

Romans #47 – Restating the Reasons (1)

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Romans - GIW

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Bible Text: Romans 8:1-4
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1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin. He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

As I said in the previous message, there is no statement in the whole Bible more wonderful than this one. If you can take it in, it is truly tremendous: no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ Jesus.

I pointed out to you that it is the conclusion of everything that has gone before in the first seven chapters. He has worked his way through a series of carefully thought out arguments to that great and tremendous conclusion but like every great teacher, he cannot just leave it at that, he has to restate it again. I think every great teacher tends to do that. He doesn't leave anything to chance and so in this eighth chapter, in a certain sense, the apostle is even explaining it again. You see, it's really important for you to understand this, what it means and why it is true, and so immediately after having arrived at the top of Mount Everest, as it were, he stands there and surveys again the terrain over which he has come and again restates the reason, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." Now, in a certain sense that is a restatement of what he has already told us but we need to hear it again in order to make sure that we really understand it.

You can easily see the necessity of it from the variety of interpretations that we have right here in the second verse because the vast majority of commentators and preachers cannot quite see how the word "law" has a coherent meaning in this verse. I would say at this point that the vast majority of the commentators are on one side and I am on the other because the majority of commentators say the law when it has reference to the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, cannot possibly be the law of sin and of death, and many of the commentators will say there are two entirely different things here: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is one thing and the law of sin and death is another thing, so that this

phrase "the law" has two entirely different meanings. Now, it is my conviction that this is not true and that when he speaks of the law, he means the law of God epitomized and summarized in the 10 Commandments which we often read in this Christian church. The moral law of God written in the 10 Commandments was transcribed by the finger of God and it was set apart from all of the other commandments and enshrined in the Holy of Holies so that we would always realize that here is, as it were, the summary of all of the holy moral commandments of God, and I believe that all the way through this passage and certainly in verses 2, 3 and 4, it is that law that we are to think of and I believe that is why the apostle goes on in verses 3 and 4 to virtually explain what he means.

So we might say to the Apostle Paul, "What do you mean when you speak of the law of sin and of death? What do you mean by that?" And the answer is, "Well, I mean that what the law could not do because it was weak, God did in sending Jesus Christ his Son into the world." And if we say to him, "What do you mean by the law of the Spirit of life?" "Well," he would say, "I mean that because of what Christ has done, now the requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

So the law in the one case is the moral law of God which works unto sin and death, but it is the same moral law which in the other case becomes the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and the reason is because human beings can be related to the law of God in two different ways. If you are on one side of the law, namely the outside, it is to you a law of sin and of death. If you are not today in Jesus Christ, I am absolutely sure that the law of God for you is the law of sin and of death. But if you are in Christ Jesus, you are converted and his Holy Spirit dwells in your heart, I am equally certain that the same law is for you the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. So there is no real problem here at all and the commentators, though they are legion, are wrong in my judgment, and there is no confusion or difficulty. The law means the moral law of God and the difference is in the way in which that law functions with respect to those who are outside of Christ on the one hand, and with respect to those who are in Christ on the other.

Now, I think I can illustrate this from something drawn from the natural order, namely this business of flying. I don't know if you've seen on television this newsreel clip from many many years ago when men were trying to fly. You're not supposed to laugh at other people's calamities but I always laugh when I see that thing because it shows these men with their wonderful flying machines trying to get off the ground and they start up and they crank up the motor and they get going and then the wings collapse and the whole thing falls flat on the ground, and because of my sinful and depraved nature, I laugh like everything when I see that happen, and you go on through and as clip after clip of these disastrous attempts on the part of men to get these flying machines off the ground. Now, do you know why they couldn't get their flying machines off the ground? Well, I'll tell you why: because of the laws of aerodynamics. They were not obeying the laws of aerodynamics, they were disobeying them and those laws are there. God created them in the natural order and every time you disobey them, you're going to have trouble.

So the aerodynamical laws of God became to those early pioneers of flying a law of disaster and death. A lot of people did die in the early days of aviation because they did not know enough about these laws and they did not obey them and therefore the law exacted its terrible toll in disaster and death. But the other day, I got on a DC8 and I wasn't afraid to fall, even though I knew that we would soon be up there about 40,000 feet. I felt safer when I got in there than I did with Mrs. Bowman driving me in there because I know that, well, I didn't mean that she is such a bad driver, I just mean by that that statistically you are not very safe on the road today. The chances of an accident driving from here to the airport is far greater than it is flying from the airport to Melbourne. Far greater and the reason is because the men who drive or fly those great machines know a lot about the aerodynamical laws and they are very careful to obey them. We did have one great disaster within New Zealand but only one in all of its history and that's a very very good record.

Now, what I'm saying is that in that instance, the laws that Almighty God has put in the cosmos are the laws of liberty and life. They liberate man to fly across in three and half hours. It's the same law, exactly the same law which on the one hand, were the law of disaster and death and now they are the law of liberation and life. It is only a question of where you are with respect to the law, and I believe that that is a true analogy to what the apostle is saying in our text. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the law in which I myself am renewed in Jesus Christ after the image of God, has liberated me from the law of sin and of death.

Well, then, let us look for a few moments at these two aspects. First the negative side. Why was it that the holy commandments of God were to every one of us originally a law of sin and of death? Well, obviously it is not because of any defect in the law and that's why the apostle all the way through the book of Romans keeps saying that, "Do we then make void the law of God?" He says, "God forbid. Is the law then evil because I sin? No," he says, "the commandment of God is holy and righteous and good." There's nothing wrong with the law. No, the problem is and here he defines it, you see, "The law could not do this because it was weak through the flesh." In other words, the weakness of the law was entirely due to my fleshly and sinful nature.

And you can easily see this if you think for a moment of the law of God as it comes to man in his fallen condition. Now, the law of God can come to you in your fallen estate and it can tell you, "You ought to be holy. You ought to do these things: have no other gods before me, don't make any graven image, don't take God's name in vain, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, honor your father and your mother, don't kill, don't commit adultery," and so on, and go right down through the list and the law of God can tell you, "Now, this is what you ought to do all the time and without any exception." But do you know something? There is nothing that the law can do to make you want to do that. Nothing. There is nothing that the law of God can do to put in your heart the desire to do those things which his law requires and that's because the law is weak through your fleshly nature. Now, if you had a holy and perfect and pure nature like Jesus did, your response to the law would be very different but you don't, you see, and that's why the law is weak and powerless, it is because you have a nature that is contrary to the law.

In my last congregation over in Kansas, we had a very funny elder, a really godly man, I still hear from him every now and then, as a matter of fact, he's the kind donor of those blue songbooks. But did you know? You wouldn't believe it, would you? He can't sing. That's not why he sent me 90 songbooks but he can't sing. He cannot carry a tune in a truck. And we used to once in a while get-together there and have a kind of school for singing the Psalms, to teach people to sing them, and you could tell that man, "Now, this is C and this is D and when you see a note up on this line it means D. It's in D, not C." And you could tell him all that and he could get it perfectly in his mind and then he still couldn't sing. He was a man who made a joyful noise unto the Lord and it was noise, and I have always been thankful for that part of the different Psalms, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands," and he always was willing to do that and he made his contribution spiritually, but the fact is that you could tell him the whole law of music from A to Z and he still couldn't sing. Do you know why? Because the law doesn't have any power to communicate to people ability. I can tell you all day long what you ought to do, that does not make you want to do it and it doesn't give you the power and strength to do it and that's what he means when he says the law is for fallen man, the law of sin and death. That's what he means when he says what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did. It's exactly what he means.

The law of God cannot do anything to make you righteous because it cannot do anything to take away your transgressions, to get rid of them and atone for them and blot them out. The law cannot do anything. A judge can do something if he lets you off but the law can't. No sir. The law does not know of any method of letting people get away with transgression and the law has no power whatsoever to produce inward compliance. There is no law and, you know, that's something that our legislators have to always remember, that's something that the people who want community standards have to remember: you cannot produce godliness in a nation by making laws. It doesn't work. It never has worked and it never will work. The only way that you can produce godliness in a nation is to make more Christians so that they begin to leaven the nation. Then you can have laws that are on a higher level. But until you do make Christians, you cannot change people by passing good laws. You could pass a law tomorrow saying that everybody in New Zealand had to go to church where the Gospel was preached and it wouldn't have any effect at all because it wouldn't give them any desire and willfulness to do it.

That's why our text says what the law could not do, God did, and he did it by sending Jesus because, you see, as soon as God sent Jesus into the world, something could be done about the guilt of sin. Now, God can do something about the guilt of your sin and he did do something about it, he sent Jesus Christ to take the guilt of the sins of all of his people and bear those sins on the accursed tree, receiving the just penalty of those sins so that a complete final and eternal payment could be made to God the Father. And that's not all he did in sending Jesus Christ because the Bible says that when Christ rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, then the Father in conjunction with the Spirit, poured out in conjunction with the Father, poured out his Spirit upon the church. The day of Pentecost was a decisive historical event in the program of God's kingdom. The sending of his Spirit was in order that the hearts of God's people might be enabled to begin to

want to do what the law required. So because Christ did something about our objective guilt and then sent his Spirit to do something about our inward and subjective unwillingness and inability, then what the law could not do, God did, and he did it for those who are in Jesus because if you are in Jesus, something has been done about your sin as to its guilt, and something has been done about your fleshly and fallen nature. So we see the meaning of this fourth verse, "in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

That's a wonderful thing and I want you to realize that it is wonderful also with respect to our state of mind here in this world. How do I know that there is now, already now, no condemnation for me? I'll never face the condemning wrath of God not even on the awesome day of judgment? How do I know that? I know it on the basis of the law.

Have you ever stopped to think about that? Well, that's really important. You see, beloved, the law is a terrible thing when it is against you. It really is, but the law is a wonderful thing when it is for you. That's why it's so terrible to live today in a place like Iran where there is no due process of law. You don't have a trial and there is no law there saying even to the civil magistrate, "You can't touch that guy if he's not guilty. No way can you touch him." That's why it's so terrible to live in a place like Iran today because they just grab you and they take you out the next morning and they shoot you and there is no trial and there is no law to protect you. God forbid that you and I should ever have to live in a nation where law goes down the drain because law is your greatest defender if you're innocent. Well now, of course, if you're not innocent, law is your enemy and you'll never have any peace.

Over in my country they have what they call a law against double jeopardy. I don't know if you know what double jeopardy is but double jeopardy means you can never be arrested, accused, tried, sentenced or punished a second time for something you have already been arrested, tried, convicted and punished for. Nope, if you have once been before the judge and he has made a sentence and you have gone to prison and you have paid your penalty, never again is the civil authority allowed to touch you in the least for that crime. They can't do it because that would be double jeopardy and I believe that's a reflection of biblical law because in the Bible too there is no such thing as double jeopardy. If Christ has suffered for your sin, paid in full for your sin, there is no way in which you are going to suffer for it again. The law itself will stand up and say, "No, no, you can't do that to this man. He is innocent. You cannot put him into that fiery inferno because his sin has already been paid for and it has been paid in full."

So, you see, knowing the function of the law of God with respect to the status of the believer is the very basis of his certainty that there is now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus, and that also goes for the inward and subjective side of the matter in our compliance. You see, the question is not going to be on the day of judgment, "Is he a perfect Christian? Did he ever reach the place in his life down there on the earth where he was living perfectly and without any sin in his daily life in thought, word or deed?" That's not going to be the question. The question is going to be, "Did the Spirit of Jesus live in him? And was he walking," you know, in the Bible "walking" means the general course

of your life. You're either walking one way according to the Bible or you are walking the other. "The general course of your life, is the general course of the man's life, was it directed by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus in such a way that the requirements of the law of God were fulfilled in him?"

Put it like this, "Do you want to keep God's commandments?" That's really the question. Do you want to? Do you strive to? Jesus said, "You are my disciples if you keep my commandments." John the apostle said, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments." Now, there is no believer, there never has been and there will not be prior to the coming of Christ who always does that in every instance perfectly, but there is no man who is in Jesus Christ, not one, who does not say in the depth of his heart, "Ah, but I do." He relies on the law of God after the inward man and, "I do endeavor in my daily life not to walk after the flesh but to walk after the Spirit." And the law of God is going to be your defender if that's true. On the day of judgment, the law of God is going to be your defender so he'll say, "This man always did delight in me, this man always did desire with all of his heart to walk in the way that I have commanded." And so the law of God will be your defender and your vindicator on the day of judgment and because the law will do that, it gives us confidence even now that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

So if you have these two things today, Christ's atonement on the cross, his sin payment as the foundation of your hope, and his Holy Spirit working in your heart the love of his commandments, you can have the glorious assurance that God intends to have in this text. So let me just ask you today: are you in Christ Jesus? If you're not, I trust that you realize that the law will be your accuser and your tormentor and I say, the more the better. The more miserable you are, the happier I will be until finally you cry out, "O Lord Jesus, deliver me from the law of sin and of death! Liberate me by giving me the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus!" The psalmist put it like this, "O Lord, thou art my portion and my lot. I said that I would keep thy word forever, though to my sorrow I have oft forgot. With all my heart, I now entreat thy favor, be merciful to me and chasten not. According to thy word, be thou my Savior." May God grant that each of us should not only pray it but have it. For Christ's sake. Amen.

Let us pray.

We thank you, gracious God, that you show us in your word how we in Jesus Christ can find the old enemy, the law, to be our great friend and defender as you write the precepts of that law in our hearts and give us the assurance of the sin payment of Jesus. Do this and do it more and more, we pray, that we may know for us too there is now no condemnation. This we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.