

Free at last Tim from CMS

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

- [0 : 0 0] at primary schools in New South Wales, or at least at the primary school that our two eldest are attending at the moment, the school organised a Father's Day gift system.
- The kids would bring in some money, and they'd get a gift for their dad to keep for Sunday. So I gave little Sonia some money for this system.
- And when she came home, she was crying. And I said, why are you crying? And she said, because I didn't get a Father's Day gift for you. And I said, oh, why not?
- Were there not any left? Did they run out? She said, no, that wasn't the problem. I said, what was the problem? She said, Daddy, I spent all the money on cupcakes and ate them all. One of life's biggest mysteries is that we don't always do what we want to do.
- She wanted desperately to buy a Father's Day present, and she was so sad after the fact that she didn't. But it just didn't turn out that way.
- [1 : 1 3] I was reading in the newspaper this weekend a little segment on Clive James, who I really enjoy as a writer and an organiser of comedy.
- And he was lamenting the fact of some things in his personal life that he'd done that had wrecked his own marriage and somebody else's as well. And he said, you know, I knew it was wrong, and I knew it was silly, but I did it anyway, and I wish I hadn't.
- It's not just little children that do this sort of thing, but grown people as well. If you're human, you'll know what I'm talking about. If you're not, you probably need to replace your batteries.
- We don't like self-centred people, but frequently enough, that's us. We know what God requires of us, but we're keen to spot it when it doesn't happen in others.
- People having an affair with a married person know that it's wrong, hence the secrecy, but we still do it, nonetheless. And afterwards we say how silly we were.
- [2 : 2 5] Well, the Apostle Paul had the same kind of experience of this life. And he writes in verse 21, so I find this law at work.
- Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. And I wonder if that's your experience of life.
- And have you got any ideas about why that might be the case? Why is it that even though we know what the right thing is to do, and even though we want that right thing, we still sometimes don't do it.
- Why is that? Some philosophers put this down to our fleshly bodies as if we're a rational mind, but we're contaminated every now and then by a polluted stomach.
- You know, my rational mind knew the right thing to do, but my libido overcame me in a moment of fleshly weakness. And so as a result, what they recommended to overcome this problem was a strict regime of discipline.
- [3 : 3 6] Other people maintained that what we needed was more education. And so jails famously became places of re-education, not of punishment. And there are many disagreements about what this source of this recalcitrant streak within us is and where it comes from.

Well, the Apostle Paul, in our reading from Romans today, also experienced this weakness. And for him, it proved that knowing the right thing can't make you good and wanting the right thing can't make you good either.

Listen to him in verse 22. For my inner being, I delight in God's law. He was not an evil, malicious man by nature.

But verse 23, 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 in me.

Now, Paul was nothing if not self-disciplined. He was also very well educated. But yet, Paul complains that he's not the good, righteous, kind person that he wanted to be.

[5 : 11] And what he's also saying, although he won't write it explicitly, is that we too are not the good, kind, righteous people that we would like to be.

Now, I don't mean this in a trivial sense of simply not being perfect. Paul is not sweating the small stuff here.

He's not lamenting the fact that he forgot to help some old lady over the road, cross the road, or that he admitted to give somebody a cup of tea at his home one day. He's talking about real matters where he caused real hurt to real people.

What a wretched man I am, he says. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

What a wretched man I am. He's not talking about trivial matters of niceness here. He's talking about the real gritty issues of human life.

[6 : 15] What a wretched man I am. How could he stand before God knowing who he was? God had given Moses very plain instructions.

Worship no other gods, do not murder, do not bear false witness against your neighbour and so on. In church in earlier times, Christians used to read out this law of Moses each week.

It was not that they had forgotten some of the laws, as if they were to suddenly chirp up, oh, do not murder, oh, that's right. I thought there was something wrong this week when I killed my neighbour.

But it reminded them that they would experience and did experience this same problem. That whilst they knew what was right and whilst they even wanted what was right, they frequently caved in to what was wrong.

And so Paul then concludes, so I myself, in my mind, am a slave to God's law in that best sense of the word. But in my sinful nature, I am a slave to the law of sin.

[7 : 30] Well, at this point, you may think that Paul is overreacting and you may want to tell Paul to lie down on a couch, take a Valium or something like that.

But Paul is not talking about some personal crisis. He's describing a big picture problem, not just of his own, but of all people. You may think that Paul's view of God is too strict, his standards too high.

Maybe God doesn't mind so much about wrong in the world. But Paul's not addressing how high God's standards are here.

He's talking about why there is that thing within us that drives us in the wrong direction. But by the way, be careful about wanting God to lower his standards. In any case, Paul considers that this bentness within us makes us unfit for God and unfit for living the good life for we cannot do what we want to do.

Well, this conclusion is very offensive to many people because it implies for a start that Moses and the prophets were achieving very little when they spoke the words of the law over and over again to the people of Israel as if that would help.

[9 : 05] In my context, in the Middle East, the laws of Islam are recounted over and over again and people are urged to pray five times a day and you can't avoid it.

The loudspeakers really fill your ears five times a day. But what Paul is saying is that even when people know God's law and even when they want to do it, this principle of evil still lies within them and makes them do the opposite of what they both do, opposite of what they want and opposite of what they know.

They may delight in God's law but that sinful nature inside them pushes them the wrong way just as it does us. No amount of learning religious laws, no amount of Bible study, no amount of meditating on God's law can fix this problem.

The problem is so much inside of us that Paul calls it part of our flesh, part of our makeup.

It's like a recalcitrant streak within us. Paul details this problem because he doesn't want the people in Rome to whom he's writing be under any illusions about where their hope comes from.

[10 : 45] And he gives us this hope in chapter 8 verses 1 to 4. It's a very dense paragraph but the ideas are simple enough so please follow along if you've got it open in front of you.

And he begins in verse 1 and he says, you see, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No condemnation.

God knows what we are like. No fear before God's justice.

No fear of the future for those who are in Christ Jesus. And why? Well, in the next verse he explains, and it turns out that both the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ play a role.

He says in verse 2, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

[11 : 58] death. This recalcitrant streak within us, this law of sin and death, Paul says, can only be broken by the Spirit who gives life.

The power that God, that Paul sees in himself, making him do the opposite of what he wants and what he knows, this can only be dealt with by God's Holy Spirit, the power of the Spirit who gives life.

And this is fairly close to what systematic theologians call sanctification, if you ever read theology, the breaking of sin's power in us.

And notice that this new life comes from nothing that we do, it comes from the Holy Spirit in Christ. It's not a result of years of spiritual discipline, it's a gift.

Now look at verse 3. For what the law was powerless to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

[13 : 20] And so God condemned sin in the flesh. Verse 2 talked about the Holy Spirit and the new life, but this verse speaks of another aspect, the killing off, the condemning of that recalcitrant streak within us, the condemning of sin, the death of Jesus as a sin offering.

sin. The problem we've been talking about, this sin in our life, needs to be addressed honestly by God.

Sin needs to be condemned, otherwise it will still continue to live amongst us. God acts here something like a judge in removing criminals from society.

He condemns sin so that it might no longer be present. But God is a little bit different to human judges. Human judges send people to jail and find them and God condemns sin too, but differently.

There are two main differences. Firstly, he absorbs the punishment in his own son. Now, in the original, there is an emphasis on the words his own son.

[14 : 52] I've got three sons and a daughter. And by using this phrase his own son, Paul is reminding us that God's love for us is so great that even his affection for his own son was called into account and was sacrificed at great cost.

By his own son, God condemned sin. And that's why there is no more condemnation remaining for us.

God is not free from condemnation because we now live perfect lives. I certainly don't and you don't either.

It's not that there's no condemnation because God has suddenly relaxed his standards. It's not that there's no condemnation because we hope to do better in the future.

There's no condemnation because God has dealt with it with his own son. At the cross God condemned sin. That absorbing of the condemnation of sin into himself, into his own son, makes God different to a human judge.

[16 : 17] But there's also a second way in which God is different to an ordinary judge. And that God is interested in imparting new life to people. The image of dying and then facing God's judgment, how people often think about this life, you know, you live your life and you die and then you go before God's judgment seat.

That's true enough, but it overlooks the fact that God is not just interested in evaluating our lives at the end of them. He's more interested in now changing your life and renewing you and in giving you new life.

God is far more involved in our lives than that earlier image might suggest. He's not like a judge to whom we are a stranger until we give an account.

He is our Father who condemns sin and wants to impart new life to us even now. Judgment is not the end of life in God's eyes but the beginning of life.

And you can see this new life mentioned in verse 2 and in the next verse 4 which speaks of this end result in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

[17 : 45] God wants the good life for us. He wants that righteous life for us. The life that we might know about and even want and desire but we cannot attain it.

God wants that life for us and the only way it can be obtained is through Jesus Christ. It was premature to think of God as being overly strict or lacking generosity.

You can see that because he sent his own son. You can see it because he's interested not just in condemning people but in giving them new life according to his own spirit.

The Christian gospel facts are that Jesus died and rose again. His death mysteriously took the place of our death and his life is mysteriously imparted to us through his Holy Spirit which gives life in every sense not just in the sense of bodily resurrection which we await but in that new obedience to God by which we can even resist that recalcitrant spirit within us when you become a Christian both this freedom from condemnation and this new life become yours and both of these death and resurrection are the gift of God. God we will still continue to struggle against sin and we will still sin further on in chapter 8

Paul says if Christ is in you your body may well be dead because of sin yet your spirit will live because of righteousness. God intends for us the new life the righteous life with him and both of these a freedom from condemnation and a life freed to serve God in all righteousness are God's gift. God is no longer just a judge but a judge who gives life through his own son where do you put your hope for a right standing before God where do you put your hope for a renewed life of righteousness of love is it in your great learning that you educate yourself to resist the recalcitrant spirit within you no that won't work is it in some ascetic regime of strict discipline no that will have no effect either the only place of hope we have for a right standing before God and the hope of living a life according to

[21 : 11] God's holy law in righteousness and love is through Christ Jesus let's pray our father especially on this father's day we praise you for showing yourself to be such a kind and generous father who knows our weakness and who pays a high price to gain our freedom father we praise you that you want us to lead a new life in Christ Jesus grant us your spirit that we might live according to it grant that we might live this new life grant that we might bear the fruit of that new life and that everyone may see how changed we are let our light shine in the world so that people may praise your name and we ask it for the glory of your son

Jesus amen