

STRUGGLING WITH SIN

THE LAW

- We're going to talk lots about "law". It can mean different things.
- E.g. "drive":
 - We're redoing our drive
 - I've lost my drive
 - I love my daily drive
 - I've wiped my drive
- Law can mean – "a system of enforced rules", it can mean "Torah" (five books of Moses), it can mean "the Mosaic Law" (613 commandments)
- Up to verse 20 it always means "Mosaic Law" – then Paul starts mixing it up.

IS THE LAW BAD?

- No. The Scriptures are clear – e.g. Psalm 119
- But Paul seems to be so anti-Law! We're under Grace, not Law! When we read "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God." (Galatians 2:19) it seems as though it's bad.

*I will speak of your statutes before kings
and will not be put to shame,
for I delight in your commands
because I love them.
I reach out for your commands, which I love,
that I may meditate on your decrees.*

...

*Because I love your commands
more than gold, more than pure gold,
and because I consider all your precepts right,
I hate every wrong path.*

LET'S UNDERSTAND SIN

- Sin, sinful desires, sinful nature – what do we mean?
- Start with **sinful nature**.
 - You may have heard that if a pregnant woman abuses alcohol or drugs, the child may be born with a chemical dependence. This makes it far more likely that they will themselves fall into substance abuse.
 - We are born with a sinful nature – nobody has to teach us to do wrong.
- So, our sinful nature means that we default to **sinful desires** – the desire to do wrong, or fail to do what is right.
 - Romans 1 – exchange glory of God for idols
 - Romans 5 – sin entered the world through one man, all were tainted
- The result of our sinful desires, if not resisted, is **sin**. We actually do wrong things.

SO WHERE DOES THE LAW COME IN?

- Preferring "things" over God – creation over Creator – is inherently wrong. Romans 1 made it clear that we should know this from the world God created.
- But so we understand how enslaved we are to this primary sin of rejecting God, He gave Law.
- Back to the example of alcoholism – "I can stop any time", "I'm in control" – "come home sober for a week". The intent is to demonstrate our sinfulness in visible ways.
- BUT it works – and so it produces a desire in us to flaunt the Law. "Do not covet" tells us that there's a thing called coveting, that it's wrong, AND makes us want to do it even more because we are born rebellious.

THIS LEAVES A PROBLEM

- We are never going to overcome this situation with more laws.
v16: "And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good." We might get as far as agreeing that the Law is good – but that only means that instead of doing evil because I think that it's a good thing, I do evil despite knowing that it's wrong. It doesn't stop me doing evil!

CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A NEW LAW

- A new law would not be enough, and it would imply that the first Law was a failure – which would lower God.
- Three ways to think about Christianity:
 - A book that tells us how to live: “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth”
 - Having the Holy Spirit alongside us to explain the rules and remind us of them
 - Having a companion, the Holy Spirit, who teaches us to love God more and more by showing us the divine nature and character, through revelation, through reminders, through demonstration – and one side effect is that we try to live by the rules.
- The moral teaching of Christianity has a place – a really clear place. It pre-supposes that we love God, and want to know how to show Him love by our lives.
- John 14:15 – “if you love me, you will obey my commandments”.

THE BODY OF DEATH

Poll: *When Paul talks about himself in verses 14-25, is he talking about his life before his encounter with the risen Christ, his salvation and baptism, or after?*

- It’s not entirely clear from the passage. However, which of us, despite being born again, does not experience this?
- The answer is not to read your Bible more, pray more, read more books about God. They may be a tool, but they are not the answer.
- Who will rescue me from this body of death? God, through Christ Jesus. How? Romans 8 – by the Holy Spirit!
- When we fall into sin as Christians, it damages relationship with God, as Caroline said last week. However, it also highlights that we do not yet fully love God. Fixing the symptoms does not fix the problem.
- Imagine that you’re always upsetting your wife through words and actions. You know you love her and so you want to change. So she gives you a written list of things that she likes and dislikes. Now that’s solid gold! You understand her better, and you can start changing your behaviour a bit. However, as you go about making those changes, you start to resent it – why should she be so demanding and so hard to please? Even though you know somewhere deep down that the list is helpful and right, you struggle. And so some days it works, and others it doesn’t. Some things on the list are “totally reasonable” and you find them easy to change; others are “being fussy” or “too much effort” and they are left to last – and don’t happen. With all the change you’re making, surely she’ll be *less* upset – and that’s a good thing! Surely she’ll be happy with that!
What’s needed here is for you to discover afresh your love for your wife. If you *really* love her, none of the change is too much. You still need the list so you know how to *show* that love – but it’s the heart that needs primary attention.
- This is what we need with God. In daily communion with the Holy Spirit, we are reminded afresh of everything about God that we love – both who He is, and how He has shown us love. He works in our hearts and changes them. He speaks to us about what God is doing, so that we understand how loving He is.

We are headed for a destination – and it’s not simply that we’ll be perfect. That features, but is not prominent in Revelation 21 & 22, or in Jesus’s talk of the end times. We are headed for a wedding banquet, for a restored and beautiful creation in which God is with us and we are with Him, as closely and intimately as a bride and her bridegroom.

PURPOSE / OUTCOME

- To grow in love for God ...
- ... by inviting His Holy Spirit to step up His activity in our lives