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SERMON TITLE: Growing Strong in Faith and Action
SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:8-12, 15-16, 6:1-4
DATE February 12, 2023
Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also Deuteronomy 30:11-20

There's always been confusion over the relationship between the law and God's grace. We struggle to understand the meaning of freedom against accountability. Freedom is like the big part of the ad, and accountability like the "small print" at the bottom. It's like the ending disclaimers of commercials that are spoken in a really fast voice that brings confusion.

Are you totally clear on where faith and law fit together? What is the relationship between them?

When God was first forming Israel, whose purpose was to point the world to God, it was a process. Receiving the laws was the first step to shaping the character of people.

This new nation God formed was on the precipice of entering the Promised Land. God wanted **commitment** from the people so God gave commands. God described the law saying:

1. It's not too difficult to understand.
2. It's not distant (so heavenly minded it's no earthly good!)
3. It's not far away (too hard to hear it and obey)
4. It's VERY CLOSE – It's on your lips; in your heart

The commitment to love God and follow God's law is a choice!

The choice you make has consequences:

<u>TO FOLLOW GOD:</u>	<u>FOLLOW FALSE GODS:</u>
Life	Death
Prosperity	Adversity
Multiply	Short life
Blessings	Curses

God's will is that people choose life!

We learn that the law's purpose was to give people instruction about how to walk with God. But over the years what a struggle to keep the law!

God knew that it would take more, that there needed to be a way to gain forgiveness for our failures. But the permanent solution would come later, and only from Christ. Let's read about it:

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved

through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. (Romans 5:8-12)

We cannot help ourselves, because of Adam's sin.

There is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. (Ro 5:15a)

The sin of Adam spiraled many people down to death. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness brought us up from death through Jesus Christ.

There's more hope than despair when God is involved. Do you see it in the results?

Adam's sin led to condemnation. God's free gift leads to restoration, even though we are guilty of many sins. (Ro 5:16) Jesus is the connection we needed. All who are in Christ are freed from the consequences of sin.

God's power to heal and reconcile through forgiveness magnificently wins over sin.

Sin is bondage. We sang. "There is power in the name of Jesus, to break every chain."

We still have the law, the Old Covenant; but now Jesus has established the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins.

We have in our culture, and it has seeped into our churches, a terrible weed bursting forth that dishonors the gift of God and the sacrifice of Christ. It is the idea that as a Christian we can do anything that we want; live any way we want; that the law is defunct.

There are churches which are lowering moral standards regarding marriage and sexuality and teachings contrary to godly principles, like chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage which are promoted in the Bible.

Our culture, and some of our churches are divided over crimes against babies in the womb. But Psalm 139 says,

God created my inmost being; God knit me together in my mother's womb. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; God's workmanship is marvelous. (v. 13-14)

The Psalmist continues:

"You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (v. 15-16).

Our culture is also fanning the flames of racial and ethnic discord rather than seeking the reconciliation which is offered in Christ. Paul writes:

"God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18-19).

It behooves us to ask, are we living into our mission? Or is the church slipping into refusing to stand up, in a loving way, against the mores of the culture?

We must examine ourselves and our beliefs! God's law leads to life. Abandoning God's ways leads to death and destruction. Where's our chart! Let's see:

The choice you make has consequences:

<u>TO FOLLOW GOD:</u>	<u>FOLLOW FALSE GODS:</u>
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We, the church, must analyze the culture before we go mum about these cultural beliefs which turn away from God's ways.

But, didn't Paul write that the law is defunct?

These are not new issues or questions. Paul goes on to ask exactly that question in Romans 6:1-4. Let's hear it:

"Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? . . . For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."

We trusted God's love when we accepted Christ. Paul writes, "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:19-20).

Why? **Because Jesus living in you helps you bring LIFE to those around you:**

- Faithfulness brings life to marriage and protection to your children.
- Forgiveness brings hope to your relationships.
- Reconciliation between races brings healing and hope.
- Chastity in singleness helps you avoid all kinds of emotional baggage.
- Promoting honesty while deterring stealing brings safety to the community.
- Sexual definitiveness helps people value themselves as being "made in God's image."
- Gaining sobriety over addiction creates peace.

Yes, you may call them God's laws. But they are also called the "heart."

Remember what the writer of Deuteronomy said? "The law is not so far away from you that it is too hard to hear it and obey. It's very close – it's on your lips; *in your heart*."

That's the idea. Jesus grows you strong in faith and action through his loving, patient, clearly defined values. His presence brings that word right into your heart.

It's on your lips to share with those in your sphere of influence so that they are given the choice. Are you sharing with others?

If you do not speak up you are simply defaulting to the culture. If you default to the culture, **you will begin to believe and act out those false values yourself.**

The choice you make has consequences:

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Your choice is effective in the long run (when you die) and in the short run (while you live). Think about it.

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. . . . Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! . . . This is the key to your life." ~ Love, God

AMEN