

Romans 7:1–12 "How the Gospel Forms You to Live a Virtuous Life" | SERMON ONLY

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[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless. Father, we ask your blessing on the children, these precious children as they go to Sunday school. Bless their teachers, bless their caregivers, their families, bless grandparents, or all who love and care for these children.

And Father, we ask that you would bless us this morning. Bless us with true knowledge of ourselves, and we thank you, Father, that you grant us true knowledge of ourselves in a way that doesn't shame us or break us or destroy us or humiliate us, but a true knowledge of ourselves that we will allow, that encourages us to turn to you and grow. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

A couple of years ago, I better set my timer. A couple of years ago, I had to go to Indigo to get some books there and some other stuff. And while I was there, I decided to get some work emails done.

[2 : 12] So I went to the coffee place and sat down with my phone and started to get some of my work emails done. And just not the table right beside me, but the table went over. There was a young mom there with her little daughter. I don't know if she was three, three and a half, four, you know, tiny, but very active.

The mom had given her chocolate milk. I still remember this chocolate chip, chocolate milk and a big chocolate chip cookie. And the mom immediately buried herself in her phone doing stuff. The kid devoured the chocolate milk and the cookie. And then within moments after that, became very restless. And before you know it, they happened to be towards the edge of the coffee area and where the Indigo began, the books began. And the little girl got up off of her seat and started to go over to the display and touch all of the gift items and the picture books. I mean, like the coffee table books and stuff like that, knocking things over, knocking them on the ground. And the mom kept saying to her, and this is a very memorable line for me. So what did she say to the kid? She said to her daughter, I'm assuming it was her daughter, stop it. You are making me unhappy. That's what the mom said to the kid. Stop it. You are making me unhappy. And I thought to myself, really, that's the moral lesson you're trying to teach the girl. Like I sort of like afterwards, over the years, I thought it'd be interesting for a psychologist to follow her, because if that's always her moral advice to her daughter, she's communicating to her daughter, amongst other things, your entire existence involves making me happy. Not that, you know, it was wrong, you're going to break it, it's not yours, like nothing about that being wrong. Just you are making me unhappy. And that's why she had to sit down.

Now, I mention this story because on one hand, we see this, I think most of us would agree, that's not the way that you would communicate to a three and a half year old to try to teach them that they shouldn't be knocking over the store's goods and throwing them on the ground. Like that's, you

shouldn't do that. There's, it's wrong in all sorts of ways. We probably all agree with that, maybe disagree on exactly how to speak. I mean, the fact of the matter is, is that the little girl wanted her mom's attention. She should have got off her phone and moved on, but that's a whole other separate thing. But I mention this because it's actually a bit of a window into what we're like, and in a surprising way. So last week, this is in a sense about part two and a continuation of a question that was asked last week. And the question was this, if the gospel is true, why on earth would anybody ever do a good thing after they have been saved, after they've been born again, after they have been united with Christ? And just to put it like in a bit more practical thing, I became a Christian when I was in grade 12 and I was 16. I'd skipped a grade, so I was 16 in grade 12 and I became a Christian. Now, I'm not going to tell you how many years ago that was, but I am way, way, way, way, way north of 16 now. And when I became a Christian at 16, what happened is at that moment, when I gave my life to Christ and I enter into him, I'm united with him, at that moment, every sin that I have ever done and every sin that I would ever do has been forgiven. It's been forgiven by God, the penalty for it has been paid by Christ, and I am reconciled to him, I am his child by adoption and grace, and that's true. And let me tell you, I've accumulated lots of sins between 16 and now. Like piles of them. Piles is too small in imagery. A Mount Everest of sins I have committed, probably, since I was 16. And if God grants me another 20 years, if Jesus doesn't come back, or 25 years, there's still lots more to go. And so the question is, George, if at 16 you give your life to Christ and every wrong thing that you've ever done and every good thing that you should have done and you're morally responsible for having done and you didn't do, if every single one of them was forgiven, why on earth would you do anything that was good? Now, I think all of us can feel the force of that question, and I have to confess that for quite a few of the early times when people would ask me that, I gave a very poor answer. Because it's a question which I think most of us can resonate with when it's put very bluntly and plainly like that. Often it's not put so bluntly and plainly.

But here's the thing. You know what that question and the obviousness of the question, you know what it reveals? It reveals that we naturally don't do good things and we naturally want to do bad things.

[7 : 03] Doesn't it? That's what it reveals. That in and of myself, if it wasn't for external types of things, like I wouldn't do good things. In fact, it actually, it's very, it's a very revelatory that the force of the question reveals something very deep about each one of us. And what it means is that really at the end of the day, I only want to do things that make me happy. And so if in fact, like I don't know, giving some money to the church, if that ends up, you know, getting me some credit or making people like me a little bit more, then I'll, you know, I'll do that. If I'm going to be kind to my neighbors just because at the end of the day, I maybe want them to be nice to me or I, if I don't do that, I don't want to have the consequences of dealing with neighbors like that.

And I can pay a traffic laws because I don't want to deal with the consequences if not. And I want to make sure I don't have an accident. And if everything that I do is actually not motivated because it's good in and of itself, but because it's going to give me some type of benefit or save, either in terms of getting something or avoiding something I don't want. And if really what is making me happy is what's really driving me, it actually means I never do a good thing.

Because obviously, if you only do a good thing to get a benefit for yourself, you're not really doing a good thing. The motives matter. So it's actually a bit of a shock for us to realize that the force of the question, if all of your sins are forgiven, why on earth would anybody do anyone any good, it actually reveals what we really think we're like.

Now that's not what we were expecting. Every single one of us in our core is that mom saying, don't do that or do that because it makes me happy. Don't do that because it makes me unhappy. We are that mom. I am that mom.

So, what does the gospel have to say about this? And it's only, I think, really, if you start to understand the fact that how we believe the question is very reasonable, why do any good if all your sins are forgiven, that we can start to hear what it is the gospel says, which is really, truly good news, why we need to have the gospel, and how the gospel changes, how it begins to change how you live your life.

[9 : 37] Because, you see, I'm acknowledging that most people, I think most people, not maybe be 100% good, but the areas that they'd like to be good in, I think they really want to be good.

Not just in appearances, but deep in, like all the way up and all the way down, they want to be able to be known as someone who does things which are good, which are just, which are true, all the way down. So how does the gospel actually, rather than discouraging right and wrong, doing good things and avoiding wrong things, why does it actually help? Well, that's what's going on in the text today.

It says, said part two last week. So if you turn to Romans chapter seven, verses one to 12, that's what we're going to look at today. And it's a second part. So last week, as part of the way to answer the question, Paul used an example from slavery, or servitude. And what he was trying to communicate was that no human being belongs to themselves. And the question is, will you belong to that power which is in rebellion against God, and usurping God, and not wanting God to be God, because you want His position, and you want to be over God, and you want to be the center, you want everything to make you happy? Are you, you're either in servitude to that, or you're in servitude or serving God. And you either belong to that project of usurping God, or you belong to Christ.

And those are the only options. And so that's what he was looking at last week. This week, he's going to look at it from a slightly different way, but he's still trying to answer that thing, why would you do anything good, in a more intimate way by drawing an analogy to marriage.

So the text in the original language is very, very complicated. And that's reflected in the translations. So I'm going to read the first six verses, and then I'll say a few words about it, but then I'll jump back, and I'll try to tell you what's going on with the analogy. It's very profound. So here's how it goes. Chapter 7, verse 1. Or do you not know brothers and sisters? Right?

[11 : 38] It begins with or. So he gave you one analogy, or metaphor, and now he's giving you a second one. Or do you not know brothers and sisters? For I am speaking to those of you who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. Sorry, the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. And if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

Likewise, my brothers and sisters... So likewise means sort of in a similar type of way, not exactly, but a bit similar, my brothers and sisters. You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead. You've been united with Christ to belong to him, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, what the word flesh there means doesn't mean body. It means the human nature is is sort of bent in such a way that it desires to have God excluded, and God serve you, and you to have that position of God. And that's what's a major part of every human being's nature. That's what the flesh means. I'll read it again. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law... Notice it doesn't say our passions. We're not Buddhists. You can have good passions. Our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members. That's all of the bits and pieces that make us us. To bear fruit for death. Very strong statement. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we may serve in the new way of the Holy Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. This is very complicated. You probably couldn't follow all of that.

And here's the big idea about why this is really, truly good news. So, one of the things that Paul is trying to get us to understand is that it's not just that we're completely separate individuals who just are making our own choices all of the time, but that in a sense we are part of a culture, culture, and we're under... The word he often uses is dominion, and we're under a dominion, and we have a ruler, and that ruler is this motivating principle of, God can't tell me what to do.

I want to be like God. I want to have his role, and that is this part of us that's always bubbling along. And so, therefore, when we're... Part of us doing wrong things is because we're actually part of this culture, and we're formed by our culture. So, there's something inside of us that desires to be in rebellion against the triune God, but we're also part of a people that has the same desire. And because of that, we have, like, you know, if you use fancy languages, like our plausibility structures, our criteria, our customs, our habits, they're all formed by this bigger culture.

[15 : 21] Like, we in Canada aren't aware of how much we're Canadians. You only really know that if you get to go to another culture, not as a tourist, but to actually live there, and especially if you go to another culture which is quite different than us. So, for instance, when I went to Zimbabwe just

recently, and I'm amongst those... I'm in that area of Zimbabwe where tourists would never go because I'm...

I was helping pastors who minister to the poor and the lower middle... The lower class and the poor. So, I'm in a completely different area. And even on a superficial level, I mean, in Zimbabwe, the currency's different. In fact, actually, the currency is garbage in Zimbabwe. If you actually found some Zimbabwe currency, they might not want you to pay with it because they want U.S. dollars. And there's a whole way of understanding that. And in that culture, you don't give change. And nobody gets mad about it. They just don't give change. If you have a 10-cent item and you give them a dollar bill, then they don't give you 90 cents back. That's just their culture. You drive on a different side of the road. You get my point. The job opportunities, the language... You know, the example I gave a couple of weeks ago is in that culture, it would be like in this... Imagine you go to the construction site and one of the big, you know, one of the construction people want to talk to their boss because they have a problem. And you just can't imagine in our culture, the construction boss would take the hand of the construction worker and walk hand in hand in a corner to talk. That would never happen. But that's just common in Zimbabwe. The culture's different. And so, one of the things that Paul's been trying to do is to get us to understand that there's not only something within each one of us that wants to usurp God's place, take over God's place, that we're part of a culture that forms us in that particular way. And so, now the analogy that he's going to say is it's not just like being in a culture and it's not just like a life of servitude. It's also like marriage.

I'm sure some of the people here, some of those who have been watching, you may have made a mistake with the person that you lived with, for instance, which is like it's common law marriage in Canada or even the one that you took vows with and you discovered that they were in fact actually quite abusive and quite cruel. And marriage changes everything. It changes the whole, all the, your plausibility structures. There's gaslighting, so they try to make you feel like you're insane and it can be really, really, really bad marriage that you have to end up getting out of because of the abuse or, you know, the cheating or other type of stuff like that. And so, Paul is saying, just think of what I'm talking about, why it is that you want to be good. Think of it about like marriage. And so, it's as if you are married to this principle of being in rebellion against God and you're married to it. But we all know about marriage that if the person you're married to dies, you're free to marry somebody else. So, what you need to understand, George, is that when you gave your life to Christ at 16, it's as if God, you now become united with Christ and when Christ died on the cross, that was your death as well. The same means by which all of your sins were put away and the same means by which you're going to be clothed with his righteousness is also the means by which you died. And that means you're no longer married to this principle, this power of usurping God's role. That what happened is at the same instant that you were no longer married to that, Jesus takes you and you now with his church are married to him.

[18 : 58] Now you belong to him. And whereas the analogy that he gave last week of slavery could sound very impersonal, it's tried to be very, very stark. This is an image to say that it's a matter of intimacy that you belong and it's a matter of intimacy why you obey. In a good marriage, you see, the demand, love demands a type of obedience as well. And the more intimate the love, the more an obedience is sort of obvious to the person involved in it. I mean, a simple example, if, um, if, you know, when I was 16 and if I had come across Louise for some reason and she said, hey you, go get me some milk. Well, I'm like, what? Go get me, go get your milk? Like, who are you to tell me that?

But 10 years later and we're married and she said, George, can you go get some milk? That she could have used the polite form in both cases. Well, of course I'm going to do that. And, and the obedience is a, like, the marriage changes everything. And, and so why is it that Christians are called to do good things? Why is it that when you're married, when you're, when you give your life to Christ, there's, becomes rather than just saying, oh, now my, all my sins are forgiven and therefore I can do whatever the heck I want and I don't have to worry about it. In fact, you see, what this is doing is it's revealing the fatal flaw of a lot of Christianity, which a lot of Christianity, it, it, it sounds Christian and, and I know that, and people can still benefit from it even though it's quite seriously wrong, but the betrayal is one of fire insurance. That when I gave my life to Christ at 16, it's as if God now stamped me and tattooed me, not going to hell, only going to heaven.

That's what I mean by fire insurance. And so now that I have my fire insurance, I, well, I mean, that's the whole thing. If, if, if all that, if all that salvation is, is fire insurance, you're not going to go to hell.

Well then, why do anything good? And, and that's why churches that often slide into portraying salvation as something like fire insurance, what often very quickly develops is a highly legalistic culture, or a highly therapeutic culture, or something like that. And now what you do is you go to pop psychology to give you principles about how to have successful marriages, or how to get that promotion, or how to have more money, or how to look more youthful, or, and that's the therapeutic type of, of church, because you know that you got your fire insurance, but now they don't have anything to do with the gospel about how you live. And you read the Bible trying to create, I mean, I can't imagine, remember how many times when I was in my early years as a Christian, people would look at maybe Jesus talking to the, the woman at the well, and try to come up from that as if this was a whole series of therapeutic advice about how to have conversations. Like, really? That's not what that's about.

[22 : 06] Therapeutic advice about how to have a good therapeutic conversation. Like, that's ridiculous, actually. I didn't say that then. I felt it, but couldn't say it, because I was intimidated by their education, their learning, their position. But it's a ridiculous idea. Like, really, it is.

Or you become highly legalistic with all these rules, and do's and don'ts, and stuff like that, because you want to protect people in a different way than the therapy does from doing bad things.

But the gospel is irrelevant to it, and the gospel provides no motivation to do anything. But Paul is trying to say, listen, the gospel changes everything. When you give your life to Christ, it's, it's, it's as if you've left an abusive spouse. Later on, he's going to talk about, and maybe it's even in that part, how, like, in under, when you're, in a sense, married to this principle of, I'm going to do good things because I want to avoid the bad consequences. So I'm still actually just doing good things with allowing that principle of sin. I'm so married to sin. And, and, and, and, and really, if you understand that all that does, if you're just doing good things to look good and to avoid bad consequences, it means you're perpetually insecure. Or you go through periods where you're secure because you're nailing it. You're just nailing these things one after another. But then all of a sudden, you get a little bit old or a little bit poor, or you realize there's some actual evil in yourself that you never thought of. And then you crumble, you know, you just, you, you just, you just crumble.

It, you can't manage it. And, and, and, because if you're married to that, you're still ultimately ruled by sin. And you're trying to just do good within that context. If you're always insecure, you're unstable, and you're unhappy, and your, increases your anxiety. Because that's what it does. And, and so it's like captivity. And when you leave, so in a sense, becoming a Christian is a little bit like when you put your faith in Christ, and you ask him to be your savior and your Lord, he says yes. And he takes you into himself. You are united with him. You are in union with him.

And now it's almost as if you, not just you individually, but you as the church, you're now out of an abusive marriage into the most spectacular marriage beyond all imagining.

[24 : 20] I mean, good grief, he left the glories of heaven to die for you. That's how much he loves you. And now you're married to him. And that marriage is going to change everything.

If he asks you to do a hard thing, well, he's asking you to do a hard thing because he loves you so much. Like if he asks you to do, like, it changes everything.

There's, and there's a desire, a natural desire, to have that marriage, that really good marriage, to shape everything in your life. And it's freeing. And there'll be times in your life that you keep wanting to be worried about it or go back to the other thing or worried that those old abusive type of marriage is what's now there. But the part of the purpose of church and communion is to keep reminding you are in something like marriage where you now belong to Jesus. And the belonging and the obedience is all at one with the intimacy desire that he desires to have with you. It changes everything.

But some of you might have noticed a weird thing that Paul said. If you go back to verse 5, because Paul's going to do a little bit more about what this sin rule and reign and dominion actually means. He wants us to realize that it's way deeper than we actually realize. And that's partially what he's going to talk about next week. And then we're going to take a pause for a moment. And you'll have to wait to get more of the good news in chapter 8 and on in January. But look at verse 5 again. It says, for while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. And so you think, well, that's weird. Like, I thought the law was

good.

[26 : 04] Like, aren't Christians in favor of the Ten Commandments? Like, isn't that one of the things they're in favor of? Is that sort of saying that the Ten Commandments comes into me and it actually makes me do things that lead to death? Like, that seems weird. So Paul anticipates that. He's a little bit like a stand-up comedian who intentionally, like a really good one, who puts in a little bit of a phrase so that's an opening for them to move the conversation on to the next part. And so he catches that. And look at verse 7. What then shall we say that the law is sin? By no means. That's what he says. By no means. No. Just saying no doesn't cut it, right? So the next few verses are going to unpack what this idea means about what is the impact of having a law, a true moral commandment of something which is actually good. If God sends a true moral commandment into me, who lives in under the reign of sin, is married in a sense to sin, and I want to be good within the context of that overarching project of taking God's place. What is it like when God invades or powers in a true moral commandment? Like, that's actually good. So that's, I'll just read it again because it's very complex and I'll unpack it over the next 10 or 12 minutes to explain what it means. But here's what it says. What then shall we say that the law is sin? Verse 7. By no means. Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet. That's the 10th commandment, and I'm going to circle back to talk about the significance of that 10th commandment in Paul's own personal life and in ours. But sin, verse 8, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

For apart from the law, sin lies dead. What on earth does that mean? I'll explain it in a moment. Actually, I'll just tell you right now what it means. It's, in the original language, what it's saying is that sin is always there, but it's dormant. In other words, there's parts of you that are way worse than you've ever possibly imagined. It's like a sleeping dragon. And you know, some people, we know that there's some people we don't want to cross them because the dragon isn't sleeping, it's always there.

But Paul is, in a sense, saying every single human being has a sleeping dragon. And sometimes it's God's word that provokes the dragon, wakes it up to be dragonish. I'm not talking about having dragons as pets and your best friends and sages. I'm talking about the old view of dragons. I'm talking about Lord of the Rings dragons and the hobbit dragons. They eat you, okay? They eat you. That's the type of dragon the Bible is talking about. Verse 9, I was once alive apart from the law. I'll explain what that means in a second. But when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. So what on earth is Paul talking about within all of this? So it's very interesting he's using the word covet. So you see, one of the very first things is that the problem of sin, the problem of being, in a sense, trying to follow moral laws when you're in this whole reign and rule of sin, is that inevitably what it focuses on is external behavior that allows you to justify yourself and feel good about yourself. But it's external. And so why does that, so why does he use the word covet?

You see, here's the thing. If you go back to the Ten Commandments, I'm not going to say all of them, but okay, the first one is, you shall ignore the gods before me. You say, okay, I'm wearing a Jesus saves t-shirt all day. Check off the first one. And then the second one is, don't bow down to idols.

Okay, I walk by my neighbor's house. There's a Buddha there and another one with an idol. I don't bow down to them. Check off number two. I'm two for two. Number three, honor the day, the Lord's day, and keep the Sabbath holy. And I'm saying to myself, boy, listen, I go to church because I'm paid to go to church.

[30 : 22] And I'm at my age, a good Sunday afternoon is falling asleep and then having a nice meal. I've kept the Sabbath. Check off number three. Honor your fathers and mothers. Well, and for some of you are saying, well, I sent my mom a Mother's Day card. I'm going to send my dad a Father's Day card.

Number four, check it off. And then you go through the others. Okay, well, I actually haven't slept with another man's wife. I actually haven't murdered an innocent person. I haven't robbed a bank. And I haven't lied about anybody. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. I'm perfect.

Now, here's the thing. Some of you who are bosses, and I'll use the military as a perfect example for those of you who have ever been in the military. But anybody who's had employees or who's been an employee knows this. Ask anybody who's an officer, and he knows that they have people who obey him. And on the surface, they're completely and utterly nice and quiet and do what they're told. But inwardly, you know they hate your guts and think you're the biggest idiot in the world. And that if the world was better organized, you would be that officer and you could be bossing them around because they are a waste of rations. In other words, what Paul realized is that at some point in time, I'm guessing that this is connected to his conversion. One day, it hit him like a ton of bricks. He was checking off all of these commandments, thinking he was like the best guy ever. And inwardly, he was saying, look at that Gamaliel. Like, I'm just as smart as him. You see, coveting and envy, coveting is you want what other people have. And you don't like that other people have because you think you deserve it. And envy is very similar. You think you're better than them. You think you're above them. And you hate the fact that they're over you. And you would do anything to have them lowered. Even if you don't get it, you're happy to have them lowered. And it's not like ambition. It's just a pure wanting. Like, a lot of tax the rich stuff is just pure coveting and envy. People resent that other people have had money and they want to have it taken away from them. And it doesn't even matter if it completely and utterly impoverishes the province or impoverishes the nation. They just want to bring them down. Our entire culture has a huge problem with coveting and envy. And Paul came to realize one day that outwardly, he was scoring 100%. And he had never paid any attention to the coveting thing to realize, yes, he was going there and he could bow down and he could do his services.

But all he was doing while he was doing the services was internal sin after internal sin after internal sin, and even doing the external acts of righteousness just purely so people would say, my, look at that, Paul. Isn't he so pious?

At the same time, not realizing they're in really saying, look at that guy. He's so stuck up. I'm better than him. Like, why is he getting those roles? And I should be. And so that's what he means by, on one hand, he was living life as if he was fine. He was alive. And all of a sudden, the commandment, you see, part of what God's word does is to convict of sin. Part of the whole purpose of the law is to make you realize that you're actually far worse than you really knew, and you need God to do a massive rescue operation. Like, the fact is that it's not that my giving my life to Christ is a virtuous act, but I give my life to Christ out of mercy because I'm helpless. And he reaches down and gets me. He takes me in his hands. He takes me into himself. He is the one who saves me. He is the one who makes me born again. He transfers me into a new kingdom. He transfers me into a marriage. He does everything.

[34 : 05] I do nothing. I do nothing. Hallelujah! If you start to realize what's going on within you. And then the other thing about it is that the law makes the sin dormant, that you didn't realize that you have it. It actually, when it comes, makes it worse. Now, how do you know that? So let's just say, I mean, one of the problems we have is, let's say, you know, it's like sometimes we'll say, how can I share the gospel with that? I'll use just the example of a, you know, maybe a Rockcliffe matron, or, you know, a Kanata soccer mom, and how can I share the gospel with them, right? Because they're just so good. Well, how good are they? Imagine that God was to come and authoritatively say to them, give 10% of your money to the local church. And then he said, no, no, no, no, don't go away.

10% right now to the local church. Well, then you'd see what they think of God. And whether they said it out loud, or whether it would be inside, they would be using foul language, which I shouldn't say here in the pulpit, but you could well imagine.

Or if he was to say, you have to keep the Sabbath, what? I have to go to church on Sunday? How dare you tell me that? There's a diocese in another country, and in terms of that country, it was at an international gathering. They were all talking about this particular diocese.

And the joke amongst the other people from other diocese was that the priest in that diocese, we'll call it the Diocese of Alpha, the priest in the Diocese of Alpha, that they weren't real Anglican priests because they weren't at all obedient to their bishop. And the bishop couldn't tell them what to do. And they finally said that to a bishop from Alpha, and the bishop from Alpha just smiled and said, that's completely ridiculous. That's not true of my diocese at all. And they said, no, you know it's true of your diocese. He said, every bishop in the Diocese of Alpha knows how to get the clergy to do what he wants. They say, that's impossible. He said, no, all I do is tell them that they have to do

something. And they'll do the opposite, just to show me that I can't tell them what to do. So I just tell them the opposite of what I want them to do, and then they all do it, just because they're going to show me that I can't boss them around. Of course, we all laughed.

But we can all relate to that. How dare God tell me to do those things? In fact, God, I'm purposely not going to church. I'm purposely not going to give any money. There's something within us that when this law and the command comes, it actually creates this thing within us that makes us want to do the opposite. But when it says that the actual, the commandments and all are good and true and beautiful and worthy and life-giving, what he means is this. And this is partly what it means now to understand that I've died. I'm now married, in a sense, with the church. I'm married to Christ. I'm in a different marriage. I'm in a different relationship. And I'm in a relationship with the one who tells me I shouldn't covet.

[37 : 11] And if you think about how profound that commandment is and how life-giving it is, it's to understand it's as if Jesus takes you to a huge, huge, huge expanse of land.

And on the side is a steep cliff that you would die. And he said, there's guardrails around this land. And you can see it's thousands of acres. You know, he gives a supernatural power to see the edges. And he said, the guardrail around these is don't covet. And life happens between the guardrails.

And what happens? What is the life that coveting is warning us against? You see, what it's calling us to is to be fruitful. It's calling us to be generous.

It's calling us to be filled with gratitude. You see, if you're filled with coveting and envy, you're not going to be fruitful because you're just filled with anti types of thoughts. But he's saying, listen, it's protecting you from that. What I'm calling you to is I'm calling you to to gratitude. I'm calling you to fruitfulness. I'm calling you to generosity. I'm calling to you to admire and to rejoice and to create and to emulate. And I'm calling you not to think of everything like a zero-sum game, but to think about multiplication. Not think, look at that artist and how they are.

I hate their guts because I'm better than them. No, no, no, no, no. You get rid of all of that. That's the guardrail that you plunge to your death. Isn't it far better to say, gosh, that artist is so spectacular and talented. I'd like to learn from them. And why wouldn't it be even better to have two spectacular artists or five or ten? Not to look at a person who can dance really well and says, I hate his or her guts. I'm a better dancer than them. No, imagine if everybody could dance like them.

[39 : 11] That's the world I'm calling to. That's life. Who doesn't want that? That's what he's calling you to. To admiration and enjoyment and gratitude and generosity and inspiration and emulation. And don't go off the guardrails into your death. And I have married you, and that is what I am calling you for. There will come a time that that original promise to human beings to be fruitful and multiply and to make the whole universe a garden, that that will once again happen when I come. And those who are in me, who have been married to me by adoption and grace, changing the imagery, that is the rest of your story farther up and higher up and farther in.

And that is what you begin to learn in me and into eternity. Be fruitful. Be generous. Be grateful. Look up with joy and longing. Bring others along.

That is my call to you in Christ. You are married to me. That is what our marriage looks like. That's what our culture looks like. That's what our churches are to look like. That's what our families are to look like. That's what our mentoring is to be like. That is what our worship is to be like.

I invite you to stand. Just as you stand, you know that just as my relationship with Louise was very, very, very, very, very, different. Before I said, I take you, Louise, to be my married wife, to have them to hold from this day forward, to love and cherish. And she said that to me. And so it is. The Christian life really begins when Jesus, who is looking at you right now, if you have not said that, say, Jesus, I want to be yours.

Please be my Lord and my Savior and thank you. And he will say yes. And then it's a different adventure. And you will begin to breathe different air and eat different food.

[41 : 33] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, thank you that you have called us into intimacy with Christ. Thank you that we belong to him. Thank you, Father, that we are in union with him, that he will never cast us out or put us aside. Thank you, Father, that even his hardest words are words of love, words for our good and our thriving and our fruitfulness. And so, Father, we give you thanks and praise that we belong to Jesus. And we ask that you would bring this truth home to us day by day and week by week. And Father, we ask that you help us as a congregation to so tell that story and so encourage each other that we together are built up and put it within our hearts to bring

others along as well, Father. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

Amen.