

He condemned sin in the flesh
Romans 8:1-11

The law and faith, what do they have to do with each other today? Now I'm not speaking about the law of the land, rather, let's talk about the Old Testament law, that stuff... that we like to keep a steady distance from but will at times acknowledge its existence. It's the set of do's and do not's that we glance at from time to time, even upholding some of them but generally only the select ones that we like or that we are comfortable with. We have been taught that the law and faith have nothing to do with each other, as if they are two completely separate things that should never co-exist. To much of the Christian world, these things should not be thought of together. But I want to, this morning, suggest that this is not entirely true – **William Jennings Bryan says it this way, “The Old Testament gives us the law, the New Testament reveals the love upon which the law rests.”** And this brings us to our reading this morning, Romans 8:1-11:

“8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”

When we look at passages such as this one, it is easy to see where our understanding of the law comes from, it is easy to see how and why we believe that faith and the law should never co-exist – I mean just look at what Paul says here, that one law, that is the law of the Spirit, leads to life while the other, that is the law of the flesh, leads to death. What we need to understand then is why this understanding continually comes up, why so many people throughout the centuries believe this concept of law and faith. Paul never states that the law should be completely disowned, he never once states that it should be written off. I firmly believe though, that what Paul is addressing is the complete manipulation, twisting and distorting of the law to suite man's own interests. Quite literally, the law became a list of do's and don'ts, a check list of sorts, a list where mankind's agenda, particularly the agendas of those in power,

could be pushed and peddled to the point where faith was almost completely removed from it. But this was never supposed to be what the law was about: It is more than simply a list of do's and don'ts:

I believe that there were three primary reasons for the giving of the law, three reasons we probably know but do not piece together or even acknowledge completely:

- 1. The law was given because of the hardness of man's heart:** Now this is the one we all kind of know, accept, and acknowledge with some ease. We know and understand the fact that the heart of mankind was hardened even to the point of rejecting God Himself. In this sense, our understanding of the law makes sense to us in that it points out the unfaithfulness of mankind. God intended that He Himself would lead His people; however, because of mankind's rejection, because of unfaithfulness, disobedience and sin, and the fact that He could not be in the presence of sin, something had to be set in place to maintain law and order. It is because of this reason that we see the law functioning in the most common way, by pointing out the issues plaguing mankind.
- 2. The law was given as a means of remembrance of the great acts of God:** If we look at the law itself, it is not given to the nation of Israel before their Exodus out of Egypt and before the wilderness journey. It is during this time that even the current generation forgets the miraculous and powerful acts of God in redeeming them out of slavery – how then would future generations remember these things? God commands the nation in Deuteronomy 6:20-25, **“²⁰ In the future, when your son asks you, “What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?” ²¹ tell him: “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² Before our eyes the Lord sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. ²³ But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors. ²⁴ The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. ²⁵ And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”** The law thus points back to what the Lord had done for His people and acts as a reminder of these things so that, in following the law in faith, it would be to the righteousness of God's people.
- 3. The law was given as a foreshadowing of Christ:** It is said that before the law, people were still able to follow the Lord, we of course would look here at Abraham's faith in God without the law – this suggests that the law was not a necessity for following God. Yet we know that, because of the hardened heart of mankind, and because of the sin of Adam, atonement had to be made - yet the ultimate atonement would not come immediately, but it would come only with the coming of Christ. Paul says, in Colossians 2:17, having addressed the issue of human regulations (the manipulation and twisting of the law) versus life with Christ, **“these are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”** The law points us to Christ, it points us to faith in God.

We need to understand the fact that the law itself was not imperfect nor was it flawed. But because of the twisting and manipulation of it by mankind, and because of mankind's inherent sinfulness, the law became simply a means of pointing the finger, a means of stimulating sin rather than solving it. This is the

issue of the law of the flesh – it does nothing but condemn one to death because mankind is unable to change. In that sense, the law is unfollowable.

Yet with the coming of Christ, with His sacrifice on the cross, He brings with Him the Spiritual law. It is this law that solves the above problem. It brings the people of God back to a foundational faith, which should have been present with the law and built upon the law, yet could not be achieved. Paul tells us that God fulfilled all the requirements of the law in the person of Christ rather than in us. And the requirement is firstly, the new life lived by the Christian believer on the basis of the work of Christ, and secondly, it is the full penalty of the law being met at the cross of Calvary.

The law is not something to be rejected or despised or written off because we think it doesn't apply to us anymore, rather, I suggest that, through the person of Christ, in His human nature, having fulfilled the law in its entirety, we can approach it in an act of love and an act of faith rather than out of obligation.

Because Christ came in "likeness of sinful flesh", being fully human, He understood the weight of sin on the human spirit but was not bound by or subject to that same sin which was faced by all under the law nor was He subject to the consequence of this sin. But rather, having initiated the coming of the Spiritual law, Christ willingly bears the consequences of our sin, upon His own flesh, and offers us not a new law necessarily, but offers us a way of approaching the law of God in faith and love. **Charles Spurgeon says it this way, "The old covenant says, 'keep the law and you will live.' The new covenant is, 'you shall live, and I will lead you to keep my law, for I will write it on your heart.'"**

Let us pray!

Opening Song: Speak O Lord - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubRIJj8xkds>

Song of Praise: Hosanna - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQWI26M-a0Y>

Lincon Hardouin
Trinity, Lynnwood
12th July 2020