

The Law of God

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[0 : 00] Thank you for your word and we pray now that you would help us to understand it and as I prayed earlier that you not only understand it but live to rejoice in it and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please take a seat. I'm going to be following along the insert so it'd be great to have that handy. There's also an outline in there as well that you might find helpful.

I thought I'd just start with a bit of a story. There was once a man who became a Buddhist monk. As part of his initiation he was taken to an upstairs room which had a chair, a table and on the table there was some bread and water and the only other thing in the room was a window which was high above his head. Now the monks left him there to meditate with only one rule and this was the rule, don't look out the window. Now as the story goes the more the monk tried to meditate the more all he could think about was looking out that window and when he could bear it no longer he took the chair, climbed on it and looked out the window to the courtyard below and what did he see?

He saw the rest of the monks gathered laughing back at him. You see they were all timing him to see how long he would last. You see this is the problem with all laws. The problem with all laws is human nature.

As the story goes the other monks knew what human nature is like. They knew that a law like don't look out the window would show this young monk how sinful his nature was and so how much he needed to meditate to overcome it. Of course we know that meditation is not the solution, the gospel is the solution. That's what the book of Romans is all about, the gospel of Jesus. For in the gospel we are actually set free from the law altogether. And so please follow along with me, we're at point one verse one. Paul writes, 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.

[1 : 56] Now the law here refers to God's law in the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments and so on. And Paul says he is writing to those who know God's law, that is to the Jews particularly. They're the ones who particularly knew God's law.

They knew it off by heart. They loved God's law. The only problem was they couldn't keep God's law, not perfectly. Of course the same is true for us who are not Jews. And we can't keep God's law either.

But says Paul, the law only has authority over you while you're still alive. And then he gives an example to illustrate. Verse two, he says, For an example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive.

But if her husband dies, she's 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. See Paul's point here? He says death frees you from the law.

[2 : 58] And this example, he says, It's the death of your spouse that frees you from the law of marriage. Yes, divorce also frees us. But God's design for marriage was, remember the wedding vows?

Till death do us part. So as I said, Paul's point here is death frees us from the law. Not that he's calling marriage something he want to get free from.

But anyway, we'll move on from that. But how have we died to the law? Well, verse 4. He says, See, Paul is saying that we too have died to the law through Christ or with Christ.

It's like what we saw last week when Paul spoke about being united with Christ. And I use that illustration about when Michelle and I were married. The moment we were married, the minister said, I now pronounce you husband and wife.

We were united as one. And so what was hers became mine. And I was hoping for that healthy bank balance that she had would become mine. But it didn't happen. The same thing here. Okay.

[4 : 11] When we become Christians, we are united with Christ. We become one. And so we get to share in all his privileges as God's son. His inheritance. His rule.

In fact, we will even judge the world with him, says the Bible. 1 Corinthians 6. But it also means we will not only share in his privileges, we will also share in his achievements, like his death and resurrection.

As Paul says in verse 4, We died through him. We died through him. And we are also raised with him, though our resurrection is only a spiritual one at the moment.

The physical one will come later. But the point is, because we are united with Christ, then we have died to the law with him. And so we are free from belonging to the law and now free to belong to another, to Jesus, and to so serve God.

Now, this is important because verse 5 says, For, or because, When we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.

[5 : 20] You see, when we lived in the realm of the sinful flesh, or the sinful nature, our sinful nature saw the law and broke it. We couldn't help ourselves, like the monk couldn't help himself looking out that window.

That was sin's power over us. We couldn't help but live to please ourselves instead of pleasing God. In fact, before we were Christians, we didn't even think about pleasing God.

And the law says the penalty for living this way is death. As verse 5 says, We bore fruit for death. You know, we deserve death. But then comes verse 6.

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.

See what Paul's saying? By dying with Christ, the penalty has been paid, and so we are now free from the law and its demand for our death. No longer do we have to serve the law and try and earn eternal life by obeying the law and doing good things and so on and so on.

[6 : 24] In fact, and I'm going to be a little bit controversial here, we're not even bound to the Ten Commandments. I know that would be controversial. We don't have to obey the Ten Commandments to earn our way to heaven.

We should want to obey the Ten Commandments because we now have new life, but we're not bound to them. We have been set free from the law, serving the law in order to earn eternal life.

Rather, we now serve according to the Spirit, the Spirit who has already given us life through Jesus. And in the end, verse 5 and 6 are really describing two realms of life, and everyone lives in one of these realms.

It is the realm of the sinful flesh versus the realm of the Holy Spirit. You know, they live according to the flesh and the law and so on, or according to the Spirit. So, for example, here's a picture of Sydney on a polluted day in Sydney, and let's call Sydney the realm of the sinful flesh.

Okay, I can say that about Sydney because I come from Sydney. I can bag it out. Okay, so this is the realm of sinful flesh, and sin is the boss, as we heard last week.

[7 : 33] And sin uses the law to condemn everyone to death. And because of Adam, we are all born into this realm. This is where we all once lived. But here we have a picture of Melbourne.

Oh, sunny Melbourne. And this is the realm of the Holy Spirit. Okay? And in this realm, God is the boss, and Jesus is his servant through whom we have been given eternal life.

Now, to get from the realm of Sydney to the realm of Melbourne is expensive. The law says the payment, or the cost, is death. But because we are united to Christ in his death, then the payment has been paid.

So no longer do we have to serve in the old realm where there was sin, law, and death. Rather, we now live and serve in the new realm, God, Jesus, Spirit. We have life now.

That's what Paul is talking about in verses 5 and 6. And in the verses of chapter 7, Paul will unpack verse 5. And in the beginning of chapter 8, he will unpack verse 6.

[8 : 36] But the point here is that because we have been united to Christ, we have died to the old realm of sin, law, and death, and now belong to this new realm of the Spirit, God, and life, and Jesus, and grace.

All the good things are in the new realm. But then this makes the law sound pretty bad, doesn't it? If the law belongs to the old realm with its sin and death, it makes the law sound particularly bad, particularly for a Jew who loved God's law.

And so one might ask, well, is the law sinful then? Point to verse 7. 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 not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, you shall not covet.

So Paul asks, is the law sinful? Certainly not, he says. But it does show us what sin is. Before we would have naturally coveted things, envied things.

[9 : 38] But now there is a law that says do not covet. And so now we know it's wrong. It shows us what sin is, you see. I remember the first time I voted in a federal election.

I had things to do that day. And so I thought I'd just skip it. You know, I couldn't be bothered voting. Very typical apathetic teenager. And so I came home later that afternoon and my parents asked me, have you voted yet?

I said, no, I couldn't be bothered. They said, do you know it's against the law? No. Do you know you can be fined? No. So I ran back out the door and went and voted. You see, the law taught me that what I was about to do was wrong.

It showed me what sin is, you see. That's the first thing the law does. But Paul is actually saying something more than that here. He's saying it not only shows us what sin is, it shows us how bad sin is.

Verse 8. Paul says here that once sin was dead.

[10 : 46] He doesn't mean completely inactive because we know from the time of Adam, before the law was given in Moses, there was still sin. Sin was still alive and well.

It's just it wasn't really active. But when the law came, it's as if sin really sprang to life, he said. It's as though sin said, goody, look at all these laws I can now break.

Here's a chance to be really sinful. It's kind of like that. You see, the law gives sin a chance to really come to life, to show its true colours, as it were, to be utterly sinful, as Paul will say in verse 13.

And we know this in our own life, don't we? We have thought before, I'm sure, that we are not that bad. I've had people come up to say, oh, I'm not that bad a person. I'm not that sinful a person. I've had people say that to me.

But when the law comes, it's as though sin springs to life inside us and shows us just how sinful we really are. Now I want to try a little experiment. In a moment, not yet.

[11 : 45] In a moment, I'm going to put up a slide on the screen. Not yet. But when the slide comes up, here's the law. Here's the rule. Don't look. Here we go. Put the slide up.

I can hear a few people laughing. They've looked. You can look now. Now the moment I said, don't look, what was the first thing you wanted to do?

Look. Yeah. It's kind of like the sign, don't touch wet paint. First thing you want to do? Okay. When the law comes, sin springs to life inside us, you see. And it convicts us as a law breaker.

That's what the law does. Paul says, the law brings sin out. It's as though when the law comes, sin rears its ugly head and shows us just how sinful we really are.

He's saying, you thought sin was bad at the start with? Well, let's add some laws and watch how sin will seek to break every single one of them. And then you'll see how sinful sin really is.

[12 : 50] And what's worse, we then have to suffer the consequence of death. See verse 9 again? Verse 9. Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin seizing the opportunity afforded 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. See, Paul is saying the law is good. It was given for our good, in fact. This is what we heard from our first reading from Deuteronomy chapter 5.

God gave the 10 commandments and in the reading that we heard, we were told that they were given so that it might go well for the people, that they might live a long life in the land.

In other words, the law was there to bring life. You see, the law is good since God gave it and it was given for our good to bring life. But then sin exploited the law.

[13 : 52] It used or rather misused it as an opportunity to make us sin and become guilty. And now that we are guilty, well, the law has no choice but to sentence us to death. For as we heard just last week, the wages of sin is death.

And so this naturally leads to Paul's next question in verse 13. Did the law cause our death? Point three, 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 used what is good to bring about my death so that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful.

Here, Paul is really just clarifying what he's already said. That is, that the law doesn't bring death. It's sin that actually brings death. Sin is the culprit.

The law in and of itself is good. But sin causes us to disobey the law and so suffer the consequence, death, eternal death. But it's not the law's fault. It's sin's fault.

[14 : 55] One of the popular tourist destinations in Ireland are the cliffs of Moer. Okay, so we've got a picture on the next slide. These are the cliffs. Lots of people go there each year. And at the top of the cliffs, on the next slide, is a sign that says, please do not go beyond this point.

And below are the same words in different languages. Okay, it's a polite law. It even says please. But the law is, don't go beyond this point. But if we have a look at the next slide, what's wrong with this picture?

Where's everyone? Which side of the sign are they all on? The other side. They've all kind of disobeyed the law. You see, sin sprang to life and caused them to disobey.

In fact, one tourist puts it like this on the next slide. Here's one tourist. She's crossed the law. And she says, there's a sign that says, danger, don't go beyond this point. And so naturally we ignored it. Climbed over the rock wall and continued walking.

That's sin springing to life. She says, naturally we ignored it. And then she tries to justify herself by saying, but everyone else was doing it anyway. And that's what happened in November 06 to a German tourist.

[16 : 02] Sin sprang to life in her and she ignored the sign and was literally blown off the cliff and died. Now, is her death the sign's fault?

Did this law cause her to die? Of course not. It was her sinful nature that ignored the law. You see what Paul is saying here? The law has not become a source of death for us.

Rather, it's sin that caused us to disobey the law and brought about our death. And in causing us to disobey the law, we again see how utterly sinful sin is. But the big point in verse 13 is that while the law may sentence us to eternal death, it can't be blamed for it.

Sin is the problem. Sin causes us to break the law and so brings death. And to drive this point home, Paul shows us in verses 14 to 23 how sin continues to cause us to break the law.

So verse 14, he says, 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.

[17 : 05] But what I hate, well, 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 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, no, but the evil I do not want to do, well, this I keep on doing.

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. And 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, this is a very wordy passage, isn't it? Lots of do's and don't do's. But Paul's point here is that sin wins every time. He wants to do something good, he can't do it.

[18 : 07] He doesn't want to do something bad, but he does do it. Sin wins every time. It keeps causing him and us to break the law and so holds us guilty and deserving of death.

That's why Paul cries out in verse 24, who will rescue me from this body of death? Because he knows sin wins every time. His sinful nature springs to life and he breaks God's laws and so he deserves eternal death.

Now, before we look at the last couple of verses of chapter seven, we need to work out for a moment who Paul is speaking as in verses 14 to 25 because there's a huge debate about this. For some people, Paul is speaking as a Christian person.

After all, this struggle that Paul describes sounds familiar to us. You know, we want to do good things, but we sometimes don't. And the bad things we don't want to do, well, sometimes we do do them.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? We often have to work hard at resisting sin. And if you have had to work hard at resisting sin in your life, then that's actually a good thing, by the way, because if you've never had to work hard at resisting sin, then either you're really blessed or you just give in to sin all the time.

[19 : 18] Sometimes the Christian life is hard work. We need to work hard at resisting sin. And so is Paul speaking here as a Christian? Is he describing that kind of struggle? Well, although that struggle is real, I don't think that's what he's speaking about here.

I think he's talking about his experience as a non-Christian Jew. You see, verse two has said that he's writing to those who know the law. Who are the people who really knew God's law?

The Jews. And in verse 14, he calls himself a slave to sin. But hang on a second, chapter six, we've just heard that we've been set free from slavery to sin. And so people who are still slaves to sin are non-Christians.

So we've got a Jew who's a non-Christian. Or verse 22, he delights in God's law. That was a Jew. But verse 23, he's a prisoner of the law of sin.

That's a non-Christian. And so I think he's speaking as a non-Christian Jew here. And the reason for that is because it's particularly the Jews that he has to convince about his gospel. That's what Romans is all about.

[20 : 21] In chapter two, it's the Jews he has to particularly convince that the Jews are sinful and so need his gospel. Remember, he spends chapter two and chapter three telling the Jews that you're just as sinful as the Gentiles.

You need the gospel as well. And in chapter four, it's the Jews he has to particularly convince that salvation is by faith, not by obeying the law. The Jews thought you had to obey the law to be saved.

In chapter six, it's the Jews who had been suggesting that Paul's gospel of grace simply means we can go on sinning. And here in chapter seven, Paul has to particularly show the Jew how God's good law fits with his gospel.

And so I think Paul is speaking of his experience as a non-Christian Jew. And this makes the best sense of the text, I think. But in the end, the good news is it doesn't really matter because Paul's main point is true for all people, Jew, Gentile, everyone, because sin causes everyone to break the law.

And so the law cannot save anyone. Because no one keeps it. Instead, the law simply shows us how sinful and deserving of death we are and how desperately we need Jesus, which brings us to Paul's conclusion and the two cries.

[21 : 29] Point four, verse 24. He says, what a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Once heard a true story of a man who visited a church. He got chatting to the minister and said to the minister that he thought he was a pretty good bloke. Wasn't sure if he needed this Jesus character. And so the minister said back, well, okay then, let's test this.

Here's a rule for you. I want you to go one week without thinking or saying anything bad. One week. So the man went away, came back the next week and said, oh, that's not fair. That rule was too hard to keep.

So the minister said, okay, well, let's make an easier rule then. Here's an easier law. Don't lie for one week. So the man said, easy, piece of cake. So he went away, came back the next week and said, oh, look mate, that was too hard as well because I changed jobs during the week and became a used car salesman.

Now I know some honest used car salesmen, let me say. But the thing is, no matter what the law was, this man wouldn't have been able to keep it. In the end, the law simply is like a mirror that shows him and us how sinful we really are.

[22 : 38] That's what the law does. How utterly sinful we are and how deserving of death we are, which is why Paul's cry in verse 24 is so appropriate. What a wretched man I am, he says.

Because that's what we are. Wretched sinners, doomed to eternal death and in need of a great rescuer. But then comes verse 25 and the great rescuer. Verse 25, you can almost hear his joy, but thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

It is through Jesus and not the law that God saves us from eternal death. As Paul will go on to say in chapter 8, he says, therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ, the law of the Spirit, that's the new realm, who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death, the old realm.

For what the law was powerless to do, why was it powerless? Well, because it was weakened by the sinful flesh. God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

You see, God has done what the law could not do because of sin. He has rescued us and delivered us from eternal death and brought us to eternal life. So thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[23 : 52] Well, where does all this leave us? Well, as I said, we all live in either Sydney or Melbourne, either the realm of sin, law and death or the realm of spirit, God and life. We all live either as a wretched person of verse 24 or the delivered person of verse 25.

We all live in one of those two camps. Which camp are you living in? If you're not sure if you've been delivered from death, if you're not sure if you're still a wretched person or not and you want to be that person who has been delivered, then it's easy.

Believe in Jesus. Believe that God can save us through him. Believe that in Jesus there is now no condemnation. Turn and trust in Jesus. And if you'd like to do that, then write that on the slip, on that tear-off slip and put it in the office plate towards and I'll, towards the end of the service and I'll get in contact with you.

But what about those of us who already have trusted in Jesus? Well, I take it, we're to be the person of verse 25, aren't we? The person who is thankful to God for delivering us from eternal death to eternal life.

I was meeting up just last week with a couple who became a Christian the week earlier. It was very exciting. They just came to my office and wanted to have their child baptised and I said, oh look, you need to be a Christian for that.

[25 : 08] What's a Christian? Oh, here you go. This is what a Christian is. Okay, well we want to become Christians. Okay, sure. So we prayed with them, they became Christians and I'm meeting up with them and when I met up with them last week, I was going through the gospel with them to make sure they understood it and the wife said this, she said, I just have this feeling of acceptance.

It's like a warm and fuzzy feeling and then she added, I'm just so thankful, it's just so good, she said. And I tell you what, that was the highlight of my week because for me who has been a Christian for some time, I can forget how good it is to be a Christian.

I can forget to be thankful to God. I ought to easily forget what a wretched man I was and still am but that I've been forgiven and given eternal life through Jesus.

I don't know if that's you. And so the question is, is Paul's cry in verse 25 one that we offer up to God regularly or do we forget just how good it is to be a Christian? I was having dinner with another Christian man one time and he just said grace, you know how you say grace before the meal and he said a very simple prayer, he said, thank you God for this food you have provided and thank you for the forgiveness of sins we have through Jesus.

Thank you for him. Amen. And it again struck me that here is a man who knew intimately the joy of being forgiven. He knew intimately verse 25.

[26 : 34] Oh sure, he didn't cry it out as Paul seems to hear but he was heartfelt nonetheless. So perhaps next time you say grace for a meal, why not include a heartfelt prayer like that?

Why not keep rejoicing and thanking God who has delivered you from eternal death to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let's do that now. Let's pray.

Thanks be to you our great God who has delivered us from eternal death to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Let's sing our next song. Joined with you And benimle will happen to you there is a big heaven whoah will later and of him so whoah will at