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WHY CAN'T WE FIX IT?



*When have you seen a fix-it job
actually make things worse?*

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

We are unable to live up to God's holy standard.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I bought a new car several years ago, and it drove perfectly. Now it's fully paid for, and I'd like to keep driving it. Recently, it kept losing power and I thought I had major transmission problems. I attempted to diagnose the problem and even fix it myself, but that didn't work out so well. After narrowly avoiding two accidents on the freeway, I took it to my mechanic. He found the problem: two small computer modules had gone bad (and cost \$900 to fix!). Although I wanted to fix the problem myself, there was no way I could restore the car to its original operating standards by myself.

I have an owner's manual that tells me what "standard operation" looks like; in other words, how my car is supposed to perform. God also has a standard by which we are to operate: perfect obedience to Him. Adam and Eve lived perfectly for a short time, but then sin entered the picture; now we just can't live up to God's standard.

We can't fix our sin problem. We're broken and we need help.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Deuteronomy 5:32-33

³² “Be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you are not to turn aside to the right or the left. ³³ Follow the whole instruction the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess.

Years ago when I was a student pastor, I took a group of students to summer camp along the Brazos River in central Texas. I gave the students specific instructions about hiking and established a clear standard of behavior for the week: stay on the trails! To venture off the trail could expose them to poison ivy and—worse!—several varieties of snakes. I instructed them to stay on the trails clearly marked for hiking. To do so would ensure them a safe and enjoyable time.

God clearly wanted the Hebrews to enjoy His blessings, so He established a standard for how they should live in relationship to Him. He did not play hide-and-seek with His will; He gave them the law and made it very clear how He wanted them to live. “Be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you.”

I am thankful God has given us the complete revelation of His Word so that we can clearly know His will. The Bible shows us how we can live and operate according to His standards. “You are not to turn aside to the right or the left” applies just as much to us today as it did to the Israelites. He wants us to stay on the narrow path that leads to blessing and salvation.

So many of us know the Lord’s instructions. We have Bibles. We have pastors who teach God’s Word to us. We have Bible study leaders who help us explore God’s Word. Yet, even with all our knowledge, we don’t seem to be able to stay on the path. We turn to the right and left, ignore boundaries set by God, and wind up hurting others and ourselves in the process. We’re unable to live up to God’s holy standard.

How have you experienced the blessings that come from following God’s instruction?

QUESTION #2

Earlier in Deuteronomy 5, the Israelites had experienced a great encounter with God. God spoke the Ten Commandments to them. Out of fear, they asked Moses to go before God on their behalf, but they promised to do whatever God told him. "For who out of all mankind has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the fire, as we have, and lived? Go near and listen to everything the LORD our God says. Then you can tell us everything the LORD our God tells you; we will listen and obey" (vv. 26-27).

Verbal commitments are commendable, but do they impress the Lord? The Israelites promised to listen and obey, but the proof of their love, reverence, and awe of the living God would be in how they lived.

Galatians 3:10-12

¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed.

¹¹ Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith. ¹² But the law is not based on faith; instead, the one who does these things will live by them.

We've probably all been "fair weather fans" at one time or another. Born and raised in Texas, I am a fan of several Texas sports teams, including one professional football team that is known by the lone star on the players' helmets. We have really high hopes for our team at the beginning of a season. We post images or comments in social media to show our support. We engage in playful banter with friends who cheer for other teams. But as the season goes by and losses accumulate, we realize our team isn't invincible. When we realize they've been eliminated from post-season play, we lose heart. Disappointment sets in. We aren't raving fans like we were at the beginning of the season.

What is the difference between living by the law and living by faith?

QUESTION #3

A REAL FIXER-UPPER

On the following chart, list an improvement or renovation you have completed at your home:

Project	Supplies Needed	Challenges/Obstacles	Process	Result
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Now complete the same information related to living a life of holiness:

Project	Supplies Needed	Challenges/Obstacles	Process	Result
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Holy Living

"Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

— MATTHEW 5:17

Something similar can happen in a spiritual sense. Remember the Israelites' excitement at Mt. Sinai? Moses had received the law and God had carved the Ten Commandments onto stone tablets. The standard of the law was perfection, but the people thought they were ready. "We will listen and obey" (Deut. 5:27). Everyone was hopeful and the people promised God they would do right.

It didn't take long to realize it wasn't going to be "a winning season." As much as the people wanted to obey God, they couldn't live up to the law's standard, which was perfection. The law not only tells us how to live, but it tells us we are sinners.

Sinner. That's a hard label for some people to accept. At best, people often try to mask their sinful behavior by pointing out the things in their lives they consider good. But according to this passage, we are only good if we "do everything written in the book of the law" (Gal. 3:10).

The law was designed to do more than tell us how to live. God intended it to show us the futility of thinking we are good enough to earn His favor. The law points us to the fact that we cannot live the kind of life we were intended to live—a life of perfect obedience. So if we can't attain to the standard, what hope do we have? We live by faith in Jesus Christ, the One who lived the perfect standard for us. We will look further into this wonderful solution in the next session, but for the moment, let's consider how the law points out our sinful imperfection while pointing us to seek the One who is perfect.



Galatians 3:19a,24-25

^{19a} Why then was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come.

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²⁴ The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. ²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

What role does the law now play in the life of a Christian?

QUESTION #4

Earlier in Galatians 3, Paul pointed out that the law can't give us the Holy Spirit, it can't bring us into a right relationship with God, and it can't save us; it can only pronounce our condemnation. (See vv. 10-12.) Paul then proposed: If the law can't do these things, "why then was the law given?"

Paul gave one single reason: the law "was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made could come." The law convicted people of sin from the time it was given through the coming of Christ. For centuries after God gave the law at Mt. Sinai, the law instructed people they were unable to live up to God's standard. The law faithfully taught that message to generations until Christ came. At that time a message of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, was proclaimed.

Few of us have been *in prison*, but we have all been *imprisoned*. Trying to live by the law imprisoned us. "We were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed" (v. 23). Paul described the law as "our guardian." In Paul's culture, a guardian was more than a nanny; he was more like a drill sergeant who kept those under his charge under control.

Then came Christ, who lived the only perfect life and kept every part of the law. He fulfilled the law perfectly. (See Matt. 5:17.) The law ruled over us "until Christ" (Gal. 3:24). He kept the law we couldn't, and by faith His perfect righteousness becomes ours! A life of failure can be replaced with a life of faith.

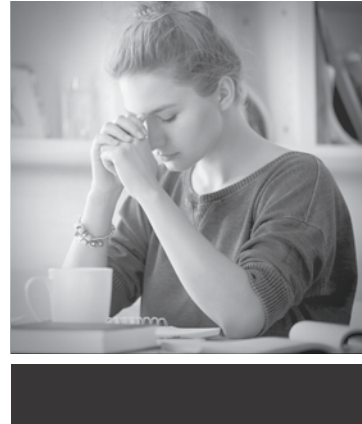
How do we help one another live by faith?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

The story doesn't stop with the truth that we are unable to live up to God's holy standard. But what will you do with this truth?

- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** Admit to God your sin and failures. At your absolute best, you're still a sinner, so confess any and all sins. Thank Him for His grace and forgiveness in Christ.
- ▶ **Stop trying.** Evaluate your life for any actions you might think make you right before God. Self-righteousness might feel good, but it's an illusion. You can only stand strong when you stand in Christ. Choose to rest in Christ and trust Him.
- ▶ **Start encouraging.** Encourage others to trust Christ instead of following a lot of rules or rituals to gain God's favor. Help them see Christ has fulfilled the law for them, and they need only to trust Him.



My car needed repair, but I could not do anything except trust my car in the hands of someone who could actually fix it. That's our story. We're broken and we need to trust our lives in the hands of Christ, the only one who can "fix" us.

My thoughts