of your own prayer: ask the Spirit to produce in you the genuine, affective, "O how I love Your law!" of the regenerate heart that has genuinely encountered the divine character in the specific instruction of the divine will.

Pray through each of the Ten Commandments in its positive form, not the prohibitions but the positive duties that the commandments require, as the specific, normative, gratitude-guiding instruction in what love for God and neighbor looks like. First commandment: the love for God that gives Him the supreme loyalty of the whole heart. Second commandment: the pure, Word-governed worship that honors God as He has commanded rather than as the creature desires. Third commandment: the reverent, covenant-keeping use of God's name and word. Fourth commandment: the Sabbath rest that acknowledges the Creator's lordship over time and the Redeemer's completion of His saving work. Fifth commandment: the honor and care owed to parents and lawful authorities. Sixth commandment: the love for the neighbor's life that produces active protection, care, and provision. Seventh commandment: the faithfulness and purity that honors the sanctity of the marriage covenant and the sexual design of the Creator. Eighth commandment: the generosity and justice that honors the neighbor's property. Ninth commandment: the truthfulness and integrity that honors the neighbor's reputation. Tenth commandment: the contentment that is free from the covetous desire for what belongs to another. For each: receive the command as the expression of the divine character, and ask the Spirit to produce in you the specific grateful expression of each.

Pray with specific honesty about the areas of your engagement with the law's instruction that most clearly reflect the legalist or the antinomian error. Where are you most prone to hearing the law's demands as the condition of your maintained standing rather than as the grammar of your gratitude? Name the specific commandments or New Testament ethical instructions whose demands feel more like threats than gifts, and bring the feeling honestly before the Father: "I know that I am completely accepted; I know that this command is the expression of your holy character and the guide for my grateful expression of the acceptance I have received; but I am hearing it as the anxious slave rather than as the loved child. Calibrate my conscience to the gospel's truth: I am not earning acceptance by keeping this; I am expressing the acceptance I have already received."

Pray for the congregation in its relationship to the law's instruction, for those who most need the second use's convicting work (who have not yet been honest about the depth of the law's demands and their failure to meet them) and for those who most need the third use's liberating instruction (who have been hearing the law as the condition of the maintained standing and need the specific, pastoral reorientation toward the law as the grammar of gratitude). Ask for the wisdom to preach and teach in a way that delivers to each person the specific use of the law they most need, conviction to the complacent, instruction to the condemned, and the Reformed balance to

all who are in the process of learning to inhabit the space between the law's honest demand and the gospel's free grace.

Close with Romans 13:8–10 as the doxological convergence of law and love: “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Receive this as the specific, pastoral bottom line of the whole lesson: the law and love are not rivals but the grammar and the language through which the justified, adopted, Spirit-indwelt believer expresses the gratitude of the accepted life. The love is genuine; the law is its grammar; and the obedience that the grammar shapes is the specific, concrete, neighbor-serving, God-honoring expression of the love that the Spirit has poured into the heart through the adoption. This is the sanctified life. This is the third use of the law in practice. And this is the grammar through which the gospel's grace speaks its most fluent and most beautiful language in the world.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Psalm 119:105, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Psalm 119:97, 105; Matthew 5:17–20; Matthew 22:37–40; Romans 6:14–15; 7:12, 22; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 9:20–21; Galatians 3:24; 5:13–14; 6:2; James 1:25; 2:12*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

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