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Sermon Notes

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Christ the Only Savior from the Wrath of God

Galatians 2:21 and 3:10-14

September 11, 2001 is a day that will burn in our memories for as long as we live. Those of us who saw the twin towers struck by Boeing 767s and explode in fire, and then eventually come crashing down to the earth will never forget the terror we felt as such a sight. For many, the most horrible aspect of that day was the sight of people throwing themselves out of windows of the Twin Towers and falling almost a thousand feet to their certain death... they were not suicidal that morning when they took the elevators to those upper stories... they were not depressed or filled with hatred of life as they walked through the halls of the 105th floor and turned on the lights and took off their coats and turned on their computers and looked out at once again at the spectacular scenery of Manhattan and the New York Harbor out their office windows... jumping out of that very window fifty-five minutes later would never have occurred to them...

But when the planes crashed into the twin towers, and caused their world around them to explode in intense, searing heat and billowing smoke, and when they tried to escape through the hallway or the stairwell or even the elevator and knew there was absolutely no chance to reach it, they ran back to the window of their office... perhaps the window had been shattered by the blast or perhaps they did it themselves...

At least 200 people made that terrifying and bewildering decision—to jump is better than to stay. One particular photo, taken by Richard Drew of the Associated Press was entitled “The Falling Man” and it was run the next day in the New York Times on page 7... but the outrage at the photo was so great that the New York Times never ran such a photo again, and neither did most other American Newspapers. On the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy, Susie Linfield, a journalism professor at NYU published a story in New York magazine called “Jumpers”... she had this to say:

“The jumper photographs make clear to us the utter vulnerability of the victims... Those trapped in the Towers had only two choices – to jump to their deaths or to be incinerated – which is to

say they had no choice at all. To moralize either ‘choice’ – to despise one as cowardly and valorize the other as heroic – is to misunderstand both. What the 9/11 victims faced was the absence of options.”

That last comment stuck in my mind with incredible power... it seems these tragic people had NO CHOICE... there was NO WAY to escape the searing conflagration engulfing their world

Even more tragic are the videos of people on the highest floors of the World Trade Center leaning out of windows with smoke billowing out around them waving white clothes to get attention from some possible saviors... it is very difficult to watch these videos without choking up, even though it happened over twelve years ago.

But these tragic people illustrate the central lessons of today’s sermon: they give me an understanding of Christ as the ONLY SAVIOR for the world!!

Three assertions the world HATES and OPPOSES vigorously:

- 1) this world is facing a raging inferno of immeasurable heat, infinite power, and eternal duration; this coming inferno is the just wrath of God against sin, a fire which will destroy the entire world in judgment AND will consume the enemies of God eternally in hell
- 2) Christ is God’s ONLY PROVISION for escape from the coming wrath; Christ’s death on the cross is the ONLY WAY sinners can be saved
- 3) Just as those people had no way to save themselves from the raging inferno, we cannot save ourselves from the coming wrath... our works cannot make us righteous in His sight; just as there was no way for those tragic people to climb down to escape death, so we cannot climb up to escape wrath

Oh how the world FIGHTS these three unpopular doctrines!!

The world says there IS NO COMING WRATH of God... God, if He exists, loves everyone and would never send anyone to hell

The world says Christ is NOT THE ONLY WAY to heaven... it is arrogant to claim that our religion is the ONLY RIGHT ONE

The world says WE CAN PAY FOR OUR SINS by our own good works; righteousness in God's sight CAN BE EARNED BY OUR GOOD WORKS

These assertions are hated and opposed by many in the world today... but they are taught powerfully and plainly in the Scripture; and they are central to Galatians 2:21 and 3:10-14 which will occupy our attention today

Key jump off point: Galatians 2:21

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

I concentrate on the phrase “the grace of God” in Galatians 2:21; we are in the middle of Paul’s train of thought here in Galatians... the “grace of God” in Galatians 2:21 clearly refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as Paul makes plain over the course of the first two chapters in Galatians

I meditate on what the “grace of God” saves us from –namely the wrath of God; I concentrate on the significance of Christ BECOMING A CURSE for us (Galatians 3:13)

I zero in on the idea of “setting aside” the grace of God... The word “set aside” = “nullify” to “render as nothing”... how man tries to avoid the cross of Christ by gaining righteousness some other way—“through the law”

I zero in on the logic of the verse—that righteousness CANNOT BE GAINED any other way, or Christ died for nothing... this is the doctrine of the EXCLUSIVITY of Christ

I want to end with the idea of the “Spirit-filled life” as the fulfillment of the promise, “The righteous will live by faith”... a quality of life that proves that the coming wrath will not consume us

These are the main points of the sermon

- I) Why the world needs the grace of God: the wrath of God
- II) The only way the grace of God comes to the world: the cross of Christ
- III) How the world sets aside the grace of God: self-righteousness

IV) How the grace of God makes sinners righteous: justification leading to the Spirit-filled life

I. Why the World Needs the Grace of God: The Wrath of God

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

A. The "Grace of God" Functions in the Context of Desperate Human Need

1. The word "grace" is not used often in the Old Testament; God seems to have reserved it for the coming of Christ

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

2. The word GRACE flows from the pen of the Apostle Paul more than any other biblical writer: 86 times!!!
 - a. He opens all of his epistles with this powerful formula: "Grace to you"
 - b. Definition: grace is a determination in the heart of Almighty God to do infinite good to those who deserve infinite wrath
 - c. Grace is especially for SALVATION

Ephesians 1:7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us

3. Grace is especially on display in reference to the JUDGMENT and WRATH we sinners deserve at the hands of God

Romans 3:23-25 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that

is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Psalm 103:10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

4. In Galatians 2:21, the need for grace is seen in the fact that we sinners LACK RIGHTEOUSNESS

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

- a. Terrifying implication: WE ARE UNRIGHTEOUS IN GOD'S SIGHT
- b. We must GAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS, and Christ's death proves it can't come through the Law (more on that in a moment)
- c. What makes us UNRIGHTEOUS? SIN!!!
 - i) At a simple level, we have disobeyed God's holy Laws
 - ii) But sin goes far deeper than that
 - iii) At its deepest level, sin is turning away from the glory of God for some created thing

John Piper:

What makes sin sin is not first that it hurts people, but that it blasphemes God. This is the ultimate evil and the ultimate outrage in the universe.

The glory of God is not honored.

The holiness of God is not revered.

The greatness of God is not admired.

The power of God is not praised.

The truth of God is not sought.

The wisdom of God is not esteemed.

The beauty of God is not treasured.

The goodness of God is not savored.

The faithfulness of God is not trusted.

The promises of God are not relied upon.

The commandments of God are not obeyed.

The justice of God is not respected.
 The wrath of God is not feared.
 The grace of God is not cherished.
 The presence of God is not prized.
 The person of God is not loved.

The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist (Rom. 11:36) – who holds every person's life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25) – is disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored by everybody in the world. That is the ultimate outrage of the universe.

And God IS OUTRAGED!!! That dishonoring of God makes God extremely angry

B. God is Perfectly Holy and Passionately Hates All Sin

1. The holiness of God is the most important attribute sinners need to learn about Him

Isaiah 6:3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

2. The holiness of God is seen in His SEPARATION...
 - a. SEPARATE because He is infinitely high above all creation (thus do perfectly pure seraphim cover their faces)

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place..."

- b. SEPARATE because infinitely distant from all evil

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

3. God HATES all forms of evil with a fiery passion... He gets very emotional about sin and all forms of evil

Isaiah 30:27-28 Behold, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath,

and his tongue is a consuming fire. ²⁸ His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction

C. The Universality of Sin

Romans 3:9-12 Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

D. The Wages of Sin is Death (Romans 6:23)

Ezekiel 18:4 ... the soul who sins shall die.

E. The Wrath of God Expressed Here in CURSE Language

1. Plainly anyone living by Law is under a CURSE from God

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

2. In the Old Covenant, the curse of God meant He was actively against the prosperity, happiness, health, and efforts of His people

Deuteronomy 28:15-19 If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ¹⁷ Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. ¹⁸ The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ¹⁹ You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

3. Galatians 3:10 says it comes on those who do not CONTINUALLY OBEY EVERYTHING written in His Law...

ALL THE LAW... ALL THE TIME... Or else: CURSED!!

F. The Doctrine of the Wrath of God: Past, Present, and Future

1. The wrath of God has been on display many times in the PAST
 - a. Almost universal in the days of Noah: every living thing with the breath of life in its nostrils DROWNED TO DEATH
 - b. Terrifyingly fierce at Sodom and Gomorrah: The Lord actively rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah... the next day, nothing was left but smoke rising from the plain
2. The wrath of God is PRESENT... NOW... EVERY DAY!!

Psalm 7:11 God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day.

3. But even more terrifying is the FUTURE wrath of God; a fiery outpouring that will consume the whole earth and level it, making ready the coming of the New Heaven and New Earth

2 Peter 3:10 The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

4. And even more terrifying than the destruction of the physical universe is the eternal destruction of the souls of sinners in hell

No one taught as much about hell as Jesus Christ:

In Matthew 5, if you are even angry or lustful in your heart, you are in danger of the fire of hell... and it would be better to gouge out your eye or cut off your hand than be thrown into hell

Mark 9:43 ... hell, where the fire never goes out.

Judgment Day:

Matthew 25:31-33 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

G. This is Why the World Needs the Grace of God... because we are condemned sinners who deserve His wrath

H. BUT the World “Sets Aside” the Grace of God by Denying the Wrath of God

1. The wrath of God is a vigorously rejected doctrine
2. Mostly because non-Christians live every day as though there is no wrath of God

Picture those desperate souls leaning out of the windows on the top floors of the World Trade Center on September 11, waving white cloths and begging for a Savior that would never come; they could feel the heat, breathe the smoke, see the flames on the floors below them; they knew their danger was imminent

BUT because there is no physical evidence of the fire that is coming, sinners live every day free from any concern whatsoever about the wrath of God

Zephaniah 1:12 [They] are complacent... thinking, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.'

3. Even worse, many in the Christian world feel that this doctrine of the wrath of God is either EMBARASSING or simply FALSE
4. Keith Getty and Stewart Townend wrote one of the greatest modern hymns, sung all over the world, “In Christ Alone”

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
 Fullness of God in helpless babe!
 This gift of love and righteousness,
 Scorned by the ones He came to save.
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied;
 For ev'ry sin on Him was laid —
 Here in the death of Christ I live.

5. A Presbyterian hymnal committee wanted to use the hymn in a new hymnal, but they wanted Getty and Townend to change the lyrics

From "Till on that cross as Jesus died/the wrath of God was satisfied" to "Till on that cross as Jesus died/the love of God was magnified."

Hymnal committee chair Mary Louise Bringle: "The song has been removed from our contents list, with deep regret over losing its otherwise poignant and powerful witness. The view that the cross is primarily about God's need to assuage God's anger would have a negative effect on the hymnal's ability to form the faith of coming generations."

Anglican Priest Bosco Peters:

"The understanding ... is that God (the Father) was angry at us in our sinfulness, and that God took out this rage on Christ instead of on us, and that this now enables God (the Father) to love us. **This understanding is heresy.** God doesn't have "anger management issues"

For centuries, the world has SET ASIDE the grace of God by rejecting the wrath of God against sin

II. The Only Way the Grace of God Comes to the World: The Cross of Christ

A. The Logic of Galatians 2:21: The Exclusivity of Christ

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

B. Christ is the ONLY WAY the Grace of God Comes to the World

1. Trying to save ourselves by Law would be to set aside the grace of God

2. There was NO OTHER WAY for sinners to be made righteous

The world is FOOLISH in how it RAGES against this doctrine!! Go back again to the top floor of the World Trade Center on 9/11... people desperate for a Savior... imagine a powerful rescuer lowers himself from a helicopter and reaches out to a man screaming for rescue... imagine that man stopping, looking at the rescuer's outstretched hand and recoiling in anger saying "Why is there only ONE way to get out of this building... I demand OPTIONS! I want MANY SAVIORS!!"

That is how the world's angry rejection of the exclusivity of Christ looks to the angels in heaven!!!

3. The coming of God the Son into the world to begin with showed that we could never make ourselves righteous in God's sight:

Isaiah 59:15-16 The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.

4. AND EVEN MORE POIGNANTLY AT THE CROSS... it was the DEATH of Jesus that proved we could not make ourselves righteous any other way

5. This is the very issue that Christ settled in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Matthew 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

ABBA, FATHER... IS IT POSSIBLE??? IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY????

Matthew 26:42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

NO, MY BELOVED SON... THERE IS NO OTHER WAY!!!

6. Christ alone is the INCARNATE SON OF GOD who DIED UNDER THE WRATH OF GOD; HE ALONE SATISFIED THE JUST PENALTY for our sins—for the wages of sin is death

7. Even more plainly, Jesus became a curse for us:

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

- a. AMAZING... not just "Jesus was cursed for us" but Jesus BECAME a curse for us

b. I meditated on this for a long time... like the grammar of

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

- c. How is it different to say "I TEACH the truth..." or "I EMBRACE the truth" or "I EXEMPLIFY the truth" vs. I **AM** the truth"
- d. Only one Person in all history could speak so boldly... it means if you have me you have all truth... I am the distilled essence of all the truth in the universe
- e. But in Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by BECOMING A CURSE FOR US...he was the distilled essence of all CURSE in the universe... in Christ on the cross, you
- f. Push it even further: the curse is the focus of God's HATRED... God's OPPOSITION... ground zero of the infinite nuclear strike of God's holy wrath... Christ on the cross was the very essence of everything that God has ever hated or ever would hate

Sin is utterly disgusting to God... He HATES it with all His heart; think of the most repulsive sinner you can imagine; maybe an SS prison guard who coldly and sadistically murders or tortures his prisoners; or consider the coldness of heart of a man converted under Charles Spurgeon's ministry... the man was addicted to gin... lived for gin... drunk on gin every single day... destroyed his family... every shilling he ever got went for gin... his adorable little daughter became ill with a treatable disease... the man took the money for her medicine and spent it on gin... the little girl died... the neighbors were utterly disgusted... the little dead girl had no clothes to be buried in... they took up a collection and bought her a beautiful little dress... the undertaker dressed her in the dress; she was to be buried in that dress the next day... this wicked man broke into the undertaker's shop, opened the casket, stole the little girl's dress off her cold body, sold it and drank the money away. He later came to faith in Christ, genuinely converted under the preaching of the gospel... but WHAT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER AGAINST THAT MAN'S SIN? What of the CURSE he deserved for what he did?

the revulsion at this man's actions you feel is like a candle compared to the sun burning in outer space—God's revulsion is INFINITELY GREATER than yours! His sense of MORAL INDIGNATION is immeasurable ...

Christ became the bubbling vat, the stinking cauldron when God collected a billion stories as bad as that one... concentrated all in one place, and GOD HATED THAT COLLECTION with a perfect hatred... Christ BECAME A CURSE for us... the essence of everything God has ever hated in His elect in human history

- g. Now I say this with all the reverence I can muster... Christ in Himself was perfectly holy and absolutely delightful to God the Father
- h. But He is the only way of salvation because He alone could stand in our place and absorb the just wrath we deserved for violating the Law of God
- i. Parallel verse:

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- 8. The GLORY OF REDEMPTION: because Christ became a curse for us, we have become THE ESSENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD in Christ!!
- 9. If there were ANY OTHER WAY of salvation, then Christ died for nothing!!!
- 10. **God did not send His Son into the world to provide one of many paths to heaven**; He sent Him into the world because there was NO OTHER WAY
- 11. Thus many passages in the New Testament teach the exclusivity of the gospel:

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

C. The Second Way the World “Sets Aside” the Grace of God: By
Angrily Denying that Christ is the ONLY WAY to Heaven

1. The tolerance-loving, post-modern mind HATES the exclusivity of the gospel
 - a. Stephen Prothero, Professor of Religion at Boston University, wrote (2010) *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World and Why Their Differences Matter*: “It has been fashionable to affirm that all religions are beautiful, and all are true. This claim... is as odd as it is intriguing; no one argues that different economic systems or political regimes are one and the same. Capitalism and socialism are so obviously at odds that their differences hardly bear mentioning. The same goes for democracy and monarchy. Yet scholars continue to claim that such different religions as Hinduism and Islam, Christianity and Judaism, by some miracle of the imagination are essentially the same. And this view resounds in the echo-chamber of popular culture, not the least in Dan Brown’s multi-million dollar franchise, *The DaVinci Code*.”
 - b. The Senior Pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church here in Durham said that spiritual truth is an underground river, and Christ is one of many wells by which we can drink that water... but so is Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism
 - c. The world is enraged at the exclusivity of Christ... it wants us to say that ALL RELIGIONS are equally VALID WAYS of reaching God
 - d. That a sincere Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or Atheist can be righteous in God’s sight apart from Christ
2. They say that, for Christians to claim that Christ is the ONLY WAY to heaven is ARROGANCE
3. I’ve never understood that!
 - a. It would only be arrogance if we could take pride in the gospel as something we created ourselves

- b. If I devised a new recipe for root beer in my cellar, and then proclaimed it was the greatest drink in the world, it would be arrogant
 - c. But is it arrogant for someone who lives in Nepal to say that Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world?
4. But let me say again: GOD DIDN'T SEND HIS SON INTO TO WORLD TO PROVIDE ONE OF MANY WAYS TO GET TO HEAVEN!!

III. How the World Sets Aside the Grace of God: Self-Righteousness

A. The Third Way the World “Sets Aside” the Grace of God: Self-Righteousness Gained through “the Law”

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

1. Simply put, to bypass the cross of Christ
2. Here in Galatians, Judaizers were teaching the people to establish their own righteousness by obedience to the Law of Moses
3. Legalism: the idea that present or future OBEDIENCE can be used to pay for past DISOBEDIENCE
4. People try to assuage their guilty consciences by assuring themselves that their “good deeds outweigh their bad”
5. But how do we define “good deeds”? By some system of morality
6. Three ascending levels of law... pagan morality, morality based on the laws of false gods, morality based on the Law of the true God

B. Lowest Level of “the Law”: Pagan Morality

1. The world is full of moralistic systems in which sinners try to do what is right in their own eyes
 - a. Greek philosopher morality

Plato: temperance, prudence, courage, justice

Aristotle defines moral virtue as a mean between extremes of deficiency and excess, which are vices. So on the issue of confidence there are the extremeness rashness and cowardice with the perfect virtue in the middle (courage). A perfect man displays the perfect middle route between extremes in all areas at all times.

b. Japanese Samurai

Bushido: seven virtues—Rectitude, Courage, Benevolence, Respect, Honesty, Honor, Loyalty

c. Kant morality:

Each person must act according to his true nature to the most excellent degree

d. Benjamin Franklin morality

Thirteen laws

1. Temperance: Eat not to Dullness. Drink not to Elevation.
2. Silence: Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling Conversation.
3. Order: Let all your Things have their Places. Let each Part of your Business have its Time.
4. Resolution: Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.

e. Common everyday average person “I’m basically a good person” If you ask, “How do you define that?” They will give you some basic system of right and wrong they try to keep

2. But this is setting aside the grace of God... for righteousness cannot be gained in God’s sight by this kind of “law-keeping”... because God did not speak these laws, and because they neglect the Law God DID SPEAK... above all, this one:

Matthew 22:37-38 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

3. Secondly, their good works are just self-serving displays of moral superiority on their part... displays of pride
4. Thirdly: no one can keep these systems anyway!!!

C. Next Level of “the Law”: the Morality of False Religions

1. The pagan religions of the ancient world all had a morality to them... a system of right and wrong focused on their FALSE GODS
2. Followers of Dagon had to avoid stepping on the threshold of the Temple
3. Followers of Molech had to offer their own children in sacrifice
4. Followers of Buddha have to seek enlightenment by following the Noble Eight-fold path
5. Followers of Allah and Muhammad have to embrace the Five Pillars of Islam
6. All of these false religions have their own “laws”... but they do not come from God

[Concerning Molech] *Jeremiah 7:31 They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire-- something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.*

Some of the moral teachings of these religions are exactly the same as the Ten Commandments... but even those they cannot perfectly keep:

Romans 2:15 the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

D. Highest Level of “the Law”: the Law of God

1. God did give a perfect Law at Mount Sinai

Romans 7:12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

2. But as we have said quite plainly, no one can keep the Law

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

All the Law... All the time... or else CURSE!!

3. So the Law only brings wrath!!

Romans 4:15 ... law brings wrath

4. The death of Christ settles forever that no one could be made righteous in God's sight by the Law

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

5. If sinners COULD earn righteousness in God's sight by the Law, God would not have sent His Son to die on the cross... He would have pointed to the Law and said "DO IT and LIVE!!"

6. But those that did climb the ladder of self-achievement to heaven would spend eternity boasting in their achievement

7. God willed salvation only by grace!!

IV. How the Grace of God Makes Sinners Righteous: Justification and the Spirit-Filled Life

A. By Contrast: The Grace of God Unfolded in the Gospel

Galatians 2:16 [We] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

B. Justification by Faith Makes Sinners Positionally Righteous Instantly

1. Christ BECAME a curse for us
2. So we could BECOME righteous in God's sight

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

AWESOME THOUGHT! Justification by faith in Christ makes us THE VERY ESSENCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS in Christ... Positionally, we could not be any more righteous!!!

C. The Spirit-Filled Life Makes Sinners Practically Righteous Gradually

Galatians 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

D. Glorification Makes Sinners Totally Righteous Instantly

Hebrews 12:23 ... the spirits of righteous people made perfect,

V. Application

A. Do Not Set Aside the Grace of God

1. Come to Christ!! Understand that righteousness can never be gained by the Law... no matter how good you try to be, not only will your good deeds not outweigh your sins, your good deeds cannot be used to pay for your sins... TRUST IN CHRIST... put all your hopes in HIM... Say to yourself, "Christ is my righteousness!!!"
2. Embrace and tremble at the doctrine of the coming wrath of God... do not fight the idea that God hates sin and is passionate to have it out of His universe; our God is a CONSUMING FIRE... tremble

at the Day of the Lord that is coming on all the earth; let the fear of the Lord be the beginning of wisdom for you every single day

3. Embrace and celebrate in the EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRIST... Christ is the ONLY WAY of SALVATION; all sinners on planet earth are like those tragic people on the top floors of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001... surrounded by death, unable to save ourselves... a Savior has descended from heaven to rescue us... ONE SAVIOR and ONLY ONE SAVIOR... His name is Jesus Christ! How foolish is the world for demanding MANY WAYS to escape the flames! Cling to Christ, celebrate that "Salvation is found in NO ONE ELSE for there is NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN TO MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED"... expect that we will have to fight for the exclusivity of Christ more and more as America becomes less and less influenced by the Bible; this doctrine will continue to rankle people... let's never give up on it
4. Meditate on the concept that Christ BECAME A CURSE for you...if you have been redeemed through faith in Christ, nothing you face in your life is a CURSE from God... Christ absorbed the curse completely for you! If you have cancer as a child of God, you are not being cursed; if you lost your job, you are not being cursed by God; if you struggle with habitual sins, you are not under the curse of God... Christ became the ESSENCE OF ALL THAT GOD HATES so you could be the ESSENCE OF ALL THAT GOD LOVES; God may discipline you for sin, but there is an infinite distance between the curse God gives His enemies and the discipline He gives His children

O CHRISTIAN... do not live your lives in fear of the curse of God, waiting for the other shoe to drop... God can not and will not curse you if He has already cursed Christ instead of you! God is your loving Father now... trust Him, run to Him, embrace Him

5. Understand again that there are two ways to live in light of a holy God: 1) trusting in your own righteousness earned by the Law; 2) standing in perfect righteousness by faith and walking daily by faith and by the power of the Spirit... living by Law vs. living by faith... self vs. Spirit... WALK BY THE SPIRIT... day by day—say to Christ, "You are my righteousness; send forth your Spirit

into my life right now and give me the power to put sin to death
and live a godly life!!!”