

Herschel is quite intrigued by the grate on our gas fireplace. It doesn't even have to be on for him to want to touch it. It's probably a texture thing, but it's probably also a pushing-boundaries thing that is usual for this age. We've told him that it's dangerous, even when it's off simply because that's easier than explaining on and off, lit and unlit, and even when there is no obvious fire, it might still be warm from moments ago.

Now typically he's a pretty good listener, and maybe it's that we're getting good at distracting, so most of the time he'll leave it well enough alone. But every now and then he gets it in his head that he wants to touch it, to make the scratching sound on it, and no words will deter him and no distractions will keep him happy, so we have to simply remove him from the situation.

But we'd rather an unhappy toddler now rather than one with burnt fingers at a later date.

We get the Law in situations like this. We like it when pain is prevented, when suffering is avoided, and when harmony can be the defining quality of the day. No murdering is a great rule from God and from the government. We rejoice when we see a married couple living happily together—especially when that's ourselves—and this is usually accompanied by the fact that they haven't broken the 6th and committed adultery on each other. No drinking and driving is a good rule that protects society—most of us can get behind this. That stealing is illegal and immoral helps keep us living with a bit of peace of mind knowing that it's less likely that someone will steal my car or my wallet or my couch because there are consequences if they do—from the Law if they get caught, and from their consciences even if they don't.

The Law is good and right and brings life and maintains peace and joy. In keeping the Law there really does seem to be some great reward, as it protects us and our loved ones from great loss, it keeps our conscience from condemning us too hard, and who knows how God may choose to bless us for striving to keep out of sin.

So the Law is good.

At least we feel that way until we are on the other end of the accusing finger.

When we are the toddler that just wants to touch the bumpy grate, or when we are the person with too little to get by and so stealing or cheating our taxes seems like a justifiable thing to do, or when we've only had a few drinks but we feel sober but then there's a check stop, then we like the law a little bit less.

It doesn't really take our excuses into consideration, does it? Whether it's a sin that we've been fighting against but can't seem to step away from—we hate it even but it seems to have control over our lives (think gossiping or pornography or binge drinking when we lose control over our words and actions or using the Lord's name in vain)—or whether it's the sins that we thought we'd just try because it looked fun or it seemed only right and we deserved it or everyone else was doing it. No matter the situation of how we found ourselves sinning, God's Law still says we've fallen short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. Plain and simple.

When the finger is pointed at us, we think it should give us a break. If it only knew what we'd been through, or what it was like to have a fallen nature that just naturally veers towards sins, then maybe it would take it easy on us.

I'm curious what was running through the Israelites' minds when they first heard the 10 Commandments. It's not as though these words were spoken to Adam and Eve, pre-fall, before they knew what sin was like. No, the masses had a conscience and they knew what was right and wrong, but as God spoke these commands, as Moses wrote them down to be set in stone, literally, forever, at least on the second go around, the people in the crowds had already broken them. There were people who had cheated on their spouses and people who had cheated on their payments to vendors. Both guilty and deserving of death. There were those who had committed murder and those, one and all, who coveted something of their neighbours. While there were certainly some people who had good prayer lives and didn't go about swearing falsely by God's name and

honoring Him above all else (or at least above most things most of the time), the average person broke the first table of the Law towards God on a regular basis on top of their favourite set of sins to break from the second table too.

So as much as many of them could nod their heads and say “that sounds like a good plan” and comprehend why this was both good and righteous before God and how each of these rules, now laid before them without a doubt, these words would cause peace and unity and life in their midst; as much as these people could assent to the new agreement of the community, each of them also had to look inwards and realize that they were already counted out. They had already committed more than enough to ensure that their descendants would be visited by God for their iniquity rather than with His blessing.

At the pronouncement of good and evil, of righteousness and sin, the people should quake, but they need not because of how God’s commands begin. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the house of Egypt, out of slavery.” God already knows who He is speaking to and the help they so desperately need. And He has pronounced His favour upon them before they can even ponder whether they will do good or evil.

He has chosen them, and He has chosen to love them. And a part of that is speaking these commands that will protect them and guide them, and that He chooses to speak the commands to sinners who will continue sinning rather than immediately smite them down for their failures, this doesn’t mean that God doesn’t take His commands or their sins seriously; it means that His love overrides their unrighteousness.

And as they continue as God’s people He provides for them a system of sacrifice because they will continuously fail to meet His, not high, His perfect and His good standards, and He renews them out of His love, restoring them again and again and again.

Now our Psalmist, living in this context of a people who should do the Law, who know the benefits of the Law, but he also knows the sin inside him that keeps

Him from keeping the Law, He prays “Declare me innocent of hidden faults; keep back your servant from presumptuous sins—let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be innocent, and blameless of great transgression. Let the Words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

The Law, with all its pesky reminders and outright condemnation, the Law is not the problem. The Law is good, but your sin and my sin, pervading every area of our lives until our last breath, it is the problem. And fulfilling the Law is not the solution, but Christ alone, the One who entered the temple to cleanse it—righteous anger leading to purity and justice—the One whose blood all sacrifices pointed towards—this One forgives you for every time you have broken the Law and for every time you will again break it, He has covered you with His grace and filled you, in your baptism and at His table, with His true righteousness. He is your Rock; He is your Redeemer.

So now for you, dear Christian, the Law is extra good and right and beautiful. For in it you see what it is that you can do to honor your God and to care for His creation. What good can you do this day? Find ways that you can honor your parents. Call them, care for them, pray for them, thank them. What else might you do? Don't murder. Excellent, you say, because that was not on my to-do list. Which is wonderful, but are there ways that you can support another in their bodily welfare—seek them out and provide them food; donate to an organization that will give another shelter; pray for those near and far whose lives are under threat. And there's still more time? Then honor your Lord's name, or find Sabbath rest in His promises (even on a Tuesday!), or honor Him as God. As you go about your day, rejoice in all the gifts that He has provided you, and spend time in His Word, and pray about the good that happens with gratitude and seek His help whenever calamity becomes known to you or you face hardship.

All of this is truly good, and as Christians we ought to want to do good in our world as good has been done to and for us.

And there, in that ought, in that Law preached once again, the Law about the Law, if you will, here lies the other, the even better good about the Law for us Christians.

It constantly stands above us, reminding us that there is more to do, that we should have done better, that we cannot make it on our own. And in this, in this humbling, in this death, we are then able to be raised up because our pride, our own puny attempts at righteousness are not standing in the way.

We cling in our weakness and our foolishness and our nothingness, as Paul tells us today, we cling to the sacrifice of our Redeemer, the One who loves us not because we fulfill the Law but simply because He loves us enough to die for us; the One who has saved us from our slavery to sin. And we pray and strive and hope to love as He has loved us, that is, we go guided by God's perfect Law, and we go courageously and freely, resting on our Rock, knowing that His forgiveness is there again and it always will be.

In His name, Amen.