

Whose law is it anyways?

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Date: 07 April 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Lord, my God, I was moved this morning by reciting the Ten Commandments. You speak to us, Lord, and as Jonathan said, the law drives us to grace, and you pour out your grace on us, Lord God.

And because of that, we just pray again, thank you for the cross. Thank you for the cross, Lord. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

I read a story this week about a missionary family that was overseas, and as happens, we find this in the military as well, when you go overseas, you go without a lot of creature comforts.

And so, like Amy does for me when I'm overseas, they had some family members send to them one thing that they really liked, which was peanut butter. So this young missionary family, every now and then, family from home would send them some peanut butter, and they'd have this lavish gift on their table that they would enjoy for the next couple of weeks.

What they didn't know, until they received said peanut butter, was that there were other missionaries involved in their circle who really believed that it was a badge of honor that they didn't have condiments, that they didn't have these creature comforts that they could enjoy.

[1 : 1 6] They really felt like carrying your cross meant not having peanut butter. Now, this young family was more than happy to let them believe and feel that way and worship the Lord in that way, and they went on, in the privacy of their own home, enjoying their peanut butter and whatever condiments that had been sent to them, not making a big deal out of it.

You fill your boots, I'll fill mine, and we'll just all go on our merry way. Unfortunately, it became a thing, because legalism almost always becomes a thing.

And this disagreement about the spirituality of peanut butter became a catalyst for a lot of difficulty that they had. There was just all kinds of issues after this, and the issues that started with the spirituality of peanut butter ended up burning that family out, because anybody who's been involved in mission work, it's hard enough, without fighting over legalistic stuff like that with your fellow missionaries who are around you, just burn them out to the point that the family left, and the family went home.

Now, to me, this story that I read this week was, it's a silly story, but it's a classic example of legalism, and what legalism does within the body of Christ, attacking when we seek out and attack each other's liberty, based on maybe a conviction that we have in our own heart.

Basically, someone saying, you know, to be completely right with God, you need to do this. You need to go without peanut butter. You need to do this sort of thing. You need to live in this sort of way, and it's imposing that on everybody else that's around them.

[2 : 5 7] In Romans, our passage from Romans, Paul, speaking to Rome, is writing to a people who have had legalists come up along beside them, and start speaking to them, and trying to get them to change their way away from Christian liberty.

Trying to say, you know, you need to follow, that's all well and good, the gospel's all well and good, but you need to follow the law of Moses. You need to follow, not only the law of Moses, but you need to follow the law of Moses in this particular way, in order to really be accepted by God.

And so, that's kind of like the spirituality of peanut butter that they were putting onto the Romans.

And so, Paul is writing to the Romans in our passage this morning, 7:21 to 8:4, and he's addressing this very thing that they're talking about.

He's saying, he saw, in our passage, Paul is setting the record straight, pretty much exactly on the role of the law. So, if you'll turn with me then, again, to the passage that was just read. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles available down front here.

It's a gift from Messiah Church to you, if you want to take one home. So, Romans 7.21 to 8.4. And basically, what this is, what we're reading, and what we had read this morning, is the summary, Paul's summary, of what the role of the law is in the life of the Christian.

[4 : 16] We just recited the Ten Commandments and said, Lord, have mercy upon us, incline our hearts to keep this law, but we don't follow law, so it can be kind of confusing sometimes.

What is the role of the law? Any law, in the life of the Christian. That's what Paul is dealing with in here. I'm working on a major, I was talking this morning, I was working on a major paper for one of my courses that I have to get done, and one of the things I'm learning how to do for the first time in my school-a-stack career is how to write an abstract.

Now, if you've ever seen kind of the summary on the back page of a book, on what that book is so you can read it, go, okay, I want to read that book, it looks interesting. An abstract is kind of like that. You're taking 150 pages, and you're putting it down into about 200, well, exactly, not about, exactly 250 words, no more.

I know that because I wrote more than 250 words, I had to make it less. It's actually a very difficult thing to do, I think I'm on my fourth iteration of my abstract. Of the 450 pages, it seems like the hardest thing I have to do.

Paul is writing, in these few passages we have, his abstract, his summary of what the law is and what it does in the life of the Christian.

[5 : 33] As we look at Romans 7, if we look at Romans 7, if you look just above it, the part preceding this is where Paul is, that kind of famous passage where he's like, I don't know what I want to do, I do what I don't want to do, even though I know what's right, I do what's wrong, I don't have it memorized, I probably should if I was a good pastor, but it's that famous passage where he's just talking about that inner turmoil of the Christian's life and of within life, and there's two ways that scholars actually interpret that passage and then our passage as well.

First, is that this is the, that Paul is talking about someone before they come to faith. Okay, Paul is talking about the unregenerate Christian because, and one of the key markers that scholars would say is no Christian would ever say wretched man that I am, no Christian would ever feel that level of failure, so Paul must be talking about someone before they come to faith.

Now, more Orthodox scholars, some, or sorry, different scholars, Orthodox as well, state that actually Paul, no, he's talking about someone after they've come to faith.

And kind of the key marker there is that Paul says he delights in God's law and delighting in God's law is actually a marker of a regenerate heart. So, it's something that happens when we can only do after we come to faith.

And I have to admit, I spent far too much time on that one theological question. Was he talking about this? Is he talking about that? Just to kind of land on something from my own personal experience.

[7 : 03] I actually read this and resonate with it. I don't know about you, but I resonate in my faith life with what Paul's saying. I think he's speaking very clearly to the Christian experience.

I might be projecting my own experience on it, but I really think it's true to life and the life of the Christian. This battle to live up to the life that God has given us in Jesus, it's a real battle.

He talks about it being at war, and that's my experience. I don't know about yours. And so that's what I think he's talking about. The Christian life is not all puppies and rainbows and prosperity.

I hate to break it to you. And one thing you're probably, you know, one thing that we tried to do here in this church is we try to be, take me to the next slide, please.

We try to be as real as possible as we can here at Church of the Messiah. One thing that Pastor George will probably never be accused of is sugarcoating things.

[8 : 01] We are all trying to be very honest in who we are. And that's what Paul's doing here. I think he's opening up for us and we can all just open our hearts and say if we're honest, this is the experience that we have as well.

I look at Paul's struggle. It's the struggle of faith being called, being a human who's called to new life. But it's a struggle with a purpose. As Jonathan said this morning, the struggle of faith drives us to the cross and calls us to press deeper into the grace that God has given us.

Because I love, if you look between verse 24 and verse 25 there, very quickly Paul turns to grace. I love how fast it's boom, but thanks be to God.

Very quickly, Paul turns from the clash between his consciousness and actions to power, faith, and hope in Christ. In that, basically what I'm saying this morning is that in our own spirituality, in our own Christian walk, friends, that is a move that we need to learn to make spiritually consistently. Because we've experienced failure. Wow, that shows me my need for Christ. That shows me my need for the cross and I'm just going to press in more to God. That whenever I feel the weight of my sin, it's not a moment to start feeling terribly guilty about myself.

[9 : 17] It's a moment to turn to God and offer that to God. In that way, the law fulfills its true role in the life of the Christian. That is to make our sin known so we can turn to God.

Now, *nomos*, or law, you can see it here, has a number of different nuances in the New Testament, especially in Romans where Paul is talking here. The primary sense, the first sense, is the law of Moses.

Whenever the law and the prophets the Bible will talk about, Paul in here talks about the law of the mind or the law of God. So, sometimes in our passage when he talks about the law of the mind or the law of God, he's talking about the Mosaic law.

Everything in the Old Testament and all the traditions that build up around that, the law and the prophets. So, that's the first way he's talking about. The second way Paul uses law in our passage is he's talking about the law of sin.

So, this is like, this is the compulsion, the law of the world that works against God. So, the first law is the law of God.

[10 : 26] The second is, or the law of Moses. The second is the law of sin. It's that compulsion we have. And whenever Paul in our passage, when you see he says, the law of the flesh or the law of our members, our body, he's talking about the law of sin, that compulsion we have to go against God's law that he has there.

And when he talks about the law of the flesh or the law of the body, the law of our members, he's not saying our body is bad. Whenever the Bible uses the term *sarx* or flesh, not necessarily saying, oh, the body is bad and the spirit is good.

We don't believe that. Jesus came in the body. He came enfleshed. So, there is goodness. But when he talks about the law of the flesh in contrast to God's law, he's talking about that corrupt nature in our flesh.

That fallen part of our nature, that sinful part of our nature. The shadow side of human existence. So, that's what he's talking about in the second part. The third sense that he uses law in this short passage that we have is he's basically saying it's a principle.

It's a rule of thumb that whenever I think about the law of Moses, number two comes along and battles it. So, it's law in the sense of rules, one and two, a different set of rules.

[11 : 44] And number three is just a principle, kind of a rule of life that whenever one comes, number two is going to happen. Now, by using law in all these different ways, Paul isn't like one of those teachers you may or may not have that stood up at the front of the class and purposely confused you so they would feel smart and you would feel dumb.

what Paul is doing is he's using a turn of phrase, he's using Greek rhetoric that his readers immediately would have recognized and known what it was he's talking about. Problem, of course, is we're almost 2,000 years later and we don't understand that so it takes us a little more time to kind of unpack what it is that Paul is saying there.

He's using a rhetorical device from the time. What he's basically saying is this. Inside, I delight in the law of Moses. I'm a regenerate heart. I love God's law. But it's a rule of nature that a competing authority works in my body.

It works in my members. So it's a principle that the law of our minds, the law of God, is always at war with the law of our bodies. That is a fact in the Christian life and something that not even Paul rid himself of.

And so if you are doing battle with the sin in your life, if there is some sort of some sin that's really besetting you and you're struggling with, welcome to the human race. Welcome to being a Christian. Because it's a law that that's going to happen within the Christian life.

[13 : 12] In fact, in the life of the Christian, that exact thing is the role of the law. It's not a bunch of rules we follow to find God. The role of the law is simply this.

To show us our need for God. The law of the Old Testament shows us our need for God. This battle shows us our need to go to the cross. Romans 3.20 says, Through the law comes the knowledge of

sin.

That's its function now in the Christian life. That's what Paul believed and that's what he's teaching us. The new role of the law is how it helps us see our fallenness imperfection and it makes us cry out for more of God.

When I was growing up, my father was a contractor and one of my jobs was, we didn't have anything nice like this, which is a magnetic wand. We had a magnet on a rope because we didn't like to spend money at that time.

And my job, Amy will tell you, I am not the best at swinging a hammer, but I can drag a magnet like no one's business. And so my job was to basically walk around the job site dragging this hammer, or his hammer, dragging this magnet so that any of the nails, any of the screws, anything like that from that day that had ended up on the ground was picked up by the magnet.

[14 : 31] Because when the new people move in, you don't want to have this stuff coming up every spring out of the backyard. A good contractor will clean up the backyard every one to two days like that or pay some young schmuck like myself to do that.

Amy and I moved to Petawawa. No surprise. Because the contractor didn't do that before they fixed the house up that we moved into. And so for eight years, because they hadn't simply taken one of these every day and cleaned up the yard, there were rusty nails coming up.

There were like screws about that long. We had pieces of sheet metal appear out of the ground.

And as you've seen our brood of children, we have four kids, young ones, running around.

It can be a little bit disconcerting. You have to clean up the little bits as you go along in order to make the law unusable. So when we talk about the law in the life of the Christian, it's not a weapon that we use against sin in order to overcome ourselves by our own power and impress God.

That's not what the law is. And what Paul is explaining is the law is more of a magnet that draws out those areas of sin in our lives that we need to offer to God.

[15 : 47] That is the function of the law in the Christian life. Makes us aware of the areas we need to give over to God because Jesus met every dot and comma of the law for us.

He sacrificed himself to meet the requirements of the law so that we can have that relationship with him in which we walk with him and by his Holy Spirit he deals with these areas of our lives. This matters because life of faith is not a life under the law.

It's a life in the spirit. I'm not a big fan of movies. Unless it's Lord of the Rings or Star Wars I am probably not watching it. I haven't watched Han Solo because newsflash hot take it's not really a Star Wars movie.

I don't watch movies other than those things but what I will do is I will watch a movie with my kids. I don't even really eat popcorn.

They all love popcorn. It makes me feel ill. However, I'll sit there and I'll eat the popcorn because you know what those really intense moments in a movie my kids turn back into my little my little critters and they snuggle right in you know right into my side and that's that moment of intimacy I haven't had since they were they were really young.

[17 : 00] And so I kind of live in movies function like that for me. The proximity to my kids. The law itself in the life of this people is not about entertaining him with our greatness.

That's not the function of the law. The law is about the intensity of our lives realizing what's going on and God drawing us into greater intimacy with him.

That's what God wants with you is greater intimacy. It's the life in the spirit which gives life.

I love how emphatic again in 8.1 Paul makes that transition to life in the spirit. Sometimes he says therefore sometimes he says now but in our passage he uses both which is a big deal apparently in the Greek.

Therefore now life in the spirit he talks about. In Christ life guided by the spirit replaces condemnation and death.

[17 : 59] And then if we look at 8.3 and 4 for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and first sin he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

so that we were drawn closer to him not by showing how great our flesh is but by coming to him and walking in the Holy Spirit. And it's a continual battle. If we go back to 7.23 Paul talks about war.

He uses imagery from war and from battle throughout his writings in the New Testament talking about being a soldier for Christ and other authors talk about as well.

This imagery of the Christian life being a battle permeates it. And when we think about a war wars take a lot of time. You know it takes an awful lot once a war is won we think about a war the way we understand it I mean I think a lot about a war it's my job when we think about war when a battle when the battle is finally won when the war is actually won in a lot of ways that's kind of the midpoint.

That's not the end point. Take us to the next slide please. If we think about Syria what's going on right now you see the little black area up there and there's some other areas here you know ISIS has been contained to there but in the battle was won the actual war was won folks a long time ago but it's taking time to kind of mop up the extra.

[19 : 26] It's taking time for them to rid it of ISIS and stability operations which is the next phase of the war comes after ISIS has left. And one of the problems is stability building stability in a place you just clean people out from who are doing evil things doesn't make for very good front page news.

And so often times peacemaking countries will move out too early because it takes time to win a war and to rebuild. If you think about it when on D-Day next slide on D-Day when they hit the beaches and they won that war it took time to march towards Germany.

It took time after that to not make the same mistakes they made in World War I which led to World War II. It takes time to win a war. So yes on the cross Jesus won the war and now we are moving into the time when we're cleaning up our lives when he is cleaning up our lives by the power of his Holy Spirit.

And it doesn't just happen in an instant. My point is this Paul uses military language because even once a war is past its tipping point it takes a great deal of time to finish up.

There's a great deal of work to be done to put away our old self as Paul says. And they take on the new self that God has given us. And so we are called to do something this morning.

[20 : 50] We are called by the power of the Holy Spirit to put the law into its proper view. I want to tell you what I mean by that. Christ put away the legal requirements of the law so that we could be zoomed out.

Okay, here's a picture of downtown Ottawa. We're kind of way up there. Anyways, up there. We're zoomed out now to the 10,000 foot view of the law.

That's what Jesus gave us. And what do we see? What did Jesus say the law was? All the law and the prophets. What did he say? Anybody? Point to him.

Love God. Love your neighbor. Love God. Love your neighbor. That's the 10,000 foot view of the law. It's not the minute details, all the little side streets of the law.

It's the broad law. And so even when we recited the Ten Commandments, if you notice, there's two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Those that have to do with loving God and those that have to do with loving one another.

[21 : 51] And that is the 10,000 foot view now of the law that we measure ourselves by. We allow that to search us out so that we can find the way, the places in our lives that we need to invite God into in order to do it all over again and allow God to continue that process of sanctifying us and bringing us into relationship with him.

From this level, God, Jesus showed us and he said, love God and love your neighbor. It's summed up by Jesus. So that's why when we look to Jesus, he draws us into the living in the power of the Holy Spirit, not under the law.

Later, Paul will say in 8.6 after this passage to set our minds on the Spirit. Coupled with 8.4, it's a call day by day to cultivate a spiritual inclination towards him.

To incline our hearts towards spiritual things. So that, as 2 Corinthians 9.8 says, God will be able to make all the grace abound in us, not by our own power, but by having sufficiency in all things at all times will abound in every good work in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not because we're following some law, because we've allowed him to search us out and do battle for us in our hearts. The law helps us see our weakness so we can continually offer those areas to Jesus and let him transform us by the power of his Holy Spirit.

[23 : 10] It's a celebration, friends, of the cross. That's what Paul's doing here. He's celebrating the fact that the cross put all that stuff away so that we can truly have an open, honest, dynamic relationship with him in which, when things come to light, we're just honest and we allow him to

move on it.

I'm going to move on to the big finish, I think. The big finish for me is sometimes there's some cutting room floor stuff that comes out of my sermon prep. Some of you here might be questioning whether or not there's actually this law out there that everybody is measured by.

That there's what we call the meta story. There's a big story out there all-encompassing universal law or truth that we're measured by. That's not very popular in Canada in 2019 to think that.

However, at the same time, while our culture tries to tell us there's no all-encompassing truth, our culture also believes in inalienable human rights. Is that the right term? Inhuman rights.

At the same time, well, there's no truth but there is such a thing as human rights. And the reason we believe in such a thing as human rights is because the law of God is written on our hearts. You know what's wrong.

[24 : 28] I know what's wrong. After I'm finished beaking on up here about Paul, we're going to be praying and we're going to pray about the 25th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

Friends, killing upwards of a million people in a hundred days, if anybody in here thinks that's not wrong, well, you've got problems. we know, we know the difference between right and wrong.

There is such a thing as right and wrong and it's not, friends, just a matter of opinion. Genocide is wrong is not a matter of opinion. If you disagree, we can talk afterwards. There is a freedom from the discord each human feels and we know there's a way things ought to be and there's a way things are.

And friends, there's a freedom from the discord between the way we think things ought to be and the way things are. Between the way we are and the way we believe we should be. And that freedom comes through faith in Jesus and it comes through the life of the Holy Spirit that he calls us to.

So if you're thinking about it here this morning and you feel that discord, I really would like to invite you to consider Jesus and the freedom that he brings. Let's pray together. Loving God, you have given us the law to drive us to grace and you lavish your grace on us.

[25 : 52] We pray that you would have your mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep your law in our hearts, measure ourselves by it and offer ourselves to you when we find ourselves wanting.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.