

April 23 and 24, 2023

Romans 7:7-13.

The Law of God is Good

Last time I gave the example of the woman who was bereft of Mr. Law. We are married to Jesus Christ by believing in Him, and we live under the reign of grace. And it was a holy life to dress and get ready like a bride waiting for her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, who will soon come. Today I want to consider again the nature of the law of God and learn about not becoming legalistic.

Verse 7: "What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

The law was originally given by God to show people how He wanted them to live. The Torah of this period included the five books of Moses, called the Torah, and the Mishnah, the Oral Torah. The Jews of that time were taught that if they did not keep the Torah, they could not be saved. They also believed that only the Jewish people who had the Torah could be saved. Therefore, they were proud of the Law and thought that Gentiles could not be saved. This wrong view of the law was overturned by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that one could be saved simply by believing in Him. Salvation was extended not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. This is grace.

The Law tells us what is sin. For example, in the case of Japan, polygamy was not against the law until 1873, when a Christian civil law was passed prohibiting bigamy. However, they found it to be a sin through Christian teaching. Thus, the law teaches what is sin. A friend of mine confessed that before she believed in Jesus, she had never thought that "unforgiveness" was a sin. Like this we come to know what is sin, when we read the Bible.

Verse 8: "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead."

The phrase "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment" describes 'sin' as if it was a living creature. This is a strange thing to say, but sin has the power to destroy a life. "For apart from the law, sin was dead" means that without the law, sin would have remained like dead and silent, but God's law revealed sin. For example, if you let muddy water sit for a while, the mud would settle out. And then you see water that looks clean on top of it. But if you take a spoon and stir it, the water quickly turns brown and becomes undrinkable. The role of the spoon is like a God's law. Without this spoon, we might drink muddy water

and get diarrhea and eventually dysentery and die. As we know that the law from God is directly connected to our lives in this way.

Verses 9: "Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died (9).

Theologians differ in their opinions about this verse, but some speculate that the phrase "I was apart from the law" refers to the apostle Paul's time of seeking before he became a Pharisee. 'But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died' means the more he studied and understood the Law, the more he understood what sin was, and the more he became bitter to the point of death at how much sin was in him.

Verse 10 and 11. "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death (10). For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment put me to death (11)."

The more seriously the Jews take their belief in "keep the law and you will be saved," the more they realize their own weakness. They find themselves unable to keep the Law perfectly, and they are saying that they were being led away from salvation and into death, as if they were being deceived by sin. The sin says, "See? You can't do it!" In the end, we confess that we have found that no matter how hard man tries to do good deeds, we will never attain eternal life.

Verse 12, "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good." This is the key point today. The law from God is good. Originally, God gave the Ten Commandments through Moses after delivering the Israelites from Egypt, also in order for the Israelites to become God's people and to give them eternal life. Even as a simple example, you could have prevented infection by isolating patients and washing their hands during the Covid- 19 period. This was already commanded by God in Leviticus 3,500 years ago. Patients had been quarantined from healthy people since that time. When we think that these old laws are still applicable today, we realize that God's Word protects people's lives.

This is not all. God promised His Son Jesus Christ to give eternal life to Adam and Eve immediately after they sinned. All of these promises concerning Jesus Christ are God's laws and ordinances. The entire Bible prophesied about Jesus Christ, and because Jesus Christ fulfilled all of God's prophecies, we have received the grace of eternal life. God's law is truly holy, righteous and good. The Bible is full of God's words, laws, and promises.

Finally, look at verse 13. “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no mean! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”

When did the law, which were originally good things that gave life to people, somehow bring death to people? Has God's law been transformed to bad? No, it never was. God is the One whose love has remained unchanged since before creation, and will remain unchanged until now and after. This points to the fact that religious leaders have turned God's law that give the life into legalism. Legalism had changed the intent of God's law and caused man to suffer.

During Jesus' public life, he was healing of the blind man on the Sabbath and the sick man for 38 years and Jesus gave them life. But the legalists, like religion's leaders criticized Jesus, for breaking the law of Sabbath. The law, which was supposed to give life, was thus turned into death. Legalism can destroy people's happiness and their soul.

This happens even today. This is especially appeared to cults that use the Bible to teach false doctrines. Among the cults derived from Christianity is the Unification Church, which is now in trouble in Japan. The late first founder, Sun Myung Moon, called himself God the Father, and the current founder, Hak Cha Han, teaches that God the mother. In this way, cult leaders use the Bible to invent their own unique teachings.

These days I am helping two Unification Church ex-members. The Unification Church had a rule that prohibited love outside the church, and they severely punished their children who fell in love with people outside the church. Many children were abused by their parents at home because of this. It is a tragedy that God's Word, which was originally intended to give life to people and help them live happily, has been changed. This is what the Jews did 2,000 years ago. Jewish legalism prevented people from believing in Jesus and crucified Him. And even the first Christians who believed in the resurrected Jesus were trying to dye them in legalism. And even today, the people of Israel live without grace because they believe in Judaism and do not recognize Jesus' grace.

Today, Paul corrects this mistake by teaching us that God's law is not bad, but "legalism" is wrong. In last month's message I gave the example of a woman who was bereft of "Mr. Law," but it would be more accurate to say that his name was "Mr. Legalism." Jesus, in his public life ministry, also rebuked the Pharisee because they were the legalist.

But on the other hand, we don't want to mistake "grace" for "grace-ism. Having learned this much, we might mistakenly think that the opposite concept of the law is grace. Some cults teach that because we are under the rule of grace, we don't have to keep the law, so beware of

this "grace-ism" as well. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. This salvation is all grace from God, but us. However, believers should not think that because they are saved, they are finished. We should believe God's word only as we live and strive to keep it. By reading the Bible, which contains God's laws and ordinances, we can have a deep fellowship with God. Then, we can live in accord with God's heart. This is the holy life required of believers.

There was a famous pastor named Derek Prince. He was an officer in the World War. At the time, he did not believe in Jesus yet. However, he suffered from a terrible skin disease in the desert. At that time, he remembered the Bible that his mother had given him and started reading it. And the verse that caught his attention was Proverbs 4:20-22. "My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words (20). Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart (21); for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body (22). He knew that "health" in this verse means "medicine" in Hebrew, so he decided to read the Bible as medicine anyway, because he was suffering without medicine in the war zone. By the way, when do you take your medicine? Half an hour after a meal! He read the Bible every day at 30 minutes after eating. And before he knew it, his serious skin disease was completely healed. After that, he believed in Jesus Christ, became a theologian and a pastor, and greatly worked. There are many other Christians who confess that their lives were changed after reading the Bible and following God's words.

2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteous."

Let's pray.

Loving Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word of Life. We thank You for all the laws, and promises in the Bible. Please guide us, Holy Spirit, that we may believe more and obey the Bible. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.