

Theme: **Reforming our lives to God's Word means being released from the Law**

Text: Romans 7: 1 – 25

Season: 10th Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 13, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let God work in your life, from God our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“How do they expect me to get this done?” Have you ever said something like that? You might have said something like that the last time you tried to figure out your taxes or filed an insurance claim or worked through some other complicated form. Or perhaps you said something like that as you were trying to complete some assignment at work or a job you took on here at the church! All of us become exasperated or frustrated when we feel compelled to complete some task that seems beyond our resources. This is especially true when we feel that the burden thrust upon us is unfair.

So, what about all the demands of God's Law? Have you ever felt that God is asking the impossible of you? Perhaps not, because you have always known of and lived under God's Grace. But that's not true of everyone. Some people today think they have to keep God's laws if they are going to enjoy God's favor and blessings. Perhaps you know someone like that, people who say, when asked about their salvation or life after death, “I'm trying to live as good of a life as I can.” For such people the burden of God's Laws can be heavy. They may feel weighted down with guilt, or they may be in real doubt about whether they will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. They may even feel resentment and anger against God because of the demands he has placed upon them.

The Apostle Paul's message to us in chapter 7 of Romans is about that struggle we all are having with our sinful nature as we are confronted by God's Law. The Apostle Paul is talking about his own struggles with God's Law since becoming a Christian and some of them are struggles that He is still experiencing even as he writes this letter to us and shares the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world.

If you remember last week the Apostle Paul talked about the fact that because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been set free from sin. We are no longer under the control of our sinful nature and because of that we have died to sin with Christ and have been given a new life with Christ to be His servants instead of a servant of our sinful nature. Well today we move on to talk about how we are freed from the Law of God.

But wait a minute; didn't God give us His laws so that we would know how to be His people? When God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and to Mt. Sinai, they were struggling to understand who this God was, who had created all the world and brought them out of slavery. There, from the top of Mt. Sinai, God asked them, "Do you want to be my people?" They responded by saying with one voice, "Yes, we want to be God's people, but Moses please have God speak to us through you and not to us directly, because it is to frightening!" So, God spoke to His people, through Moses and through all the prophets and apostle as they wrote down God's Words for us in the Bible and that started with His Laws, didn't it? I don't know about each of you but I want to be closer to God, I don't want to be freed from God's Laws or do I?

Well here is one of those confusing points that many people have about God and being His people that the Apostle Paul is trying to explain to us today. The Apostle Paul tells us in chapter 7, **"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. ⁶But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."** (Rom 7:5-6)

Now we have been released from God's Law that brings us to death, because of our sins against God, He has sent His Only Son, Jesus Christ to fulfill all the requirements of the Law by His perfect life in this world. Jesus faced all the same temptations from the devil and this sin filled world that we do. By Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary He paid for all our sins and by His Life, after His resurrection on the third day, He has given us a new life freed from the Law so that we can be obedient Children of God guided by God's love, peace and joy.

So, then what is the purpose of God's Laws in our lives? Well first off God's laws act like a Police officer, which is God's Laws keeps our sinful nature in check so that it wouldn't get into trouble that would lead us to death. For example, the Laws of God are like the police officer stationed along 285, enforcing the highway regulations. The police officer is not there to cause you harm but there to help you in case you have problems, but when you are speeding down the road at a speed that isn't safe or if you are doing things with your car that could cause harm to other's He will pull you over and give you a ticket for doing something against the Laws set down by the governing forces that we have set up to determine the driving standards of that road.

God's laws are do the same thing, they show us the limits of our sinful nature that will cause us to fall away from being His people, that is those who want to live with Him now and for all eternity. The Apostle Paul says it this way, **'What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."**' (Rom 7: 7)

We all know that traveling too fast down the road will cause us to lose control of our car and cause us to crash into someone else or into a rock wall or a tree, which could kill us and others, but I must admit I am constantly finding myself go a little faster than the speed limit because I am in a hurry to get to where I want to be or I am late for some appointment or meeting. If the highways signs didn't tell me that the safe speed is 55 miles per hour I wouldn't know what the safe speed is to travel on the road and I would be involved in more accidents and yet because there is a speed limit sign I am constantly trying to go a little faster to see if I can get by with traveling faster without getting into an accident.

That's the way God's Laws work in our live. God's laws are there to show us how to live safely in God's Love, Peace and Joy and not fall into the traps of the devil, the world and our own sinful self, which lead us to death. As Lutherans, we call this the curbs that keep us on the right path to heaven. The Laws of God doesn't get us to heaven, but as we follow them in our lives they guide us along the pathway that God has given to us to His heavenly love, peace and joy. Thus, as we let the Holy Spirit work in our lives we are freed from the Law condemning us and instead use God's Laws to guide us along the way to the safety of God's love, peace and joy now and for all eternity. So as Christian, we are free to travel on the highways of this world using God's Laws to keep us safely in God's loving arms instead of the harmful ways of the devil and the world.

Now the Apostle Paul goes on to explain the second purpose of God's Laws in our life by saying this, **"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."** (Rom. 7:13 – 20)

As a child of God, I want to be a good steward of all that God has given to me. So, I go to work around my house, here at the church and in the community, but sometime as I work I get dirty or something gets spills on me. Often, I don't see the dirt that I have gotten on my face and body until I look in a mirror. That's what God's Law does for us it shows us our sins. As we live and work in this world that God has given to us we get the dirty with sin on ourselves without even knowing that we are dirty or that we have sinned until we look at God's law as a mirror. It is God's law that shows us our sins and our sinful nature that needs to be cleaned by the blood of Jesus Christ. God's Law is the mirror that shows us how sinful we are and our need for Jesus Christ to wash away all our sins.

What Christian doesn't identify with the anguishing struggle that the Apostle Paul describes? As long as we live in this world we will know this struggle with sin. God's law will sound the alarm to alert us to the presence of sin within us and our need, through the Holy Spirit to do what is good and yet we find that evil is right there constantly. The Apostle Paul explains it this way, **"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** (Rom. 7:21 – 24)

Where is hope to be found in any of this? It is found only in one person as the Apostle Paul says, **"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Rom. 7:25) Sure you knew that all along, didn't you? That's what brought you here today to be strengthened in the assurance that God has given to you. You know that as a redeemed child of God through Jesus, you want to grow in your new relationship with God and so you use God's Laws to teach you how to do what God want you to do as His Child. This is the third purpose of the Law and we often call this a guide. God's Law is a guide for our live as we journey through life here on earth. Now may God bless your journey as His Child now as your share God's Law with other through the love, peace and joy you give to them now and for eternity in your heavenly home. Amen.