

God's good law increases sin

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Please turn with me to Romans chapter 7. And we're going to read from verses 4 to verse 13.

First few verses of the chapter give marriage as an illustration. And then from verse 4 it explains how that relates to us as Christians giving us freedom from the law.

So Romans chapter 7 and starting at verse 4. Likewise, my brothers, 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, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

But 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. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in a new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means. Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

[1 : 32] For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had said, You shall not covet. But 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. Did that which is good then, death to me?

By no means. It was sin producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Well, good morning, everyone. Welcome to Jacob and Annabelle and Little Adelaide.

It's the first Sunday with us, right? Yeah. All right. Look forward to seeing Little Adelaide. Well, why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[3 : 05] Lord in heaven, please open your word to each of our hearts. Please fill me with your spirit as I speak.

Fill all of us with your spirit so that we might go deeper in our grasp of your word, which points us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit, lead us deeper into the promised land of rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, do you have such a big view of grace, God's grace, that we feel the problem that Paul is addressing in what Gareth read for us, that we need to be freed from God's law?

There's something jar in your head. Do you have such a big view of grace that we even understand the problem that Paul is addressing?

[4 : 20] He keeps making these radical, total, negative statements about the law.

And we've got to remember who Paul is. He is a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law of Pharisee, like the Torah was everything to this man at one point in his life.

It was his identity. It was his purpose for living. He saw everything revolving around it. We've got to remember who is saying these things. But now he says in Romans things like this.

Chapter 3, verse 20, Through the law comes knowledge of sin. Chapter 4, verse 15, The law brings wrath.

Chapter 5, verse 20, Talking about the period in time between Adam and Moses. The law came in to increase the trespass.

[5 : 21] Chapter 6, verse 14, Speaking to believers who are united to Jesus, Sin will have no power, no dominion over you, Since you are not under law, but under grace.

He's connecting law with being under the power of sin. And then as we heard last week, Chapter 7, verse 5, While we were living in the flesh, Our sinful passions aroused by the law.

We're at work in our members to bear fruit for death. What are you saying, Paul? How does your gospel align with Psalm 19?

The law of the Lord is perfect. The commandment of the Lord is pure. The rules of the Lord are true. By them is your servant warned. In keeping them there is great reward. But, Paul, You are saying that God's law, Given through Moses, Is sinful.

[6 : 27] As if it's opposed to God somehow. You are making God's law, Out to be a murderer. Bringing death. Paul's gut response, His instinctive response, Before he gives any explanation, Is just, By no means.

By no means. So, As we come to this, We need to ask ourselves, Do you have such a big view of grace, That you feel the weight of this problem?

How does that fit with God's law? How do you feel these negative view of the law? Paul has two purposes in this paragraph, That we're going to go through.

The first is to vindicate the law. The law is not the problem. And the second purpose is to demonstrate, All these negative claims he's been saying, He now demonstrates it.

The law cannot break the power of sin. In fact, The law brings sin to life. We need to understand this, So that we can grasp how wonderful the news is, That Jesus has freed us from the law.

[7 : 53] We need to understand this. To understand it, There's going to be a mirror put up, For all of us. Because Paul is going to, Invite us into his own soul.

Into his own mind. And that's going to, Make us, Look into our own soul. And it's not pretty. It is not pretty.

We do, We go to great lengths to avoid, Analyzing ourselves. But the more you look, The more, It will lead you, To God's super abounding grace.

You will end up singing in the end. But you've got to look. If you don't look, You will love Jesus less. We've got to look into this mirror.

Okay, Paul, Explain yourself. Why do you say such negative things, About God's law? And he uses the tenth commandment, The last of the ten commandments, You shall not covet, As a case study.

[9 : 08] Now why? Did he just pluck one out at random? Did Paul have a particular problem, With coveting? Maybe you've got a problem, With one of the others, But he's got a problem with this.

Well, We need to understand, What coveting is. I think the original commandment, The wording, The context, Kind of explains it. We grasp it pretty quickly.

Exodus 20, You shall not covet, Your neighbour's house. You shall not covet, Your neighbour's wife. Or his male servant, Or his female servant, Or his ox, Or his donkey, Or anything, That is your neighbour's.

So coveting is more than saying, That'd be really nice to have that. It's more than that attitude. Let me try and illustrate it, And myself, Like sometimes, Emma and I, We go for a walk, Around our neighbourhood, And I'm just looking around, Looking at the houses, As we walk by, And I look at someone's, Really well kept garden, And appreciate how beautiful it is.

And then I see this, Lovely car, In the driveway, And then my eye is drawn, To the next house, Which has this huge deck, This barbecue area, That's lovely.

[10 : 24] Now, Now, Please understand, There's nothing inherently wrong, With going, That is quality. That's beautiful. Nothing wrong with that. But something else can creep in.

This disquiet, In my heart, This, This discontentment, With my own lot, In life. This desire, To possess that, For myself.

Something else creeps in. Ruining the walk, By the way, Like, Now, Before we think, This is just a minor sin, Coveting can lead, To awful violence, Against our neighbour.

It led to King David's adultery, It led to Cain, Murdering his brother. James 4 tells us, What causes fights, And quarrels among you, In the church?

Coveting. Coveting. So what's changed, From admiring something as good, To needing to possess it?

[11 : 35] Something's changed. Two things I can see. The first is, It's not letting God be God. You could say, That person owns a lovely house, I don't own a house, But that's okay, The Lord knows best.

No, God doesn't know best. He is withholding life from me, I must change my lot in life. So I think the first thing that's going on is, You're not letting, We're not letting God be God.

I think the second thing that's going on is, We're looking horizontally, What will only be made to find, Vertically in God. It's believing that a created thing, Can give life, Joy, And peace in my soul. Does it remind you of anyone? Like apart from me, I've already confessed that, Does it remind you of anyone? I think in Paul's mind, We've got Adam and Eve, Very, Very, Behind the surface here. It's the essence of the original sin. Paul isn't picking the tenth commandment, At random. It's not random. Coveting is at the essence of sin.

[12:56] It's rebellion against God's authority, And it's idolatry. Looking in a created thing, For that wholeness in your heart, That you can only find in God.

It's rebellion, And it's idolatry. And so it actually, I think it actually bookends, The ten commandments. It's breaking those first two, In how we treat our neighbour. The other thing about the tenth commandment, And it's worth noting this, Is that, It's an internal attitude. So, The other commandments, About keep the Sabbath holy, Don't work. That's a behaviour. But you hit the tenth commandment, And suddenly, Don't covet. That's an internal attitude. You might be able to control, Not working on the Sabbath, But can you control, Your internal heart?

So as Paul uses the tenth commandment, As a case study, Because coveting is at the essence of sin, We need to hear this as the dynamic, Between sin and law, For all of God's law.

[14:04] So why does God's law increase sin, Rather than stop sin? He says, If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

God's law defines sin. In chapter 5, Verse 13, Paul has said, That before the law came through Moses, Sin and the consequences of sin, Were in the world since Adam.

So sin was in the world, But, In verse 13, It says, Sin is not counted, Where there is no law. That doesn't mean there's no sin.

There's sin, And the flood, God, in the time of Noah, Proves that. God treats people as sinners, Even if they don't have a written law. And, Go back and read Romans 1-3, To work out why. None of us live up, What we know is right. We've got, To some extent, All of us as image bearers, Have God's law written on our hearts. To some extent, We all have a conscience. But the word counted here, Has the idea of, In a ledger.

[15:15] It's not, You don't have a criminal record. It's not written down. Your sin, Sin isn't recorded as law breaking, Because you don't know the law. But then, A commandment comes in, And it increases, The seriousness of the wrongdoing.

The wrongdoing was there. But when the law comes in, It increases, How serious it is. Let me try and give an illustration. Okay, It's Tuesday afternoon. Your children are home from school, And your child is playing on their Nintendo Switch.

Alright, And you ask, You got any homework to do? Yes. Have you done it? No. Then comes the command, Turn that off, Finish your homework, And then you can play it.

You go, You bring in the washing, You come into the lounge room, And behold, Your sweet dear child, Is on that switch.

Now we all know what comes next. Wrath. Wrath. Now why does wrath come?

[16:29] Because that general, Vague wrongness, Is now crossing a clear line. They've transgressed a clear line.

And more than that, They are now rebelling against you, As the rightful authority. Sorry kids. Not sorry. Listen up kids. It's an act of rebellion.

And so wrath comes. Law increases sin. It shows the greatness of the offence. It turns it into transgression, And rebellion, Bringing more wrath.

Now we haven't come yet, To why the commandment brings death. Because defining, Educating us on what is right, And what is wrong, That would be a really wonderful thing, If we had the power to stop doing wrong, And delighted, In choosing to do the right.

We haven't come to the problem yet. And that brings us, To verses 8 to 11. The law arouses sin. It wakes sin up. How does it do that? To grasp, To grasp, More clearly, I think, What's going on here, There's lots of language of life and death.

[17:51] Sin is dead. The commandment comes, And it comes to life. I was alive. The commandment comes, And I die. There's lots of life and death going on here.

To understand what Paul is saying, It helps to know Paul's theology of the law as a Jew, And what his Jewish contemporaries thought the theology was.

And in case you're thinking that's going to be really complex, Paul quotes one verse. You want to understand the theology, Of Jewish theology? One verse.

It's Leviticus 18 verse 5. He quotes it, In Romans 10 and Galatians 3, In two very critical passages about salvation by faith.

This verse is almost as important as understanding Genesis 15, 6, That Abraham believed God, And it was counted to him as righteousness.

[18 : 50] This is a big verse in Paul's thinking. So Leviticus 18, 5. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes, My written laws, And my rules.

If a person does them, He shall live by them. I am the Lord. The law is about doing.

If a person does them. And life is the reward for doing. I think in the original context, Life would have been understood as the blessings of the covenant.

So I could live in the land under the blessings of the covenant. Later on in Jewish thinking, That life turned into eternal life. The law promises life.

The law promises life. But it depends on a person doing the law. If a person doesn't do them, They get covenant curse.

[19 : 51] Cut off. Exiled. Put to death. Out of the camp of God's people. It's all dependent on doing. You hear Leviticus 18, 5 in Jesus' words in Luke 10, In the introduction to the Good Samaritan parable.

You can have a look at that later. So the law promised life as a reward for doing. That's key here.

And I think it unlocks why Paul is using the language of life and death.

He's confronting that. Sin uses the law to launch an attack. It seizes the opportunity.

It uses that to launch an attack on us. To incite us to do more sin. You think law puts sin to death.

No. Apart from the law, sin lies dead.

Now that dead most likely has the meaning of powerless. It can only do so much. It's dormant. It can't be saying that sin doesn't exist.

[21 : 04] That would contradict the rest of Romans. It's lying dormant. But then the commandment comes and sin comes to life. Now, again, let's remember who's saying this.

This is the Apostle Paul, the spiritual giant, saying, sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

This is the Apostle saying all kinds of covetousness. Once I know what coveting is, sin creates covetous desires everywhere.

Emma and I went out for dinner. I can't even remember when it was. Monday? Anyway, a couple of days ago. We went out for dinner and we ordered our meals.

And as soon as they arrived, I wanted hers. Now, once I understood what coveting is, I wasn't thankful to God. Thank you so much, God, for my meal.

[22 : 11] I was coveting hers. Now I know what coveting is. I can covet someone's health and their fitness. I can covet someone's intelligence and their knowledge.

I can covet someone's charisma, their discipline. I can covet someone's spiritual gifts that they're using in the church. I can covet another church that's flourishing. Once you know what coveting is, it's everywhere.

It's every waking moment. The law promises life to those who do not covet, but sin uses it to show me, just to awaken sin, and I'm transgressing left, right, and center.

St. Augustine, in his really famous book, The Confessions, the whole book is a prayer, really.

He's reflecting on this one time as a youth. He and some other kids, they stole some pears, some pears from an orchard. And he was reflecting on why he did that.

[23 : 21] What was his motivation in doing that? Because he wasn't hungry. He didn't steal the pear because it would be pleasurable to eat, because they threw the pears away. And then he reflects, they wouldn't have done it if they were allowed to.

He concludes, he stole the pear for the pleasure of knowing it was wrong. And he's just like, whoa, what is that in me?

The rule created in him a desire to break it, to be the one who makes the rules. I think people designing diets understand this principle.

You tell yourself you can't have chocolate and dessert, and you turn up at Bible study. Does that eradicate the desire to dig in? It does not remove the desire.

I don't know what you've found. It increases the desire. I'm distracted, the whole Bible study. I want to eat that. Sin deceives me.

[24 : 34] Thinking I could do the law and get life and blessing as a reward, sin used what promised life to murder me by increasing my transgression. Sin deceives me.

So how could Paul say as a Jew he was once apart from the law? This has led some, there's debate as to who the I is in this passage, so you can go away and read about that.

But this has led some to think he's talking about Adam in the garden, because surely only Adam was fully alive apart from the law. But then I think that creates huge problems, because then it makes out that Adam has a sinful nature, which is not true.

Not before the fall. Others conclude this is talking about, he's talking about Israel as a whole. Anyway, you can go read about that.

But I don't see why this can't be true of Paul himself. But there was a time in his life where he thought he was deserving of life and blessing from God based on what he did.

[25 : 44] Now maybe that was when he was a child, and he didn't fully understand his moral obligations until he became an adult. Maybe, I think it's possible even as a Pharisee, he thought he was blameless, but the Tenth Commandment just kept nagging.

I think that's possible, that everyone else thought he was blameless, but this internal command of don't covet, maybe he was very aware of that. I think that's possible.

I heard someone else have this theory, that the Spirit was convicting him just before the Damascus Road. So you've got Stephen, the stoning of Stephen.

And Paul, he prided himself on advancing beyond his peers. And then Stephen, with his wisdom, no one can refute him. And what ends up happening?

Paul is approving of his death. So maybe he was being convicted just before his conversion, or maybe after his conversion, I thought my righteousness was based on the law.

[26 : 51] And then the Spirit brings that conviction. I think any of these are possible. Whatever the case, before the commandment came, he once thought he was deserving of God's blessing, based on what he did.

The commandment came, and he got deeper conviction of his sin, his transgression, and he knows, I deserve wrath, not life, curse.

The law doesn't break the power of sin. It increases it. It awakens it.

So we come to Paul's two conclusions in verse 12 and 13. He returns to that objection.

Paul, you're making the law to be evil. No. Verse 12, no. The law isn't the cause. It's just the circumstance. It's not the cause. The Mosaic law is holy.

[27 : 57] It is from God. It is pure. The commandment, you shall not covet, that is holy. It is from God. It is pure.

It is righteous. It represents God's righteous character. It is good. It results in life. Like, imagine if everyone in the world just stopped coveting. Wars would stop.

Marriages would thrive. Churches would be unified. It would bring life. It is good. The law in promising life for those who do it is not the problem.

It's not the problem. So that leads us to the second conclusion in verse 13. Did that which is good then bring death to me?

Did the law bring death? No, no, no. It's sin. Sin producing death in me through what is good in order that sin might be shown to be sin and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

[29 : 06] Exceedingly sinful. If you see yourself as just a bit selfish here and there but otherwise good, the law teaches us otherwise.

If you blame external influences for turning a person bad, like something that happened in their childhood or whatever, if that is your total explanation for why someone turns bad, the law actually disagrees with you.

There's something internal that's the problem. If you think people are basically selfish and that only if people understood God's law and took it seriously, that would solve the problem.

That's not true. Sin is more powerful. It will take God's law and make more sin, increase the sin. Any of these assessments would be deceiving ourselves as to the power of sin in human nature, handed down since Adam.

[30 : 26] Like think about it. If not even God's law can restrain your sin but provoke you to more sin, wow, wow, wow, sin is an enemy that is so strong in us.

The law shows me the terrible grip that sin has over me. It should lead me to feel utterly helpless in saving myself.

The law isn't sinful but it is weak. It doesn't have the power to break sin, the power of sin.

Romans 8 verse 3, God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son. God's law can't break the power of sin.

I want to keep repeating that. He can only show us how utterly sinful sin is. It is so powerful. I'd like to go back to the original objection that in chapter 6 verse 15, what then?

[31 : 52] Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? In that objection there is a really wrong view of God's purpose of the law, why he gave it.

And if you've got a wrong view of God's purpose in giving the law, it's going to lead you to a very superficial understanding of sin and a very cheap and superficial understanding of grace.

God's purpose in giving the law. The wrong view of God's purpose for the law is that the written code gives you power to stop sinning and choose what is right.

God never gave the law to give you power to conquer sin. Otherwise Christ died for nothing.

Galatians tells us. Chapter 5 verse 20 has already said, the law came in to increase the trespass.

We've got to get rid of any idea that God gave his law to provide a way to do what is right and pleasing to him. Because it's not just a wrong view of law in the end, it's a wrong view of God.

[33 : 04] As if he is the kind of God who needs you to earn his blessing. And this wrong view of God's purpose for the law leads to a superficial view of sin, I think.

If you think a written code can conquer sin. It's not that we all have certain vices. Someone struggles with pride. Another with lust. Another with gambling.

It's not that we all have vices here and there. Do you see what's in the mirror? Sin is so strong. It is an enemy. We've got to get rid of any idea that the written code has the power to break your sin.

It leads to this superficial definition of sin. Sin is a powerful enemy in me. Because that ends up leading to a cheap and superficial view of grace.

You will think that grace is only forgiveness for the occasional times that you get it wrong. God's law was given to us to teach us how exceedingly sinful sin is.

[34 : 20] To show me I don't only need occasional mercy. I need someone to deliver me. To deliver me from me. We need deliverance from a strong enemy.

Not just the occasional mercy. It leads to a shallow view of grace. If we have a wrong understanding of God's purpose for the law.

So should we avoid God's law altogether? It's just negative thinking to focus on the law. Some Christians seem to do that. Some churches seem to do that. And sometimes in the name of living by the Spirit.

If you don't let God's law be a mirror to you. To reveal the depths of the power of sin over your human nature. It leads to, like I've tried to show, it leads to a very shallow view of grace.

You can't delight in grace as we should. God's purpose is to cause us to come to Paul's conclusion in verse 24 of chapter 7.

[35 : 32] Wretched man that I am. Wretched man that I am. In my Adam-like nature. Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. This is why it's such good news that in the death of Jesus you have been freed from the written code.

Because the written code arouses your sin. It's such good news. You're free from that. That we now have a new husband. Who renews us from the inside out.

By his Spirit. Who, as Tim Keller talks about, delivers us from a battle with sin we could not win. Sin is too strong. Into a battle we can't lose.

Because we're under grace. Forgiveness is empowering. He's changing. Hope of the resurrection. When sin will be gone. I like how John Piper puts it.

[36 : 46] Belonging to our new husband. This is no belonging to Jesus. This is no external slate of duties. This is a spiritual union. With an all glorious.

All providing. All satisfying. Ever living person. Ever living person. More real than the person sitting next to you.

Our new husband. Can provide us with all we need. And I think looking to our new husband.

In the Lord Jesus. Leads us to another totally positive. Purpose of God giving the law. It's been very negative purpose of the law.

Paul is totally negative about the law. If you rely on doing it. For God to bless you. He is totally negative. You have died to that.

[37 : 43] But he's totally positive. About the law. If you see it. It's pointing to Christ. In what many find to be the greatest paragraph in the Bible.

In chapter 3. How is that introduced? Chapter 3 verse 21. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested. Apart from the law. Apart from doing the law to earn God's blessing. It does not lead to righteousness. Only more sin. Although. The law. And the prophets bear witness to it. This new righteousness.

The righteousness of God through faith. In Jesus Christ for all who believe. Chapter 10. He says Christ is the goal. That the law was always pointing towards.

If you look to Christ. As your new husband. Not rule keeping. It leads you to a positive purpose. In giving to the law as well.

[38 : 45] It leads you to a positive purpose. It leads you to a positive purpose. It leads you to a positive purpose. It leads you to a positive purpose. It leads you to a positive purpose. So let me finish by urging us. Don't fight sin.

By trying to do the law. It cannot break the power of sin. It will arouse more sin.

If you try and do. You know that God has released you from the law through the death of his son. Totally.

And look to your new husband. To give you. To do for you. All that you need.

Because. God has never been a God. Who needs you to earn his favour. He's never been like that. He isn't today. He never will be. He's always been a God.

[39 : 46] Who loves to give life as a free gift. Through his son. Don't fight sin. By trying to do the law. Look. Look to Christ.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Lord thank you for. Putting up. The mirror of your law.

Your righteous character. In your law. So that we can see just. How unrighteous we are. Lord thank you.

Thank you. Because. That leads us to despair of ourselves. And to. Look for life in the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we come to you. Our.

Our loving husband. Who only gives us grace. We find that you have so much life to give. So Lord I pray that you would convince. All of our hearts.

[40 : 46] To stop. Trying to do. Start. And just keep looking to your son. And what he has done. And what he can do. And what he will do.

For us. In Jesus name. Amen. God bless you.

Thank you.