

The Law and Sin

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 June 2019

Preacher: Euan Dodds

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, and let me say, as always, what a pleasure it is to be here and to have fellowship with you this morning. If you have your Bible, it would be great to have it open at Romans chapter 7, which was read so well for us there.

Thank you for that. I wonder if you ever take a detour, if you're making a journey. We were driving a few weeks ago down to Northumbria, and we drove the A1, and we saw a sign for St. Ab's.

Now, I've never been to St. Ab's. I'd never actually heard of St. Ab's until I saw something on the BBC website a few weeks ago that it's been twinned with New Asgard from the Avengers movie.

There were some scenes from Avengers Endgame, apparently. I haven't seen it, but filmed in St. Ab's, and the locals have made much of this, and they've got a sign saying, twinned with New Asgard, and what have you.

So we thought, well, let's go and have a look at this. And we were delighted, not only to find that there were no evil aliens, but that it was a beautiful fishing town. And so we took a detour, and we were greatly blessed by the detour.

[1 : 1 3] And really, what we have in Romans chapter 7, verses 7 to 25, is something of a detour. It's something of an excursus the apostle Paul makes in the flow of the book.

He speaks about the old life under the law, and then into chapter 8, he'll talk about the new life into the spirit. But we have these verses, chapter 7, 7 down to 25, and they seem to interrupt the flow of thought from between 7, 6 and 8, 1.

In fact, if you read chapter 7, verse 6, you can go straight on and read chapter 8, verse 1. But Paul interrupts his argument and introduces this subject here.

So we want to ask the question, why he does that, and then what does he actually say in these verses? This is, I have to be honest, one of the most challenging passages in the New Testament.

One of the commentaries I read said this is one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament. Martin Lloyd-Jones, if you read his commentary, has an entire chapter just about who the person in Romans chapter 7 actually is.

[2 : 2 1] And I have to confess I was a little bit anxious about approaching this. So a couple of weeks ago I sat down to lunch with a friend who's got a PhD in Pauline theology, who's taught New Testament all around the world, and I said, I'm speaking in Romans chapter 7 at Brunsfield in a couple of weeks.

And he went, tricky. And that was it. So what we're going to do is we're going to take a sort of long run up, and we're going to do what you do in school, in maths, when you're not sure of the answer, you show you're working, and you hope the teacher will give you some credit for the working, even if your conclusion isn't right.

Firstly, we're in the book of Romans. Thank you, Euan, for pointing that out. You're studying Romans, and particularly Romans chapter 5, I believe through to verse 8 in your series, The Christian Life.

Romans chapter 5 to verse 8 is bookended by the subject of suffering and glory. Chapter 5, verses 2 and 3. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and we rejoice in our sufferings.

Romans chapter 8, verse 18. I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

[3 : 40] So the Christian life is a life that will be characterized by suffering in the here and now and glory in the age to come. We live in this age, but we are people of the age to come, and therefore it's not unusual if in your Christian life you are facing trials and temptations of many kinds.

We're often taught that as Christians we are to be victorious, we are more than conquerors, and all that is true, but we will suffer before we enter the glory that is to come. And in Romans chapter 5 through to verse 8, there are a series of contrasts we'll consider.

In chapter 6, we have the contrast of life outside of Christ and life in Christ. In Adam, all die. In Christ, all shall be made alive.

In Adam, we are under sin. In Christ, we are under grace. In Adam, we receive the wages of death. In Christ, the wages of eternal life.

There are two men, two heads of humanity. And we do well to ask ourselves, well, which one am I under? Am I in Adam or am I in Christ?

[4 : 54] Christ comes to us offering the forgiveness of sins, offering new life in his Holy Spirit, offering eternal life. And he says, make your choice. Whose footsteps will you follow?

When I drove here today, it was a bit of a round trip for various reasons. And I passed a lot of churches. A lot of churches open up. People going into churches, which is wonderful. You're in church this morning, but are you in Christ?

Have you committed yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, turning from sin, turning to him, and then accepting him as your Lord, your master and friend?

So there is suffering before glory. There are two humanities. There is the humanity in Adam, the humanity in Christ. But now, chapter 6 tells us that we are free from sin.

In Christ, we are forgiven and we are free. Chapter 6, verse 10, you have died to sin. Chapter 6, verse 18, you have been set free from sin. There is a change of employer, a change of master.

[6 : 00] No longer are we slaves to sin. Now we are slaves to God and to righteousness. And when we get to chapter 7, and I listened to the very helpful sermon last week by our brother Ian, Paul moves to speak about the law, the law of Moses.

And this is a major topic in Paul's writings. It was a major issue in the first century, because the church consisted of Jews and of Gentiles.

And the debate of that generation was, what is the relationship of the law of Moses to the gospel of Jesus Christ? And that provides the backdrop to so much of the New Testament, so much of the Acts of the Apostles, so much of Paul's writing, among others.

I think it was Martin Luther who said, if anybody wants to be a theologian, they must seek to understand the relationship of the law to the gospel. And Paul seeks to explain something of that relationship here.

He's already explained, beginning at chapter 2, that we are not justified by the law. We are not declared righteous in God's sight by our own observation of the law.

[7 : 14] Romans chapter 3, verse 20. For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. And in chapter 7, beginning at verse 1, he says that as Christians, we are no longer under the law.

We have died to the law. We have been set free from the law. The same language he was using of sin in chapter 6. And instead of being under the law, he will go on to argue in chapter 8 that we are now in the Spirit.

Today is Pentecost, when the Lord first sent the Holy Spirit from heaven. And as Christians, we live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And Paul will next week, you'll probably see this more clearly, draw out that contrast between being under the law and being in the Spirit.

And as we go into chapter 7, therefore, I want you to have that contrast in your minds. And it's particularly spelt out at the end of the passage we studied last week.

Chapter 7, verse 5. When we were controlled by the sinful nature, literally the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit to death.

[8 : 27] But now, by dying to what once bound us, we've 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. So I just want you to hold those verses in your mind.

This week and into next, chapter 7, verse 5 is really a summary of our passage today. Chapter 7, verse 6 is something of a summary of what you'll study next week in Romans chapter 8.

It's like two sides of a coin where Paul describes the experience, firstly, of life under the law and then secondly, of life in the Spirit. Why then do we have this detour?

Why then, from verse 7, does Paul introduce this parenthesis? And I think the reason is to reassure people that actually the law of God, the law given to Moses, the moral law, the Ten Commandments, are God's good gift to humanity.

He's told them that they've died to sin, they're set free from sin. And we think, well, that's wonderful because sin's a ghastly thing, isn't it? It's a terrible, toxic, radioactive thing in our life that wants to destroy us and our relationships and harm us.

[9 : 40] And so we're glad to be dead to sin. We're glad to be freed from sin. But people might say, well, Paul, you're telling us that we've died to the law, that we've been set free from the law.

Are you saying that the law itself is a ghastly thing? And Paul says, no. The law was given to Israel by God. In chapter 9, verse 4, where he says of the great privileges of the Jewish people, theirs is the adoption to sonship, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.

So the law is good. It's not able to save us or sanctify us, but the law is God's good gift to his people. Okay, so that's by means of introduction.

So what I want to do now is just to look at this passage in two halves. Firstly, verse 7 down to verse 13, we'll consider the law and sin and death. And then verse 14 to the end, we'll think of the law, our sinful nature, and our disobedience.

So verse 7, chapter 7. And what Paul seems to say here is a principle we see worked out in different spheres of life.

[10 : 53] So I live next to a bowling club. I have joined the bowling club. I've not been asked to play for the firsts in the bowling club, but who knows, one day.

But recently, the bowling club had a problem because there's a fox in our street, and every morning the fox was digging up the green. And if you bowl, you'll know how obsessional bowlers are about the green, and how difficult it is to bowl if there's a giant hole in the centre of it, and your bowls keep dropping into the hole.

And so the bowling club set up an electric fence. And they did it over a weekend, and it's just a thin wire, and it has a sign saying, electric fence, do not touch, and a picture of somebody being electrocuted in a ghastly way.

And on the first day of the bowling season, we all turned up, and do you know what everybody was doing? They were touching the electric fence. The sign said, do not touch, and they all wanted to touch it. And that's what Paul is saying here.

It's sin seizing the opportunity, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. Sin seems to come to life in the face of the law. He says a number of things.

[12 : 01] He says, firstly, that the law reveals our sin. It shows us God's character and his standards. In a sense, it shows us his holiness and our sinfulness.

One of the great reformed confessions of faith says this, although believers are not under the law, it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly, discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives.

The law tells us what is wrong. I parked in Broughton Street a couple of weeks ago to buy a steak pie. I went to the machine. The machine didn't accept my money. I thought, happy days.

I'm outside the parking restrictions. I bought the pie. I was delighted. I sat down in the car. There was a parking ticket on the windscreen. And I got out the car and there was a chef from a local restaurant. He said, if you'd read the sign, you wouldn't have got the parking ticket.

The law reveals our sin. We might not realize anything is wrong until we look at the law of God. Paul did not realize coveting, being jealous of others was wrong until God's word told him so.

[13 : 18] And that's often the case, isn't it? We can live outside of Christ and we just go with the flow. We just live like everybody else. We don't think there's a problem with drinking to excess.

We don't think there's a problem with gossiping or slandering people in your workplace or telling crude jokes. We don't think there's a problem living together with someone without being married. And yet when we come to God's word, we begin to recognize that these things fall short of the glory of God and the Lord has something better in mind for us.

The law reveals where we fall short. And that was the habit of John Wesley, you know, the 18th century preacher who traveled around and preached all through the United Kingdom.

And he would go to a town and begin to preach in the open air. And he explained to somebody with a marvelous name, he wrote a letter to somebody called Ebenezer Blackwell, and I had to double take.

I thought it was Ebenezer Blackadder, but it's an old letter and Ebenezer Blackwell. And he explained how he uses the law and the proclamation of the gospel. John Wesley said this, I think the right method of preaching is this, after a general declaration of the love of God to sinners and his willingness that they should be saved, to preach the law in the strongest, the closest, the most searching manner possible, after more and more persons have convinced of sin, we may mix more and more of the gospel in order to beget faith, to raise unto spiritual life those whom the law hath reign.

[14 : 54] So John Wesley realized that if people are to come to Christ, the friend of sinners, they need to be shown their sin. And he said, well, the law of God shows us their sin. The law that tells us that stealing is wrong, deception, lying is wrong, coveting is wrong.

The law reveals sin. But secondly, the law provokes sin, verses 8 to 12. The world laughs about sin and considers it just a bit of fun.

But Paul says it's deadly serious. Sin is aroused by the law, it springs to life, and it kills him. Verse 11, sin seized the opportunity, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

There is something in us, in our sinful nature, that wants to break God's law. Because sin is a rebellion against God when we come up against God's law and his claims in our life, we want to push against it, we want to rebel against it.

If you've ever been to hospital for an MRI scan, you'll know that they're very particular that you don't have any metal work on your body. You take out your earrings or whatever it is, your watch.

[16:10] And the reason is the magnetic scan, the MRI scan, is a gigantic magnet and it creates an enormous magnetic field. And if there's anything internally made of metal, it'll pull it out and cause all sorts of damage.

Apologies there, I should have given you a warning. But Paul is saying it's a bit like that with sin and the law. We have this sinful nature and when it comes into the presence of God's law, it's sort of aroused and activated and it begins to act and move within us and to cause terrible harm in our lives.

The law provokes sin but is itself holy and the commandment good. I suppose an analogy of that would be adolescence, teenager, difficult time.

I recall being a teenager a long time ago now, but it was a difficult time and there was always that pressure, wasn't there, to break the law. You're told that you're not allowed to drink till you're 18 or smoke till you're 16 or drive a car till you're 17 and even then under the speed limit.

And yet people always wanted to do these things, to break the law, to do things they weren't to do. So it is with sin and God's law. The law comes, the magnet is switched on and our sin is awoken and seeks to be provoked into life.

[17:30] So the law reveals our sin. The law provokes our sin and finally, verse 13, the law condemns our sin in order that sin might be recognized as sin it produced death in me through hope was good so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

God declares his verdict on sin through his law. And so it's not a pretty picture. Chapter 7, verse 11 really summarizes this relationship of the law to sin and death.

Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the law, deceived me and through the commandment put me to death. We think of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve in their innocence, sin entering the world, deception, the serpent deceiving them into sin and through his deception death came to all.

Sin seizes the opportunity to deceive us and to put us to death. We need to remember that, don't we, if we're tempted, particularly if we're tempted into falling to very serious or public sin.

Sin promises very great things and yet it doesn't deliver. Sin promises joy and brings us sorrow. It plays us for a fool.

[18:51] The evil one wants to deceive us and then to see us die. The law reveals sin. The law provokes sin and the law condemns sin, showing it to be utterly sinful.

And so that seems to be what Paul is getting at in verses 7 down to verse 13. And as we enter verse 14, we come to the second part, this much disputed part of the letter.

And what happens here is Paul seems to move to speaking about himself in the first person instead of talking about past tense, he starts to speak of himself in the present tense.

And the great dispute therefore is, is Paul talking about his life before he was a Christian, as a Jewish believer seeking to keep the law, or is Paul speaking of his present experience as a Christian, somebody seeking to glorify God and yet battling with sin?

There is a story told of Alexander White who was the minister in what is now Charlotte Chapel, it was St Andrew's West in Shandwick Place there. And he was a very famous preacher in Edinburgh back in the day and he was friendly with a Christian publisher.

[20 : 06] And whenever a commentary on Romans was published, they would inform Alexander White, he would come and have a look and he would turn to Romans chapter 7 verse 14 and he said if the person describes Paul before he is converted, I close the book and I put it back on the shelf.

And he was very decided in his own mind what the right answer was. I would say we have to be a little bit more humble than that. There are lots of people who would argue this is Paul's experience when he was unregenerate, before he was a Christian, as he sought to live by the law.

There are others who would say this is Paul the regenerate man, Paul the Christian struggling as we all struggle in the Christian life. There are great and godly people on both sides of that debate.

And there's a very helpful summary of both sides of it. In fact, the Gospel Coalition website, they invited John Piper and Tom Schreiner to godly New Testament scholar and preacher to give their side of the debate.

And if you're interested, perhaps you could read that after lunch. But suffice to say, what I'm going to do today is to try and explore that a little bit and then present my own conclusion, which thankfully is the same as John Stott's.

[21 : 18] And I'm going to hide a little bit, therefore, behind John Stott. But what we want to see is as Paul describes his experience in these verses, there's a lot of repetition. He really says the same thing twice, 14 to 18, and then 19 to 24.

The nub of it is that Paul wants to do what is right, but he has not the ability to carry it out. He delights in the law of God and yet is captive to the law of sin that dwells among his members.

Verse 15, I do not do what I want to do, but the very thing I hate. Verse 20, now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

There is this tension, this conflict in his writing. Those who say this is a regenerate person, that this is Paul as a Christian, have to reckon with the language he uses of himself.

Could someone who's a Christian say, well, I'm of the flesh, I'm sold under sin, I'm captive to the law of sin, I'm a wretched man, and they say, well, that's not true of the believer, and so this must be Paul's experience before he was a Christian.

[22 : 26] But others would say, well, could the unregenerate person, could the person still living in sin say, I delight in my mind and the law of God? Do we not rebel instead against the law of God?

So there are long and interesting debates on either side. But what I want to do is just read to you what John Stott says, and I want to try and persuade you that I think that's where he's coming from.

I'm not going to be dogmatic about this. You know, if you want to talk over lunch, we can talk over lunch, but I think what we'll find is whatever our interpretation, the application is in the main the same, and that's important to us.

But John Stott says this, the three salient features of the person portrayed in these verses are that he or she loves the law and therefore is regenerate, is still a slave of sin and therefore is not a liberated Christian and knows nothing of the Holy Spirit and therefore is not a New Testament believer.

who then is this extraordinary person? It seems accurate to describe pre-Pentecost believers in terms of love for the law but lack of the Spirit and he goes on to explain what that might mean.

[23 : 38] So, let me explain a little bit. When Paul went to Ephesus, he found believers, didn't he, who knew the baptism of John and he said, have you received the Holy Spirit? And they said, we didn't even know there was a Holy Spirit.

They'd been taught by Apollos who knew only the name of Jesus. And there seems to be in the first century church therefore these earnest, these God-fearing Jewish people who knew the law and desired to serve the Lord and yet were unable to do so because of their sin.

They had not yet been born again, liberated, cleansed by the Holy Spirit. And it's perhaps that kind of person that Paul has in mind, somebody who delights like the psalmist, who delights in the law of God but is impotent to keep that law because of their sin.

And I think the argument for that is that in Romans chapter 7 there is no mention of the work of the Holy Spirit in this person's life whether it's Paul or whether he's dramatizing somebody else's speech.

There is no mention of the Spirit. That has to wait until chapter 8. So does this therefore represent an earlier period in somebody's life where while they're struggling with sin, they're convicted of sin but they haven't yet come to newness of life in Christ.

[24 : 52] And chapter 8 as you'll go on to see talks about the contrast between these two ways of living. Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what the flesh or the sinful nature desires but those who live in accordance with their spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

So Romans chapter 7 talks as we've considered of the law of sin and death. Romans chapter 8 talks about the law of the Spirit of life. And there is the contrast therefore between living in the flesh and living according to the Holy Spirit.

And I think the reason these passages in chapter 7 resonate so much with us and people say well Paul's obviously talking as a Christian is because that is so often our experience isn't it?

As Christians we want to know the Lord we want to love the Lord and grow in our faith we want to obey Him because of our love for Him and yet so often we find ourselves falling back into sinful ways and patterns of behaviour.

[26 : 01] The Christian life is as Romans 8 will go on to tell you next week a struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The Christian life is a battle. Paul speaks of the Christian life the good fight of faith.

We battle against the world with its competing ideologies that deny the Lord. We battle against the devil with his supernatural opposition to the kingdom of God and we battle against the flesh seeking to draw us back into the ways of sin.

Elsewhere Paul says in Galatians the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. So we see that don't we?

In different ways in our lives we see it perhaps most clearly in those believers who are battling addiction trying to give up smoking trying to give up drinking trying to give up drugs eagerly desiring to be free to be dry to be clean and yet repeatedly falling back into the old ways.

We see it in our speech I would love to say kind encouraging wise things to everyone I meet that so often we fall back don't we into cynicism sarcasm slander gossip it would be great to be able to exercise self-control eating or drinking but you know we go to somebody's house and the cakes just look so delicious and we keep going back for more and more or when we drive past the fast food outlet and the tummy begins to rumble we just oh I just don't want to do it and yet I do it maybe you want to cut down how long you spend on the internet what you look at on the internet the hours perhaps playing addictive video games and yet when you're a bit tired or feeling a bit low after a hard hit college or the office you find yourself being drawn back to the screen I want to stop being so angry and yet time and again I just find myself losing my rag I want to stop being so ungrateful and coveting what other people have their homes their lifestyle their relationships their possessions

[28 : 11] I just want to be content as a Christian and yet again and again I find myself being bitter and jealous and disappointed every day in the Christian life is a conflict between the flesh and the spirit and I think that's why people see that conflict in Romans chapter 7 and they say well that's Paul's experience and I don't doubt that it was Paul's experience but I think what we understand as the spiritual struggle is the struggle of Romans chapter 8 and not necessarily the struggle of Romans 7 a sort of God-fearing Jew eagerly desiring to keep the law and yet finding that he cannot and therefore instead needing to call out for Christ who will deliver him from his body of death but it's good to be aware of that struggle as Paul was aware of that struggle maybe you're here as a new Christian maybe a student or a young adult maybe you've come up through the dime club and you've been told that it's a wonderful thing to be a Christian and it is and you've come to faith and you've come to appreciate the love of God in your life to know a newfound peace to know a joy in your circumstances and yet very quickly you run into trouble and difficulty and there's trial and there's temptation and there's testing and you think well I didn't recognize this was going to happen and yet the New Testament is very honest that as we seek to live by the Spirit of God we also have to put to death the deeds of the flesh and we will battle temptations and sins and harmful patterns of behavior until Christ comes to take us home maybe you're a mature Christian

I'm sure many of you have been walking with the Lord for many many decades perhaps longer than I've even been alive and you know as a mature Christian you've been fighting sin and there's been victories in your life and there are some things you've laid to rest and yet there are other things other patterns of behavior thought or speech or deeds that just seem to linger that seem to be besetting sins thorns driven into your flesh and maybe you feel like the Apostle Paul who will rescue me from this body of death and the good news of the Gospel is that Christ will come to rescue us we live between his first and his second appearing one day the old order will be done away with sin and the law and death and we will enter into life which is truly life we sang that hymn at the start come o fount of every blessing one of my favorite hymns and one of the versions has those words on that day when freed from sinning we will see his glorious face and we often think of heaven don't we as an end to suffering you know and be able to do away with all the sort of medical things we need and the pain and the disease and the discomfort and yet it's also a day when we will do away with sinning and we will be able to stand before the Lord and gaze on his face and worship him without hindrance with complete obedience giving to him all of our worship and our praise what a wonderful thing that will be wonderful worship this morning wasn't it but we get distracted and you know

I think have I put money in the parking meter or our minds wander and yet on that day when freed from sinning we will see his glorious face what a wonderful thing to look forward to and in the meantime of course we have his promise that he will continue to renovate us to make us holy to cleanse us and to bear patiently with us as we battle sin as we seek to sow to the spirit not to sow to the flesh the Lord wants to transform us doesn't he he wants to conform us to his image we don't just sit here waiting for heaven he is doing a work in us to make us a people of pure speech to make us his holy and treasured possession in all the earth but it's not easy and it can be painful and there can be growing pains in the Christian life as we face that battle and endure that struggle but if you've been in the fight for a long time keep going and be encouraged by Paul's words there is no condemnation because the spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death well Paul wants us to understand that and I think that's the reason for this detour these verses deep rich wonderful verses

Paul wants to remind us that God graciously gave the law to Israel to show them their sin and to show them their need of salvation and yet because of their sin they chose to disobey against his law as we disobey his law and his commands and he wanted to show us our own impotence in keeping the law even if we delight in the law and desire in our own strength to serve God we cannot do it because of this sin in our hearts and therefore we are taken to Christ to call out for Christ to look to him on his cross at Calvary and having been slain by the law to be lifted up and exalted by the gospel to be forgiven of our sin to be filled as the believers were filled that first Pentecost with his Holy Spirit and to begin that new life to run that race to fight that fight Paul teaches us about the law and sin and death so that we might come to Christ and understand his love and receive his spirit and look forward to that great deliverance that will one day be ours deliverance from this body of death this body of sin deliverance from the old order and the way things were he wants us to see the seriousness of sin but the salvation of our God well we thank the Lord for his word and for the Apostle Paul who just communicated these things to us let's just pray together

Father we thank you that you have such great ambition for us you want to purify our hearts that we might be holy oh that your son has gone to prepare a place for us that we might dwell with you forever to gaze upon your face on that day when free from sinning we shall see your glorious face and to serve you wholeheartedly throughout all eternity Lord we thank you for your great honesty in your word that the Christian life is a battle but that you have given to us your very great and precious promises you strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and you encourage us Lord through your word and through our times of fellowship so Lord would you continue that good work in us that good work begun in us that you will carry on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus help us to be holy

[35 : 40] Lord to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to keep in step with your spirit not bearing fruit for death but bearing the fruit of your Holy Spirit love and joy and peace and all the other fruit in our daily conduct and in our daily conversation so we thank you for our time this morning we thank you for the opportunity to worship you and to encourage one another in Christ's name Amen