

What about the Law?

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, and can I add a welcome to Mark's welcome. It's great you could join us for 5pm Church online tonight. And well done to Brendan and Rianna for reading those passages for us.

How about we pray and then we'll get into God's Word together. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you that you continue to speak to us through your Word, by your Spirit. Please help us, we pray, to unpack this packed full passage.

But more than that, to live in light of our understanding. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we have some friends who have four sons, and the eldest son is a boy called Ben.

And some time ago, he introduced a new law into their family. And the law, well, let me show you the father's Facebook comment on your screens. So the father wrote on Facebook, our number one son has started saying his brothers must refer to him as boss.

Two of them are complying. So I've been hearing, yes boss and no boss around the house. He also wrote no and go away on the palm of each of his hands, so he can just hold them up when he doesn't want to be bothered by them.

[1 : 17] It puts a new spin on talk to the hand, doesn't it? But not all Ben's brothers obeyed this law, and much to Ben's disappointment, neither do his parents.

Now, laws help us live rightly in society. Perhaps not Ben's laws, but laws generally. And God gave us laws to help his people live rightly as Christians too.

But for the Jews, it became a way to earn righteousness or a right standing with God. To earn God's blessing or what we might call eternal life.

Now, if someone obeyed God's law perfectly, then yes, they would earn eternal life. The problem is, though, no one can. You see, the problem with the law is, well, us.

Like Ben's brothers, we disobey God's laws. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, which is a non-Jew, we cannot keep God's law perfectly.

[2 : 25] Which is why I love Christianity. Because Christianity says we don't have to be perfect. Every other religion in the world, without exception, will say we have to do certain good works or obey certain religious laws to earn our way to heaven or whatever their equivalent is.

But God always knew we'd never be good enough. It's why he even saved Israel by grace. That's why it comes at the very beginning of the Ten Commandments.

A reminder that he brought them out of Israel. Sorry, out of Egypt to be his people. See, God always had another way to receive eternal life. Apart from having to keep the law perfectly.

And it's now being made known this other way through Jesus. We've seen this earlier in Romans. So on your screens, let me see if I can recap. We read, No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law.

No one. But now, apart from the law, here's this other way, the righteousness of God has been made known. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

[3 : 46] For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace.

You see, if we believe in Jesus who died and rose again, God gives us righteousness. He makes us right with him.

He justifies us. And so now we can have eternal life despite not being good enough. Because it's now not about earning it based on what we do.

It's about receiving it based on what Jesus has done. And you notice on your screens there, the last phrase, we are justified freely by his grace.

See, being made right with God is a gift, a generous gift. Last week, actually, I received a gift from someone in our church.

[4 : 49] It was a \$100 voucher, which was very generous. But how much more so is eternal life generous of God?

I mean, people spend millions of dollars every year trying to live longer, look younger, whether it's spent on medical or cosmetic or whatever it is.

God gives us life eternal for free, spiritually now and physically later, forever young in a new creation with God in glory.

What a gift. What grace. That's why Paul said to us or reminded us last week on your screens, as Christians, we are no longer under law, but under this grace.

Now, why am I telling you all this? Well, because this was hard for the Jews to hear. You see, they grew up with God's law. They were taught to rightly love God's law.

[5 : 52] It's all they knew. In fact, I grew up eating meat and three veg. It's all I knew. Perhaps the equivalent for you is rice or some other food.

In fact, for me, I was 21 years old before I had my very first curry. 21. And it rocked my world. So Paul now telling the Jews that they're no longer under law would have rocked their world because the law was all they knew.

And so that's why Paul writes chapter seven tonight to explain the place of the law. And he begins by explaining point one that they've been set free from the law.

So have a look at verse one in your Bibles. Verse one. Do you not know, brothers and sisters, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

Notice here, the law, I should say, refers to God's law given through Moses. It also includes the first five books of the Bible. And Paul, do you notice, he says he's writing to those who know God's law.

[7 : 10] That's the Jews in particular. But he says the law only has authority over them while they're alive. And to explain, he uses an example. Verse two. For example, by law, a married woman is bound to a husband as long as he is alive.

But if a husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then if she has sexual relations with another man, while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress.

But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress. If she marries another man. You see what he's saying?

In marriage, you're bound to your spouse by law. Now, while divorce frees you, God's design in marriage was till death do us part.

And so if I die, then my wife, Michelle, is then free from the law of marriage, free to marry another person, to belong to them.

[8 : 12] Well, when we became Christians, we died with Christ to the law. And so we're now free from it to belong to another. Have a look at verse four. He says, so my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

As we saw last week, when we became Christians, we were united with Christ, such that his death counts as our death. I won't go over it all now, tonight.

If you missed last week, then you can go back to the website and hear how that works there. But this is how Christians, including Jewish Christians, have been freed from the law, by dying with Christ.

What's more, by dying with Christ, we now live in a different state, where we serve God, not by trying to keep the law, but by the spirit.

Have a look at verse five to six. For when we were in the realm of the flesh, or sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.

[9 : 35] But now by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

These two verses describe two realms, or states to live in, and everyone lives in one or the other, whether they realize it or not. There's the state of the sinful nature, or the flesh, versus the state of the Holy Spirit.

So here's on your screens, a picture of Sydney, New South Wales, with all its air pollution. We'll call New South Wales, the state of the sinful nature.

I can say this because I'm from New South Wales, and they recently shut the borders, when I tried to go up and visit family, so I'm not very happy with them at the moment. And like we heard last week, in this realm of the sinful nature, sin is the boss.

And we are sin slaves. So the next slide there. Who serve sin, and try and serve by the law, but only end up breaking it, which causes our death.

[10:50] And so this state is not a nice one to live in, is it? You can see why I came to Melbourne. But on the next slide, here is sunny Melbourne, perhaps like yesterday.

It's not quite the harbour bridge, in the distant background there, but you know, stay with me. We'll call this state, on the next slide, the realm of the Holy Spirit.

And in this realm, on the next slide, God is the premier, the boss, the real premier of Victoria. And we are God's slaves, who serve by the Spirit, saved by Jesus, and therefore have life.

This is a much nicer state to live in, maybe not with the lockdown at the moment, but as I said, stay with me. The problem though, is we were all born into New South Wales.

As we saw in chapter 5, because of Adam, we're all natural born sinners, born into the state of the sinful nature, born to serve sin, break the law, and die.

[11:56] What's more, to move states is expensive. God's law says it costs much more, than just a permit, to cross the border. It actually costs you, your life.

But because we're united to Christ, and when he gave his life at the cross, it's as though we gave our life. His death counts as our death.

And so the payment has been made. We can cross the border, by believing in Jesus. And so for us, who believe in Jesus, us Christians, Paul is saying, we're no longer, we no longer live in the state of New South Wales, with sin, law, and death.

We've been free to live in Victoria, where we serve God, by the new way of the Spirit, and have life eternal. Now Paul will unpack verse 6, and living by the Spirit next week, in chapter 8, but the point is, by dying with Christ, we've been freed, from having to keep the written code, of the law.

And we live in a completely new state, where we serve God, by the Spirit. And so that's why, we're no longer under law, but under grace.

[13:11] But hang on a second, Paul, does that mean, the law is now bad? I mean, if you've lumped it with sin, and death, I mean, it sounds like, it's in the baddie group, New South Wales.

Well, Paul anticipates this question, and in fact, he therefore asks it. Have a look at point 2 on your screens, and verse 7 in your Bibles. He says, what shall we say then?

Is the law sinful? Certainly not. Nevertheless, I would not have known, what sin was, had it not been for the law. For I would have not known, what coveting really was, if the law, had not said, you shall not covet.

Is the law sinful? Certainly not, says Paul. But it does show us, what sin is. So before we would have envied, or coveted things, yet we may not have realised, what it was, that it was sin, that we were doing.

But now there is a law, that says, do not covet. We heard that in the first reading. We all now know, it is sinful. It is wrong. You see, the law is helpful and good, because it shows us, what is right, and wrong.

[14:31] What is good, and sinful. But it also shows us, just how sinful we are. For it wakes up, our sinful nature, in us.

Have a look at verse 8 to 9. It says, But sin, seizing the opportunity, afforded by the commandment, produced in me, every kind of coveting.

For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive, apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died.

Paul says, sin was once, not very active. It was a bit like, a couch potato. It was hanging around, kind of, not doing much. We heard in chapter 5, that sin was in the world, from the time of Adam, before the law, came through Moses.

It just wasn't, all that active. But when the law, came through Moses, well, it's as though sin, leapt off the couch, it sprang to life, and into action.

[15:38] It's as though sin said, oh goody, look at all these new laws, that I can break. And in so doing, it shows, just how sinful, humanity is.

And we kind of know, this experience, in our own life, don't we? We may have thought, we're not that sinful, we're pretty good, kind of people. In fact, I've had people say that to me, about

themselves.

But when a law comes, it's as though the sin inside us, springs to life, and shows us, just how sinful we are. I was driving down a road, built near some houses, and there was this intriguing sign, at the start of the road, that said, quiet please, do not honk horn.

Now, it never occurred to me, to honk my horn, as I drove down that road. But as soon as I saw that sign, as soon as I saw that law, what did I want to do?

Every bit of me, wanted to honk that horn, as loud as possible. It's as though the law came, and the sinful nature, sprang to life in me. Or it's like when you see that sign, wet paint, don't touch.

[16:49] What do you want to do? You want to touch the paint. You never would have thought of touching the paint before, but when the law came, the sign came, the sin in us, springs to life, and pulls us, to be sinful, you see.

That's why, one person wrote on your screens, this sign, about wet paint, don't touch. And then they added, I don't know if you can see it, in the small print, I know how when people see, don't touch signs, they want to touch.

It's Romans 7, they're talking about. And so to get around it, they just tried to place some extra paint, that people could touch instead. Well, Jesus is a much better solution.

He gives us the spirit, to help us obey. But you see, the point is, the law wakes sin up inside us, like a red rag to a bull.

As I said last week, we may have been set free, from the payment, and power of sin, but not yet, its presence. So when sin sees a law, it springs to life, and pulls us to break it.

[17:54] And in so doing, it shows us, just how sinful we are. And worst of all, the consequence, then, is death.

See verse 10? I found that the very commandment, that was intended to bring life, actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity, to break a law, which came by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment, put me to death.

So then the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. You see what Paul is saying? The law is good, it's not sinful.

It just, it shows us what is right and wrong, what is good and sinful, which is why, it's still worth reading, the Ten Commandments, God's laws, and so on, by the way.

Even though, we don't have to obey, these Old Testament laws, to get right with God, they still show us, how to please Him, how to love God, and our neighbor, that the law is still good.

[19:05] In fact, if we could have obeyed it perfectly, it would have given us, life eternal, it says there. But, we can't, and instead, sin uses the law, to make us, law breakers, and then condemns us, to death.

Death, both death in this life, and eternal death, or judgment in the next. So, this then leads, to another question, which is point three, on your screens.

So, did the law, then cause our death? Have a look at verse 13. Did that which is good, the law, then become death, to me?

By no means. Nevertheless, in order that sin, might be recognized as sin, it was, it used what is good, to bring about my death, so that through the commandments, sin might become, utterly, sinful.

Paul is clarifying, what he's already said, actually. It's not the law, that causes our death, it's sin, that pulls us, to break the law, and then says, we're deserving of death.

[20:24] One of the popular, tourist destinations, in Ireland, are the cliffs of Moer. I'm not sure, if I'm pronouncing that correctly, but you can see a picture, of it on your screens. And at the top of the cliffs, there is a sign, that's still there today, on the next slide.

Here is the law, please do not go, beyond this point. It's a polite law, it begins with the word, please. You've gone back, thanks guys. So, it's a polite law, and it's there, to stop people, falling off the cliffs.

It's there to bring life, if you like. But if we take a step back, on the next slide, look at the picture, look who's gone beyond, the point of the sign.

Loads of people, have ignored the sign. Everyone's disobeying the law. You see, their sinful nature, sprang to life, and caused them, to disobey.

In fact, one tourist says, on the next slide, here she is with a picture, and she says, down the bottom, there's a sign, that says danger, don't go beyond this point. And so, naturally, we ignored it.

[21 : 30] Climbed over the rock wall, and continued walking. Naturally, that's our human nature, you see, that springs to life. And because of this, people have died.

In fact, on the next slide, is a man, who was visiting from India, just last year, and he fell off the cliff, while trying to take a selfie, and died.

Now, here's the question for us. Was his death, the sign's fault? The law's fault? Of course not. This sign, or law, did not cause him to die. It was the sinful nature, that disobeyed the law, that caused him to die.

Do you see? What Paul is saying, is the law, has not become a source, of death for us. Rather, it's sin, that has caused our death. Sin is to blame.

[22 : 29] And in causing our death, sin is shown, to be utterly bad, utterly sinful. But the problem for us, is that sin, keeps winning.

Have a look at verses 14 to 23, I'm going to read this chunk, and as I read, notice who keeps winning. I told you the answer, but anyway, have a verse 14. We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave, to sin.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that the good itself, does not dwell in me, that is in my sinful nature.

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, well, this I keep doing.

[23 : 40] Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work. Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

Now, it's very wordy, and Rihanna did very well when she read it for us before. But do you notice in these verses that sin wins every time?

You know, he wants to do good, but doesn't. He doesn't want to do evil, but does do it. Sin gets him both ways. His sin keeps winning.

Now, some people think Paul is speaking of a Christian. He's speaking as a Christian person here. After all, this is a struggle that sounds familiar to us, doesn't it? Have you ever found yourself, I don't know, wanting to read the Bible every day, but then you don't do it every day?

[24 : 48] Or on the flip side, have you ever found yourself wanting to not do the sin of gossip or swearing anymore, but then you do do it, you kind of keep doing it? It's an experience we can relate to, isn't it?

And so it might sound like Paul is speaking as a Christian in these verses, one who battles with sin's presence. And he certainly speaks like this elsewhere in the Bible.

But I think he's actually talking about his experience as a non-Christian Jew. You see, it's particularly the Jews he has to convince about the gospel. And in verse two, he's writing to those who know the law, Jews.

Or verse 22, he says he delights in God's law. That's also a Jew. They grew up with it, loving it. But in verse 23, on the flip side, he says he's a prisoner of the law of sin.

That's a non-Christian. Or back in verse 14, he calls himself a slave to sin. That's also a non-Christian. I mean, we only heard just last week, Romans chapter six, that we have been set free from slavery to sin.

[26 : 03] So Paul seems to be talking about a non-Christian Jew. And I think that fits with his summary verse at the end of the chapter, in verse 25, where he still says he's a slave to God's law.

He delights in it. He wants to obey it, as every good Jew does. But yet, he's also still a slave to the law of sin. Someone who always breaks the law, as every non-Christian always does.

But either way, and there's a lot of debate about these particular verses, either way, Paul's main point is, the law is good.

It's sin that causes us to break it and condemn us to death. Which brings us, on your screens, to our final point, point four, Paul's conclusion, and two cries.

Look at the first cry in verse 24. He says, what a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

[27 : 09] Can you hear his heartache? He longs to keep God's law, but in the end, the law simply shows how sinful and wretched he is, and how he is condemned to death because of it.

His body will die, and after that, he will face judgment of eternal death. But then comes verse 25, which should start with the word, but, and listen to his joy, verse 25, but thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

You see, it is through Jesus and not the law that God delivers us from slavery to sin and death. It's through Jesus we can move from New South Wales to Victoria, from sin, law, and death to God, spirit, and life.

It's through Jesus that Paul can exclaim in chapter 8, verse 1, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

I won't steal any more of Mark's thunder for next week than that, but for us this week, the first question on your screens is, where are you living?

[28 : 28] New South Wales or Victoria? The state of sin, law, and death, or God, spirit, and life? If it's New South Wales and you want to move, remember the permit, believe in Jesus who died for you.

that's the way to cross state lines and receive God's gift of eternal life. That's the way from moving from being the wretched person of verse 24 to the delivered person of verse 25, believing in Jesus. And so do you. And for us who do, then the next application on the screen is where to remember God's law is good, that it's still worth reading, just like it's still worth eating meat and free veg or rice, even though we're free to eat all sorts of other food.

For God's law helps us to know what's right and wrong, what's good and sinful. It helps us to know how to love God and our neighbour, whether it's by not taking God's name in vain or not giving false testimony, lying about our neighbour and so on.

Yes, the reading of the Old Testament takes more effort and sometimes it's really hard to work out what applies and what doesn't. But let me tell you, this part of Romans is no walk in the park either.

[29 : 56] But if we want to please God in response to his grace, then the law can help show us how. So it's still worth reading.

And secondly, for us who believe, we're to keep being thankful. Remember, we were once like the person of verse 24, a wretched person, whether we were a non-Christian Jew or a non-Christian Gentile.

For no matter how hard we try to do good deeds or keep God's law, we keep breaking it. So we cannot earn our way into life, but instead are rightly condemned to death.

But now there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Now we are the person of verse 25, a delivered person, rescued.

And so with the person of verse 25, we need to keep saying, thanks be to God. I realize, though, we're so used to hearing about what God has done for us in Jesus, we can often take it for granted, can't we, instead of being thankful.

[31 : 09] We can be like kids who complain about what they don't have and forget everything they do have. And not my kids, of course, they never do that. But we're not to forget all God has done for us through Christ Jesus.

We're to keep thanking him for it. On your screens is John Newton, who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, along with many others. And at age 82, he said this famous quote, My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great saviour.

You've probably heard that quote before, but it's a great one, isn't it? Here is a man at the end of his life who still was thankful to God, for he remembered that he was a great sinner and yet he had a great saviour who delivers him from death for life, a spiritual life now and physical life later in the new creation.

I remember having dinner one time and the person who said grace before eating was a man who'd been a Christian for many years and not quite 82 years like John Newton. But I remember him saying grace a very simple prayer and he said this, he said, thank you for this food, our gracious God, but thank you most of all for the forgiveness of our sins through your son.

In his name we pray. Simple prayer, but his sincerity shone through and it showed me that he was still thankful, even though he'd been a Christian for years and years, he was still thankful to God for Christ.

[32 : 53] So the next time you say grace before dinner, whether you're eating meat and three veg or rice or some other food, I think I saw Steph eating a donut before, whatever it is, why not add that to your prayer of grace, thanking God for Christ.

In fact, why don't we start now on your screens as a prayer. Let's pray this prayer together. Thanks be to you, our gracious God who has delivered me through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.