

Free... But Not Lawless

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[0 : 00] So before I jump into the text, and excuse me, but if you're new or visiting, welcome. My name is BK. Pleased to have you here. Nick, I got a good wave. It's good to be loved.

Thank you. Thank you, Fiona. I kind of want to explain to you where we are in the text because it's really important for us to understand where we are.

If you're new to the church, new to Christianity, you're considering coming back to the church. I need to explain to you the book of Romans a little bit here. Let me tell you why this book matters. And I'm going to tie in a few ideas. One of the primary means that we believe that God has given us this word, this Bible, that these are his words, and we are to know his words.

And one of the aspects of the Bible that we talk about as theologians would be the nature of Scripture. And one of the areas is that there is clarity in God's Word.

[1 : 04] And it's my role to bring about that type of clarity, which is one of the reasons why I've been invited to Indonesia. There's a church planner who you're going to get a chance to meet in June.

He's going to be here in Vancouver. And I've asked them to come and preach and just kind of share the ministry and the church building process that they have going in Indonesia. And if you weren't here for when I got back from the Philippines, I did comment on them because God has been working quite incredibly in that country.

Although it's a big Muslim population, there is a fair number of Christians. One of the things that they've lacked is how to handle God's Word.

And I know it might sound weird to say that, but there's a lot of things that are out there. Prosperity gospel, right? If you do the things of God, you're going to be financially blessed.

If you do these things, you're going to have health, wealth. Those are all these things. And what they found is they invited some of these head of the seminary down to the Shepherd's Conference where we generally take them in every year.

[2 : 15] And the leaders of one of the largest denominations was convicted that they were not doing that. They said the preaching that we heard down at the Shepherd's Conference is not what we're doing. So that's been kind of one of the reasons why I've been asked to go is to kind of help have a conference to active pastors.

And it's not so much preaching, but it's teaching. It's kind of like a pre-seminary. So my seminary and the missions agency has been asked to set up preaching institutes in all 14 of their provinces. It's pretty crazy. And now they're kind of recruiting. And I'm just kind of the first volley to introduce some of the other pastors that's going on. So what's exciting is in the Pacific Rim, the Asian Pacific Rim, it's funny.

You know, some of the guys that I know that are over there, it is hard, hard soil. They feel defeated. Their families are struggling.

You know, there's persecution for just even sharing the gospel with someone from a certain tribe or ethnic minority or majority in those countries.

[3 : 29] But then something like this in Indonesia happens. So it's a good thing. And one of the things that we do is we believe in what's expository preaching, which means is exposing what God has said to the original people in the original language and what it would have meant to them.

And it's my role, as you all know, to explain why that matters to us today. So it generally begins starting in verse 1 of a book and going to the last word of a book.

And the reason why we're in Romans is Romans is the clearest explanation of the gospel of Jesus Christ out of all the books. The gospels are great, but Romans, Paul, after many years of traveling through three missionary journeys, kind of decides, okay, just through the intention of the Holy

Spirit, he's going to write down all these different theological aspects.

And the one thing that comes clear is the good news is that we are not saved by what we do, but what Christ has done. Amen? We're not saved by anything that we can do.

We're saved by what Jesus Christ has done. And in this book, it answers the most important question that every person always struggles with is, how can I be made right with God?

[4 : 52] How can I be made right with God? And this book answers some of these biggest questions that every single person on earth faces. And as we're hearing, Paul gives very specific, precise answers to mankind's greatest questions.

And I'm just going to cover them. You guys have heard them before. The first question that he answers is, what's wrong with the world? We know there's something wrong. There's something broken. And we also know that it's within us as well, right?

You just heard Chris read the text, why do I do the things that I do, but I do not do the things that I want? There's this struggle that's going on. So Paul answers that, that there is this sin that we broke, this rebelliousness that we had towards God.

And this affected everybody. The second question he asked, okay, now that I understand that there's sin, the question is, how can I be made right with God? And that's why Paul answers, it's not by works, it's not by religion, but it's by grace and faith alone, right?

These are the things that bring us to Christ. And today we're in a section where Paul's answering the question, can I really change?

[6 : 13] Can I really change? Given what I know about my sin, now that I'm a new person in Jesus Christ, can I really change?

Does the word of God have the power to actually transform me? So that's a question I think every Christian struggles.

If you've been struggling with one area of your life sometimes, the question becomes, can I actually overcome this sin? And then the fourth and fifth questions is, has God failed his promises?

And the fifth question is, how do I live now? So this morning, as I said, we find ourselves answering, can I really change? Is it possible to change?

Now there's a danger of misunderstanding the gospel. And here's the problem. When people hear the gospel that you are saved by grace versus not by works, not by keeping the rules, not by being good enough, it sets up two predictable misunderstandings.

[7 : 22] And this is why Romans 6 and 7 exist. Paul is dealing with the two issues that people generally mess up.

Romans 6 answers the question, well, if I'm saved by grace, then I can go ahead and live however I want. And we've heard the answer. We've covered that over about a month's time.

That no, you can. And number two, and what we're starting to get into today is, well, if I'm saved by grace, does the law really matter? Does the law of God, maybe, maybe, maybe is the law bad?

Do I have anything to do with the law? So Paul knows this, and he knows exactly how people will twist what he said. So one author says these chapters are kind of a parenthesis to the book, but they kind of form these two guardrails to protect you from going from one side of the road to the other side of the road, which would lead to danger.

Like I said, chapter 6 answers the question, does grace mean I can keep sinning? Of course, Paul says, absolutely not.

[8 : 36] You died to sin. And question 7, chapter 7 answers this question, is the law the problem? Is the law bad?

Which is what I hope to begin by giving you an answer this morning. So just to, even as you heard Chris read it, it's easy to get tongue-tied in the text, right?

He's unloading a lot of information. And I'm going to begin by saying that this is not a simple passage. This chapter has confused a great many people through the centuries.

And I hope to explain why, and I hope to help you understand the text. Because the big challenge, every single commentator, when he comes to this passage, has to deal with Paul's own intense struggle against sin, right?

He says, for I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Can anybody relate to that in any way?

[9 : 50] All right, me and Murray. All right, Sabian, thank you. We're all there, right? We all kind of wonder, why do I struggle with this?

Now, the question that comes up is, did Paul write that talking about his life before Christ? Or does he write that as he is now in Christ?

You with me? So some commentators want to consider that he's writing this, he's talking about himself when he wasn't saved. And there's commentators that are writing this, they're defending that he was indeed saved and this is his struggle.

So it's what period of his life? I land on the area that I believe this is his true ongoing struggle as a Christian. Paul was a saint, he wasn't perfect.

Are you with me on that? And so I'm going to take these little drawbacks in the text, and I'm going to explain to you why I've come to that conclusion. We're just going to cover the first six verses.

[11:00] But I hope by just moving slowly through these preceding verses, these verses, it'll help you understand. So by the time we start getting into the later section, verses 15, you're going to be, okay, I get what he's saying because of what I understand in the previous 14 verses.

You get it? You understand the beginning, it'll help you understand the end. So that's the goal this morning. Let me pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I just, we come to this text humbly.

I pray that we would understand some of the landmines that are found in there, and I pray that you would give my voice clarity and understanding and making these ideas as simple as possible.

But not only that, may we not miss the teaching that Paul is bringing through the power of the Holy Spirit to help these saints understand the glorious grace that you offer believers in salvation and how sadly so often we can go astray by misunderstanding things.

So Father, I just ask that you'd give us ears to hear and my voice would be clear. And more importantly, my mind. In your name we pray.

[12:25] Amen. Amen. So the first point that Paul is going to make in this text is, the law is for the living. The law is only for the living.

Romans 7.1. And Ryan's going to be having the text up there. So we're going to be looking at different phrases. So I figured this was the easiest way to break down the text. So one, Or do you not know, brothers?

For I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives. Okay. There's two landmines in this text.

The first landmine is that word brothers. Who is he talking about? Is he talking about Jews and Gentiles? Or is he just referring to Jews?

Because he's calling them brothers. And a lot of commentators, I believe, get this. Completely incorrect. The fact of the matter is he's speaking to Jews and Gentiles. Why? Because we know in Romans 9.3 and other passages, when he is speaking specifically to Jewish brothers, I'll just give you Romans 9.3.

[13:31] He says, For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

So when he's usually only talking to Jewish brothers, he makes an emphasis on them. You with me on that one? So we know here, and it's all going to make sense in a second.

So he's speaking to church in general. The other landmine is what does Paul mean by the law? So if you believe that Paul is talking to only his Jewish brothers, you would think, well, he's talking about the Torah.

Right? He's talking about the Old Testament law. But he's not right here. If he's talking to the church, he's talking about a different law. And that law, I would argue, is just the normal natural law, general law that we understand.

It's going to become clear in a second. So he's not talking about the Torah. Because look at how he starts. He says, Do you not know? And what he's saying is, You already know this.

[14:43] What I'm about to say is obvious to you. You're not just thinking clearly about this. And this is the principle. The law only has jurisdiction over the living.

Guess what? Every law of mankind only rules over the living. Right? It doesn't matter if it's the Torah, the Jewish law, civil law, moral law, Roman law, Greek law.

Just all law as a point only has power over you if you are alive. It only has authority.

And the moment that death occurs, guess what? The relationship's over. The law no longer applies to you. Do you understand? He's just laying down a general principle.

And he's basically asking them, Can you guys buy into that? If I tell you that the law only applies to living, What do you people say? Yeah.

[15 : 45] Amen. Great. Yes. I agree. You get this. And that's how he's kind of starting off this talk. This text, it's a basic legal reality. And he's making a general principle.

And it means that the brothers do not need to be Jews, Nor does the law need to be the Torah. Every single law. So what Paul is doing here, Is he's explaining what he just said in Romans 6. And he's doing something very intentional here. He starts with, like I said, Something everyone agrees on. The law only has authority over the living.

Right? You with me? Jewish law, Greek law, Roman law. Because we all know dead people don't stand trials. Right? Dead people don't obey laws. Dead people are beyond the reach of the law. Everyone knows this. This is the truth. And this is exactly what Paul wants you to understand. So that's the first truth that we get from the first section of verse 1.

[16 : 48] Now, look at verse 2. Paul's going to give us this marriage illustration. He says, For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives.

As long as the husband is alive, she is bound. We kind of get that, right? You're married. As long as they're alive, you're bound. That's the law. But if her husband dies, she's released from the law of marriage.

The moment death enters, the legal bond is broken. Duh. Right? We get that point. Now, this is the third line. The third landmine that people get confused about.

Paul is not teaching on marriage and divorce. So if someone, if you're talking about marriage and divorce, and someone brings this text, man, you can just say, you've missed the whole point of what Paul's talking about.

He's just making a general principle, and he's using this as an illustration to prove his principle. He's not teaching about marriage and divorce. This is not about exceptions. This is not about remarriage ethics.

[17 : 53] This is an illustration of a single principle, and that principle is death ends legal obligation. Nothing more, nothing less.

What causes confusion when I read the commentators is they keep trying to draw other implications of marriage into this, or they put into this.

But that's not what Paul's getting at. And then look at, let's verse 7, let's look at the third verse. It says, Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.

But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. What Paul is saying here is clear, simple, and it's unavoidable. And that is, death changes everything.

Okay? So within this first point, I want you to see clear. One, the truth is the law only rules the living.

[18 : 53] We've got that, right? Thumbs up? The law only rules the living. Number two, the illustration that Paul of marriage proves Paul's point. With it, it's just an illustration.

It's not an analogy. And if you understand an analogy, you start trying to put meaning on every single word that exists. That's not what this is. This is an illustration. And now, when he turns to verse 4, we're going to understand the application, which you're going to go, Ah, I get it.

So, this is where it gets personal, though. Because the reality is Paul is not really talking about courts.

He's not talking about criminals. He's not talking about marriage. Remember who he's addressing. It's the church. He's talking to us. He's talking to me.

And he's talking to you here, right? So, it's important to get this. And his point is, if the law only rules the living, then everything hinges on one question.

[19 : 57] Are you still alive in relation to the law? You with me on that? Are you still alive in relation to the law?

All right. So, let me bring up Paul's second point, which is the second point of this morning's service, is death brings a new master. Death brings a new master.

Romans 7, verse 4. Likewise, my brother, 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.

All right. We know that Paul's given us the principle. Paul has given us the illustration. Now, he's going to apply this truth. Notice he begins with, likewise, you also.

What he's saying is, what I'm teaching you isn't theory. It's not theory. This is about you. And he makes this shocking statement.

[21 : 06] You also have died to the law. Now, at first reading, this doesn't sound that it's a big deal. But I want you to pay attention.

He does not say that the law died. He did not say that the law disappeared. He does not say that the law is irrelevant.

You with me on this? He's saying, you died to the law. The law died. The law disappeared. It doesn't say that.

It says, you died. Now, why is this truth important? Because Paul here is actually protecting the law. And he's beginning by saying that the law is not the problem.

The law is not sinful. The law is not defective. And I know people who, now that they've become Christians, they don't want anything to do with any of the law. They think, I live in a whole new dispensation where there is no law.

[22 : 06] That's absolutely wrong. All right? In fact, as Chris read, we heard that Paul said that the law is holy. The law is righteous. The law is good.

So there's this tension. So if the relationship had to end, it has absolutely nothing to do with the law failing.

But it's because you had to die. Now, how does this happen? And you guys have been with us through Romans 6. Get this. Through the body of Christ.

Get that? And he's not talking about the church. He's talking about through the literal body of Jesus Christ. This is reference to the cross. This is what we call the objective historical substituciary reality.

When Christ died, he bore your sin. He bore the law's penalty. And he satisfied its demands. And here's the key.

[23 : 11] When he died, you died with him. Right? When we take on that faith of Jesus Christ, we die with him.

So your death to the law is not self-produced. It was accomplished by God through Jesus Christ.

You still with me on this? I know it's kind of confusing, but it's going to come together okay.

So then the question comes, what does die to the law means? First of all, to die to the law doesn't mean you ignore God's commands. It does not mean you reject God's standards.

It does not mean you live however you want. That's not what Paul is saying. What Paul is saying is when you die to the law, it means you're no longer under the law's authority.

You're no longer under its condemnation or its power system. And we talked about this in Romans 6, right? When you do not know Jesus Christ, you live in the reign of death, which means death rules over you, where the law is.

[24 : 20] And we're going to talk about what the law does. But now when you die to Christ, you move over here, and that law, death, no longer has power over you, right?

It can't be used to condemn you or any of those kind of things. So you're no longer in that realm because death has severed that relationship.

What that means is you've been released from law's binding authority. But here's the thing. Okay, that's not the end. Let's be honest. A lot of us think the Christian life is about forgiveness, freedom, and having a clean slate.

But Paul simply says, no, no, no, that's only half the story. Notice what he says the second half is, so that reason being, if you died to the law, you may belong to another, right?

Don't miss that. You just didn't die. You kind of got remarried. You have someone else you're under. And this tells us that, one, Christianity is not independence.

[25 : 29] Christianity is not autonomy. Christianity isn't freedom to define your own life and live however you choose. Christianity is a transfer of ownership.

The best way to say it is you did not escape authority. You changed allegiance. You with me on that one? You went from the law of death as authority, and now you're under the authority of God.

Amen? Amen. Amen. Okay. So the question is, who do you belong to? And it says here in the text, to him who's been raised from the dead.

And there's only one person, Jesus Christ, right? Not dead, not buried, not temporary. We talked about the implications last week over Easter. But he's risen.

He's alive and he reigns. And this tells us something very important. It tells us that our relationship with Jesus Christ is not temporary.

[26 : 33] Our relationship with Jesus Christ is not some sort of fragile union. It tells us that we are joined to a living Savior who will never die again, and he will never lose you.

You understand? This is another implication of once saved, always saved. I don't always like using that. But once you're called by him and you're held by him, there's no getting out of it, right? God's called you to be a believer in Jesus Christ.

So why? What is the purpose of all this? And if you notice in the text, it says, in order that we may bear fruit for God. If you were looking for a quick summation, this is the Christian faith.

You're not just saved. You're not bound to Jesus Christ and you're in union with him. It's because you're to bear fruit for God.

We weren't freed from the law, not so that we could do less, so you could finally do what the law could never produce, and it is to bear fruit for God.

[27 : 47] All right, I'm just going to give you some. I wrote a note here. It's called theological insight. Here's some facts about the law. The law could command righteousness.

The law could demand obedience. And the law could expose sin. But here's the thing that the law could not do.

The law can't change your heart. The law cannot empower obedience. The law cannot produce holiness.

You with me on that? What happens is the law exposes sin. But the law cannot produce righteousness. And the only thing that can produce righteousness in a believer's life is union with Jesus Christ.

So two other ways to say it. The law can tell you what to do, but it cannot make you do it. And the law can expose your problem, but it cannot fix your problem.

[28 : 57] Right? You guys have those OED readers. You know, I got them from my car. I plug it in and it'll tell me everything that's wrong with my car. You guys ever know that? If you don't know, there's a little port usually right on the left side of the driver's wheel.

I plug in this little computer and it tells me everything that's wrong with the car. But it don't tell me how to fix it. It doesn't fix anything. It just means there's a whole bunch of money I got to spend. Right? I got to find someone like Mihai to go do the fixing for me.

And Mihai ain't cheap. I'm going to tell you. Top quality service gets top quality dollar. Anyway. That's kind of the law. It tells you what's off, but it doesn't fix what needs to be fixed.

So this is where it relates to us. You want to know why some people try harder and fail? Do you want to know why religion exhausts people?

The reason it does those things is because they're still, people are still trying to live under a system that they were never meant to live under. You with me on that?

[30 : 05] Many of us continue to put ourselves under the law. And we hope that that law is going to bring a deeper union with Jesus Christ.

That's not what he's going to talk about here. You were not set free from the law so you could go live however you want. You were not set free from the law so you could finally live for God.

And that is Paul's second point. You have a new master. And now we're going to see in point three, Paul is going to explain why this was necessary.

Because if the law is good, is holy, why couldn't it produce a godly life? Now, remember we're talking general law. And if you're a Jew, it's hitting there.

You're thinking about this, right? You're thinking about the Mosaic law. God wrote out all those laws for you. Why was that not working? So this is point three.

[31 : 03] The law doesn't fix you. The law exposes you. The law exposes you. I'm looking at a hockey game back there. I don't know what's going on.

Romans 7, 5. 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.

So Paul answers the question we're all thinking. If the law is good, why didn't it produce a good life? Now what Paul reveals here, and it's shocking, it's uncomfortable, and some might even take it offensive to it.

Notice the statement, sinful passions aroused by the law. Paul just said the law didn't just expose sin, the law actually stirs up sin.

And this sounds kind of counterintuitive, and it's important that we understand that, because if we understand what Paul is saying here, you will be confused for the rest of the chapter.

[32 : 17] Paul is not saying that the law is sinful. Paul is not saying that the law is evil. Paul is not saying that the law is defective. The problem is not the law.

The problem is you. We're the problem. Notice it says, while we were living in the flesh. And now at this point, he's talking about specifically who you were before Christ. You weren't neutral. You weren't slightly flawed. You weren't basically good, but you were in the flesh. Which means you were controlled by fallen human nature, dominated by sin, unable to respond rightly to God. And what did the law do in that condition? It said sinful passions aroused by the law. Because the law comes in and says, don't covet. Don't lie. Don't lust. Don't rebel. And we all know this story.

[33 : 21] What happens? We push back. We push back. The fact of the matter is the law didn't create sin. But the law provokes sin that already is there.

Why? Because the human heart, when God says don't do that, sin in ourselves says watch me. Every single one of you who is a parent knows exactly what I'm talking about.

Junior, don't touch the stove. What's their first instinct? Go touch the stove. Right? It happens. And you're doing all these things that are right and good to protect your child. But there's that rebelliousness that still exists in a toddler to do exactly what you told them not to do.

That's what's in us. Paul's point here is the law in the hands of sin becomes a tool that actually intensifies rebellion.

[34 : 35] It's what stirs up the sin even more. The law reveals sin, but in fallen humanity it also provokes sinful desires and increases transgressions.

Now don't hear me wrong on this. I'm not saying the law is evil. I'm saying sin is evil. The flesh is corrupt.

And when you combine the law and the flesh, you get an explosion of sin. You with me on that? You combine those two elements, it's a big bang.

And this is why the law didn't fix you. The law exposes you. And it stirs what was already inside of you. And the result of that, we read in this verse, At work in our members to bear fruit for death. Notice that word fruit again. No matter where you are, your life is producing something. It's fruit for death when you live here, or it's fruit for God when you live in his realm.

[35 : 50] Now what kind of death is he talking about? He's talking about spiritual death. Separation from God. Condemnation under judgment. That is the death that Adam experienced in the garden.

Notice if you touch of the fruit of that tree, you shall die. And people say, well, he didn't die. No, no, he died. His relationship with God, gone.

Separation from God's perfect kingdom of the garden. He's moved out. And now he lives under condemnation because of that sin that he would even see his own son kill his other son.

See, the law doesn't rescue us from that. What the law does is it confirms it. It proves you were guilty. More importantly, the law shows you your heart.

Now, why does this matter in the book of Romans? Well, in Romans 1 to 3, we learn that the law shuts out every accusation.

[36 : 59] The law makes the whole world accountable. And the law shows you your sin. So before Christ, you had the law. You had commands. You had knowledge.

But you had no power. Like I said, rules don't change hearts. Rules don't create obedience. The law doesn't produce life.

So now, the question becomes, if the law couldn't fix the problem, how do I change?

How do I change? Because it's just telling me, I can try to obey the law all I want, but it's just going to expose me. The law is not going to change me.

And that's exactly where Paul wants you right now. And this is the fourth point. Now you serve in a new way. That's a horrible title for point four, but that's the best I came up with.

[38 : 03] This is the new reality. Let's just call this the new reality in Christ. Look at verse six. But now, we are released from the law because we died to death in Christ, right?

Having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. And remember my two favorite words, but now.

But now. You felt defeated, but now. But now, and this is one of the most important phrases in the entire book of Romans because it marks a total shift in reality.

What you were is no longer true. What held you no longer holds you. And what defined you no longer defines you. That's the old you. And here's this wonderful declaration.

We are released from the law. We're not improved. We're not upgraded. We are released. What does release mean?

[39 : 07] It means you're no longer under its authority. You are no longer under its condemnation. You are no longer under its system. Why? Because having died to that which held us captive.

You were bound under its authority like a slave under a master. And now, everything has changed. So it says, notice that we said, it says, so that we serve.

We didn't move from slavery to freedom with no authority. We move from one kind of service to another kind of service. And before I go anywhere, I want to clear up something.

And I've said it a couple of times. A lot of people think I'm no longer under the law, so I can live however I want. Paul is saying, no, no, no. You still have a responsibility. You have a different authority.

The question isn't, do you serve? The question is, how do you serve your authority? And Paul gives us two categories. Notice it says, the old way of the written code.

[40 : 19] That's the old law. The external commands. The written code. The rules without power. That's what it's like to live under the law. And every single one of you know that when we try to obey the law, it produces pressure, failure, condemnation, and eventually death.

The letter tells you what to do, but gives you no ability to do it. And this is why Paul calls the newness of the spirit.

This is the new reality. It's not external pressure. It's not internal transformation. Not rules written on stone. But it is a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In case what you do not know, this is new covenant language that Paul is using. Old covenant, you had the law written externally. New covenant, you have the law written on your heart.

And what's interesting is God doesn't just command obedience. God creates obedience. You with me on that? He doesn't command obedience. He creates obedience within you.

[41 : 33] The spirit inaugurates a new era where believers can now live lives that actually please God and bear fruit. The old way said do this. The new way says I will change you so you can do this.

Amen? Amen? Amen? So when the question is can we change? Yes. But it's not through my work. It's through Christ's work in me through the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember in verse 4 it says that you may bear fruit for God.

Like I said, this answers the big question. Can I really change? And Paul gives us a resounding yes. But not through effort, rules, or discipline.

But only through the spirit of God. You with me on that? Okay. I'm going to get into something.

[42 : 40] A little bit of a side. But I hope this will prove practical application. And I actually hope it will demonstrate why we fail to understand this often.

I've got a lot of thoughts on the spiritual disciplines. Have you ever heard of the spiritual disciplines? You know, those are the spiritual things. You know, read God's word.

Make sure we pray. Make sure we serve. There's many more disciplines that are out there. And I realize what I'm going to say is going to bug people.

But this is what I've experienced and what I've seen play out in front of my eyes all too often. With people seeking to grow closer to God. And I've shared with you before. My thoughts on this subject began to evolve when I read Jerry Bridges' first two books.

It was called *The Pursuit of Holiness* and *The Practice of Godliness*. This occurred in my life when I was just kind of out of high school, starting into college. I can finally think for myself.

[43 : 45] So you guys who are in high school, you still can't think, right? Don't worry about it. But when you get college, you start getting exposed and you start really connecting some of the thoughts. And I can honestly say these books changed my life.

They came into my life at a time when I really wanted holiness and I wanted godliness. I recognized as an 18-year-old boy, I needed god.

But what happened when I got into these books, I started to create more rules for myself. Right? I made checklists. These are the spiritual things I'm going to do.

And what I was doing is I was putting pressure on myself to perform. Right? You know, have you guys been there? Man, I've been reading my Bible every day this week, but I forgot Thursday.

And now I feel like a complete failure. Anybody been there? Come on, we've been there, right? Sometimes it's a whole week you leave it, right? And you keep thinking, man, what a loser of a

Christian.

[44 : 47] Am I even saved? Right? You know, I didn't even read Habakkuk this month. What's going on? But we put these rules. And so, you know what? I'm going to get up at 6 a.m.

And I'm going to go to bed at 12. And, you know, my first hour, my last hour are going to be complete devotional times. And it's going to be great. And it's going to work. But what happens is we turn Bible reading, praying, and even fasting into a law.

A law that always exposes our failure. And for me, honestly, it left me feeling exhausted and feeling condemned. Man, I'm not like that person.

I'm not like that. Then I'm like, oh, I'm way better than that person. Oh, man, that guy must not have been able to do devotions for like six months, man. He's so messed, right? When you create these checklists, you start to see, oh, I'm doing really good.

I'm really good. Then you start judging others. Does anybody relate to what I'm talking about or am I just talking to me? All right. Okay. Now, what's interesting, before here, I pastored a church in Victoria.

[45 : 59] And it was a group of people that lived in bitterness, defeat, and I would say they were spiritually depressed. They would say they loved God, but they were exhausted from doing it.

Because the previous pastor put on all these extra rules for them to live by. And as they tried to grind it out, they never fell away.

Well, I'm sure some fell away from the Lord, but they weren't a happy group of people. They always felt like failures. And what was interesting, even when I would encourage that we, listen, we need to read God's word, right?

We want to know him. We know this to be true. But they would say, BK, you're putting on legalism. You're putting on legalism to me. No, that's not what's going on.

What they were hoping to get was total freedom. And I saw a great many of them just decide, I'm just going to live in complete freedom. That was the answer. The way to get out from under that weight was just to go live what I wanted to do.

[47 : 04] And now I'm free, right? We had members of our worship team showing up drunk and a whole other bunch of things. Just people, you know, I'm going to live for the world Monday to Friday, but on Sunday, if I can get a little holy, I'll be better.

But that's exactly what Romans 6 warned us about. When Paul talks about the newness of the Spirit, this isn't what he's talking about. What I described, what happened to me is I slipped back under the old system.

I was a Christian, but I'm creating more laws. Now, what I'm thankful for is that Jerry Bridges continued to write and think about these things. And he wrote later two more other books.

One's called The Discipline of Grace. And more importantly, the book Transforming Grace. That released me. And it was interesting reading that book, and I think I've shared with you, I was so mad reading Transforming Grace because it made me feel all the pursuit of holiness and practice of godliness was no good, that God could love me no matter what.

It felt too good. I threw the book in the garbage. Because it made me think that God really wasn't that loving. God wasn't that kind, and the issue was me because I didn't measure up.

[48 : 25] So I had to work harder to create that love that I thought I was supposed to feel. The Lord's taken me through a few roads here.

But through the readings of Disciplines of Grace, it began to help me rethink the spiritual disciplines and to later think of them as the habits of grace.

And that book that we gave out at that last family conference talks about that. The habits of grace are defined by repeatable processes that are channels through which the Holy Spirit pours God's power into our lives.

Get that? It's channels for God. It's not me working to create it. God is creating it. It's not about earning anything. They're about positioning yourself to keep receiving what God keeps on giving so that we can serve Him with joy and actually bear fruit.

You with me on that? Because I know some of you are struggling. You're doing all these things, and why am I not bearing this fruit? What's going on? Well, there's three rhythms that I believe we're supposed to have.

[49 : 38] One is to hear His voice. Read God's Word, listening to godly biblical preaching. Study it. Meditate on it.

It's the Spirit using Scripture to renew your mind and desires from inside out. Number two, it's have His ear. Just pray.

Pray in the moment of defeat. You don't have to clean yourself up to pray. You don't have to get on your knees. Just pray. And it doesn't mean I've got to sit there for an hour. Just pray in that moment. Lord, man, I'm just confronting with my own.

Just the other day, man, I am the most disorganized guy. We switched over to offices, and I've got like a thousand books, and I still can't put them in the right order. So I can't find them. And I'm just like, why am I so disorganized with this?

So I'm now putting it into a computer file, and everything's coded. And also, when someone borrows my books, I know who has it, and I can come after you for it back. And the third one, and all the teachings on spiritual discipline that I've read rarely talk about this, but you're supposed to belong to the body.

[50 : 46] We need one another. We need each other to share, hey, this is what I've learned in my devotions. Hey, I'm reading this really great book. This has really helped me with this. We need other people building into us.

Because the church ends up acting as a safeguard. You see, when personal devotions, the first two, just prayer and reading, stay rooted in the life of church, they avoid two dangers.

That first danger is you don't slide into exhausting legalism like I did. And you don't drift into hyper-individualism where you think it's only between me and God.

Because guess what? I've been there too. And so it's just my, you know, you might have some info from my life. You don't know my relationship with God, man. I'm good with God. Look at this. I've got these verses I'm claiming for myself.

This is who I am. No, no, no. No. You see, the new covenant isn't private. The new covenant is personal and corporate.

[51 : 49] And the Spirit changes us as we live together in Christ's body. Now we are going to see that in a moment.

And it's going to be perfectly illustrated as we come to the table together. Are you with me on this? This is that responsibility. So just to finalize here, some of you are still trying to live the Christian life in the old ways.

More rules, more pressure, more guilt. And it's exhausting. Why? Because you're trying to live under a system you've already been set free from.

You were set free from the law to live with power. So that leaves us with two ways to live.

You can live under the law, try harder, doing more, failing again. Or you can live in Christ by the Spirit, bearing fruit, and dare I say, actually experiencing the change that only God can bring.

[53 : 06] Let me pray. Dear Holy Heavenly Father, we thank you for the God that you are. Father, I feel this chapter's been a bit of a mouthful, just covering the complexity or, I don't know if it's the complexity of the text or the complexity that man brings to the text.

Father, we've all gone different roads in our Christian life. Father, we've all gone different roads in our Christian life.

Father, we've all gone different roads in our Christian life. Father, we've all gone different roads in our Christian life. Father, I pray that this morning at least one person would be saved from that.

That their mind would be brought clear on what it means to want to live in the Spirit and to let the Spirit bring about the change.

That change is demonstrated in our works, in our desires, in what we long for. That's why when we look at later on Paul's words in verse 15, the reason I believe he's saved in our condition is because he says, I do the things I must do, but I do not want to do, or I want to do, but I do not do.

That only shows a heart of someone who's been redeemed by the blood of Christ who can say these things because someone living in the flesh doesn't want the things of God.

[55 : 07] And I pray it would be the same thing for people here today. Don't. I pray that they would not follow Jesus just so they can have a better relationship with someone.

I pray that they can, that they follow you because they can have a better relationship with you. So God, we just ask for your blessing upon this day and this table.

In your name we pray. Amen.