

Dead to the Law

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Ruth. Good afternoon, everyone. Really good, as Paul said, to have you with us today. Are there some people you find who bring out the worst in you?

You want to like them, you want to get on with them, but they constantly irritate you, and whenever you're with them, you seem to say the wrong thing, and that makes things even worse.

I'm sure we've all come across people like that. On the other hand, are there some people who bring out the best in you? They're really encouraging and friendly, and they show a real interest in you, and actually you want to do well in things just so that you can please them.

I'm sure we've all come across people like that as well. Quite a few years ago in my work, I had a new boss, and as new bosses do, he came in and he wanted to make changes.

And I felt that the changes that he imposed on us were unhelpful and were really quite demotivating for the staff. I didn't feel it was for the good of the department or indeed of the company.

[1 : 07] He in turn, I think, found me quite negative and perhaps felt I was a bit awkward, and probably he was right in that. That same year, I was involved in a big project.

It was one of these projects where if you don't get it right, you're going to get a very big fine from the regulator, at least potentially even get shut down. It really needed to be done right. And I was responsible for delivering half of that project.

And I got on really well with the person who was in overall charge. He made it clear that he trusted me, he bowed my expertise, and he was happy to let me get on with my part with as little interference as possible.

And that project was a great success. I flourished under the trust that was given to me, and we delivered what we needed to. So my end of year appraisal that year was quite interesting.

On the one hand, I had a boss who clearly didn't rate me and didn't think much of me. On the other hand, he was being told by the project that I'd done a good job, and we delivered. And I can remember saying to him during my appraisal interview, I'm not a different person when I'm doing the project from when I'm working for you.

[2 : 19] Now, one said, of course, that was absolutely right. I was exactly the same person. But actually, in the way I approached it, in my feelings about it, in my attitudes, you could argue I was a different person.

One was bringing out the worst in me, and making me feel in many ways quite resentful and unhappy. The other was bringing out the best in me, and giving me the opportunity and the freedom to do well.

Well, I think that these pictures are a quite good way for us to get into Romans chapter 7 and 8, that we're going to look at over the next few weeks. Because Paul says in these chapters, there's something that brings out the worst in us, and there's something that brings out the best in us. What brings out the worst in us is the law, and we'll talk about what the law is and means in a minute. And what brings out the best in us is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit that Jesus sent to his disciples.

I could like equations, so let's have a couple of equations, and I think probably help illustrate that. Paul says the law plus the flesh, or the sinful nature, as I said in the version that Ruth read, our natural incarnations, leads to sin and death.

[3 : 37] That's very clearly in the passage that Ruth read to us. The law plus our sinful nature leads to sin and death. In other words, the law brings out the worst in us.

But Paul also says that the grace of God plus the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, leads to righteousness and life. In other words, the Spirit brings out the best in us.

If we know that God has worked in our lives through the Lord Jesus, and by his grace we've been forgiven for all of the wrong that we've done, and we want to please Jesus, then through the Spirit, we can do that, and we know that we have righteousness, and we have life through faith in Jesus. Now just to plan ahead, for the next couple of weeks in chapter 7, we're going to be looking mainly at the law, and then we go into chapter 8, and everything really brightens up, and that's about the Spirit and the difference that he makes in our lives.

But today we're thinking particularly about the law and about our relationship with it. So maybe worth a minute, just thinking about what do we mean by the law.

[4 : 47] Paul is writing in the context of people, mainly as readers who were Jews, or who certainly knew the Jewish faith, and he is writing about the Jewish law. The law that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that's recorded for us, particularly in the first five books of the Old Testament, but actually throughout the Old Testament.

The law of Moses, the law that was given to the people of Israel. Now we might say, well that's not very relevant to us today, in one sense it's not, but so we could extend it a bit wider, and we could say it as instructions about how we should live, that we might try to keep to the letter, and try to be good, and to please God through the things that we do.

That was the law that was about, if you kept the law, said God you will live, if you don't keep the law, you'll die. The problem being of course, that no one could keep it completely, until Jesus came. The first thing I want to say about the law, is that the law is good. Now you might read the verse we read today, and quite a number of others, in the book of Romans, and think this law, it was a really bad thing.

It held people back, it wasn't a good thing. If you're tempted to think that, can I suggest that you go home, and you read either Psalm 119, or if you feel that's going to take a bit too long, read Psalm 19, because both of them speak very positively, about God's law.

[6 : 15] Let me just read a few verses, from these Psalms. So Psalm 19 says, the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. Psalm 119, Oh how I love your law, I meditate on it all day long.

My soul is consumed with longing, for your laws at all times. So the psalmist tells us, that God's law is good, if we meditate on it, if we love it, then it's a good thing, and it can bring great delight to us. But the problem was, that the experience of people of the law, didn't always reflect that, and particularly by the time Paul was writing, the time of Jesus, and that kind of time, the law had come to mean something, that perhaps was a little bit different.

It was something that was imposed on the people, we read about the Pharisees, and the Gospels, who would add to the law, or would interpret the law, and it became a real burden, for people.

And although the law itself is good, Paul tells us, that it brings out the bad in us. The law is good, but actually because we have a sinful nature, because our natural inclination, is not to do what is right, and to obey the law, it brings out the worst in us.

[7 : 37] So a few verses that Paul writes a bit earlier, in the book of Romans. Romans chapter 3, No one will be declared righteous, in God's sight, by the works of the law, rather through the law, we become conscious of our sin.

When we see the law, and the kind of standards, that the law imposes on us, we recognize that we can't keep it, and we become aware, of just how sinful we are.

So in the next verse after that, Paul says, Now apart from the law, the righteousness of God, has been made known. And that righteousness is through, the Lord Jesus. But later on chapter 4, Paul writes, The law brings wrath, and where there is no law, there is no transgression.

Paul in the next few verses, in Romans chapter 7, is going to write a bit more about the law, and how just knowing the law, and knowing what we shouldn't do, in many ways encourages us, to do the very things, we wouldn't want to do, because of the sinful nature, because of our natural inclinations.

So the law says, Paul is good, but it brings out, the bad in us. The law brings out, the worst in us.

[8 : 53] And so, being free from the law, Paul says, is a really important, and valuable thing. And that's what these verses, that we're looking at this morning, are especially about.

Paul is saying to us, you are not bound by the law, and you have to look and say, have I got this right, have I got that right, and am I justified before God, for all that I've done. Rather, you can have a freedom, to be free from the law, and to please God, through his spirit.

So let's just walk through, these verses quickly, and then we'll bring together, a few applications. So on verse 1, Paul states, a rather obvious, legal principle.

The principle is, if you die, you're no longer subject, to the law. And that could apply, to any kind of law, not just the Jewish law, if you die, you're no longer subject, to the law.

It is, I think for many people, who have been victims of crimes, a great burden, that the people, who committed these crimes, against them, weren't discovered, until they had died, and they were beyond, the reach of the law, and therefore couldn't, in this world, be punished appropriately, for what they'd done.

[10:05] Because they died, they were beyond, the law. So once you die, you're not subject, to the law. Paul then, illustrates this, by writing about, marriage.

And about the lifelong bond, that is marriage, but that stops, on death. Now I want to say, two things, by way of warning, before we start looking, at these verses.

The first thing is, we shouldn't treat this, as an allegory, it's an illustration. So we shouldn't look at, everything that Paul says, and think, this has some kind of, direct application, over to my situation. In particular, if you think through, what Paul's writing about, he talks about a wife, whose husband dies, and she's free, from the law of marriage. And then he goes on, to talk about us dying, and being free, to be related to Christ.

So it's the person, who's died now, rather than the person, who's still alive, that is in the relationship. Paul isn't making a mistake, or getting muddled here, he's just using, a simple illustration, and then taking something, on from it.

[11:10] Second thing, I think we need, to be careful about, is this is not, Paul expounding, everything you need, to know about marriage. He's just using, a simple illustration, and in particular, he's not saying, anything about divorce.

The Lord Jesus, gives us teaching, on divorce, and particularly divorce, is valid in the case of, where there's been, unfaithfulness, in the marriage. Paul is not, in any way, contradicting that. He's giving us, a general principle, that applies to marriage. He's not trying, to give us, all the details, and all the rules, that might apply. Having said that, what does his illustration, teach us? So Paul says, when you're married, you're married, for life. And the way, we put it these days, you're married, for better, for worse. Some of us are blessed, with happy marriages, and with wonderful spouses, with all of our moments, but generally, our marriage is very happy.

Other people, marriages are not, so happy. And marriage, can become, a real burden. Perhaps the person, you married, changes. Or perhaps, you realize, you made a mistake, at the beginning, and they weren't quite, the person, you thought, they were.

[12:24] And that is very sad, when that happens, but it doesn't break down, the basic principle, that marriage, is for life. Now, if we expand a little on that, we can imagine, Paul thinking here, about a woman, who's gotten to a marriage, that has turned out, to be quite unhappy.

It's turned out, to be quite unhappy, because her husband, is so demanding. He's telling her, all sorts of things, that she has to do, and can't do, and she finds it, a real burden.

She just can't do, anything that seems, to please him. However hard she tries, she falls short, and she's not able, to give him, the satisfaction, that she really, would like to.

Paul says, that person, in the marriage, which in many ways, is unhappy, if the husband, should then die, she's freed, from the marriage, no doubt, mourning her husband, but at the same time, perhaps feeling, liberated, by the fact, that she's free, herself now, and particularly, if she finds someone else, she falls in love with, she's free to marry them.

Marriage, is for life, but when one partner dies, the other partner, is free, to marry again. Again, very obvious, and in many ways, quite straightforward.

[13:40] So Paul then, applies that. So verse 4, is key to the passage here. So Paul says to us, the law, is like, a married partner to us, or was to him, and to the other Jews.

While the law, still applied, while both were, alive if you like, they had to try, to obey the law, and to satisfy its demands, even knowing, that they never actually, could do it.

Because the demands, of the law, were so strong, and so, against our natural, inclinations, it was, impossible, to be completely, obedient, to the law.

But says Paul, there's been a death. And the death, is not of the law, that the law, has changed, in that sense. The death, is of me, as a Christian.

That as Paul, is explained in chapter 6, and comes elsewhere, in the New Testament, when we become a Christian, it is as if, we died, with Christ. Now obviously, we didn't literally die, with Christ, with his body, or on the cross.

[14 : 51] But nevertheless, Paul says, we have died, to the law, and grace, he says, I've been crucified, with Christ, nevertheless I live, not I, but Christ lives in me. And he says, now, you have died in Christ, you have been raised in Christ, and we came across that, in chapter 6.

So you now belong, to Christ. You don't belong, to the law, you're not subject, to the law, you belong to Christ, and because you belong, to Christ, you can bear fruit, for God.

You are able, to do what is right, and pleasing to God, and what is really helpful, to others as well, and will help them, in their Christian life, or help them, to come to know, God, for themselves.

You've died, to the law, you're alive, in Christ, and now, your allegiance is to Christ, not to try and do, the letter of the law, to do exactly, what the Old Testament law said, but to please Christ, and to live, for him.

And so, that is the new reality, that we read about, in verses 5, and 6. So, Paul says, when we are, my verse says, in the realm of the flesh, or in our sinful nature, and, the sinful passions, that the law aroused, were working us, so, we saw the law, we saw what we had to do, and we didn't do it.

[16 : 11] Because our sinful nature, is so opposed, to what the law demanded, we just couldn't keep it, we couldn't, please God, through it. But now, now, we've died, to what once bound us, we've died, to the law, and we've been released, from the law, so that we serve, in the spirit.

And we serve, not because we have to, because that is the thing, that is going to, bring us, forgiveness from God, or make us please God, and be saved through it.

We serve, because we want to, because the Holy Spirit, and our love for Jesus, and our desire, to do what he wants us to do, helps us to do, what is right, rather than to do, what was wrong, as we used to, in the past.

The law is good, but it brings out the bad, in us. We have been freed, says Paul, from the law, by our faith, in the Lord Jesus. And because of that, we are able, to serve God, and to please him, and to live, for him.

Now what does that mean, for us? Let's talk, for a little bit, about, me, and the law. And I said, at the beginning, for most of us, that the law of Moses, isn't something, that's on our minds.

[17 : 29] We don't spend our days, going through, Leviticus, and Numbers, and saying, am I doing exactly, what the law says here? Am I being obedient, to it? Of course we don't.

So from that point of view, the law that Paul, talks about, isn't directly, relevant to us. And yet, it's not true, either, to say, that we have, no standards.

That there is nothing, that should guide us, and direct us, in our, Christian lives. Although we may say, the law of the Old Testament, no longer, binds us.

As we read, through the New Testament, we find that, many of the things, almost all of the commandments, in the Old Testament, are repeated, in one form or another, for Christians.

Because they are good, they represent to us, God's way of living, and how we should live, for one another, and particularly, for the Lord Jesus.

[18 : 27] And so, if we are thinking about, the law, and how it applies to us, let's think about, what we might do, that is good, that is in keeping, with what God, wants us to do, and what our attitude, to that is.

So, first attitude, might be what I've called, guilty legalism. We might say, I see what the Bible, says, I see the kind of instructions, that God gives us here, I know in my heart, a lot of what's right, and what's wrong, and I need to do right, so that I can earn, God's forgiveness, and have a relationship, with him.

I need to try, really hard, to do my best, so that, I can win, God's favor. I've called it, guilty legalism, because if we do that, we're going to fail.

As all the people, in the Old Testament, fails, and we have this long, catalogue, of the failures of Israel, as we read through, the Old Testament. If we have the same, kind of attitude, and we think, I must do, certain things, and if I do them, I will please God, and everything, will be all right, we're going to fail, because we just, can't do it.

We're going to end up, full of guilt, and full of remorse, and wondering, what can we possibly do, that will put things, right. Trying to please God, through our own efforts, and to win our way, to heaven, is not at all, what the Bible, teaches us.

[20 : 05] Second aspect, we might have, is what I've called, false liberty. So we've got this chap, we're sitting back, in his chair, and saying, I love this grace thing. Because I'm a Christian, because Jesus has, taken all my sins, on the cross, I can do what I like, I don't need to worry, at all about God's command, or what God wants me to do, it's all forgiven, I'm okay.

And Paul, I think makes very clear, in these chapters, in Romans, that we're looking at, that that is a, totally false attitude. If we have experienced, the grace of God, in our lives, if we have come, to the Lord Jesus, and trusted him, for salvation, and for forgiveness, from sins.

We don't want, to be keeping, doing all the wrong things, that we know, are grieving to God. These things, have led to the Lord Jesus, being nailed to the cross, and suffering, that awful death, for us, and being separated, from his father, as he bore our sins.

We don't want, to be continuing, with that. We want, to be doing, what pleases him, and to live, better lives. And frankly, if we take the attitude, I can do what I like now, because my sins, are forgiven, we haven't begun, to understand, God's grace, or what it means, to be a Christian.

Being a Christian, isn't all about, doing what I like, and ignoring, what God might want me to do. It is about, obedience, but obedience, because, we want to.

[21 : 38] That's the final thing, in the application here, that there should be, in us, a joyful, obedience. It should be like, that situation, I was talking about, where I had, the person who was running, the project, and he trusted me, and he let me get on, with things, and I was really pleased, with that, and I did my best, because I wanted, to please him, as well as to, do good for the company.

If we truly know, the Lord Jesus, if our trust is in him, then we serve him, and we do what is right, not because we have to, because we're looking, at the letter of the law, and what it says, in the Bible, saying have I got that right, have I got that wrong?

We're doing it, because we want, to please Jesus, we recognize, all that he's done, for us, and we want, to be like him. This person, who came into our world, son of God, living among us, lived a perfect life, taught so many, wonderful things, helped so many people, ultimately died on the cross, for our sins, and rose again.

If we know him, and we love him, we want to serve him, and we want to become, like him. That's what we're thinking, next week, none of us, is going to become, perfect, in this world, we still are subject, to sin, we still have that, desire for sin, that's in us.

But nevertheless, our lives, should be being transformed, by the power, of the Holy Spirit, as we seek, to become more, and more like Christ, and to obey him, and to do it, not grudgingly, not because, we feel bound, by it, but to do it, because we love him, and because, we have a real, joy, in him.

[23 : 23] The message, of the gospel, the Christian message, is that we can't, save ourselves, what we do, doesn't, save us. We don't, become Christians, by doing our best, and by hoping, that that's, good enough.

We're saved, by God's grace, by the death, of the Lord Jesus, by putting our trust, in him, and seeking, to follow him, and to live, and then, to live, for him.

But it's the grace, that comes first, the forgiveness, for Jesus, and then, the following. It's not that, our obedience, leads to salvation, rather the salvation, that we have, through the Lord Jesus, should lead us, to be obedient, and to follow him.

So the challenge, this morning, I guess, for everyone here, first challenge is, have you experienced, that grace, of the Lord Jesus? Are you trying, to do it all, for yourself, or have you come, to recognize, that it is only, through Jesus, through his death, on the cross, that we can have, forgiveness, and a relationship, with God, and then go on, to serve him?

And if you do know Jesus, if you have, trusted him, where are you today? Are you still, trying, to obey laws, because you have to, and have a real, difficulty, in your Christian life, because you're, constantly, worrying about guilt, and are you keeping, the particular laws, that you, I think, are important?

[24 : 53] Or have you, gone the other extreme, and think, well I'll just do, what I like, and I won't bother, about God, or about his law? For the Christian, we should have, that same kind of joy, in the law, that the psalmist had, but joy not, in keeping, the letter of the law, but in having, the spirit in us, helping us, to obey, and to become, like Jesus, and to represent, him, to others.

Started with the, situation from work, perhaps I should tell you, how it ended, I had that job, for about a year, and then someone, who was a bit more powerful, changed things, from my boss's boss, recognized that, it wasn't working out, for me, or for probably, for my boss either, and he decided, move me on, to something, that was more, appropriate, for me, where I could, do better, and could be encouraged, in my work.

He took me out, of that situation, and put me, into a better, situation. That's exactly, what God, does for us, when we come to Jesus.

He takes us, out of the situation, where we're stuck, with our sin, and perhaps we're, trying to do good, but failing in it. He puts us, in a new position, where we have a real, living relationship, with Jesus, like a marriage relationship, if you like, in the love, and the care, that is there.

And in that relationship, we're able to do well, and to flourish, but we do it, not because we have to, but because we want to, we want to please Jesus, and to be obedient, to him.

[26 : 28] Let's pray, to all of us, have that relationship, with Jesus, that salvation, that comes through him, and have a real joy, in our Christian lives, as we seek to serve him, and live for him. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you, for your word, to us this morning. We recognize, that some of these, pastors and Romans, are quite difficult, and in some ways, quite obscure to us, in situations, that perhaps, aren't directly applicable.

But we thank you, that your word, is always valuable, and helpful to us. And we thank you, that you do give us, the opportunity, to experience your grace, through the Lord Jesus, through his death, on the cross for us, and then joyfully, to live for him, and to seek to serve him, and to please him.

We pray that all of us, will come to know him, if we haven't already, and then may be able, to serve him, and to live well, for him. We pray now, you'll be with us, as we move into a time, of communion, as we thank you, particularly of all, that the Lord Jesus, has done for us.

Help us truly, to worship him, and to give you, our praise for him. We give you thanks, in Jesus name. Amen.