

Daily Discipleship

October 31, Reformation Day (C) – Romans 3:19-28

Discipleship – A New Law on our Hearts

Focus Question: *What would it be like if the only law was to love?*

word of life

“Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works! No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.” Romans 3:27-28 (NRSV)

Read Romans 3:19-28

Apostle Paul spent a lot of his life and energy debating the law, but what law?

To understand Apostle Paul is to come to terms with the deep and abiding role of the law in his life. Paul grew up as a devout Jew being raised as a Pharisee, born a Roman citizen in Tarsus, a city in Asia Minor. (See Philippians 3:5)

At the time of Paul, the Pharisees and Sadducees were flourishing Jewish movements who examined the implications of the 613 commandments (including the Ten Commandments) given to the Israelite people. The Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the written Law of Moses for rituals, religious practices, and daily life.

1. *What do you know about the Pharisees?*
2. *Describe a person who has much zeal for the law.*

Paul devoted his early life to the study of the law of God and developed a zeal for enforcing it. He was convinced Jesus was in violation of the law of God. Paul was determined to destroy the followers of Jesus. With great passion, he pursued Christians in their houses and jailed them when they were found. (Acts 8:3) Paul was convinced he was right.

That was until the road to Damascus when he was blinded by a flash of light. There he encountered Jesus. There his life was forever changed. He heard Jesus say to him, “Why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4) Paul was left to struggle with his own inadequacy to fulfill the law, his own imperfection, and all that he had been taught. What do you do when it’s not enough? Ouch! Paul realized that he would never be able to fulfill the law.

3. *Describe Paul’s internal struggle.*
4. *What does it feel like to not meet God’s standards—to not fulfil the law?*

But that is not the end of the story. On the road to Damascus, Paul discovered God’s grace. He was able to let go of his own hold on the law and the law’s hold on him. He became open to a new law—one of love. Paul was freed to serve God out of his faith in God’s grace made known in Christ, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans towards the end of his life. It reflects conclusions from his own long and personal struggle with the use of law, and the gift of grace. Paul recognized the benefits of God’s law. In Romans, Paul explained how the law had taught him something important. “For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20 NRSV)

5. *How does the law help us to be aware of our sin?*
6. *Why might that be helpful?*

word among us

Jeffrey had a rough week at work. As he drove from work to his house, he could feel his anxiety rise. He was concerned about losing his job. Dare he share all this with his bride of two months? How would she react? As a couple they were still figuring out the dynamics of marriage.

Then things got worse. In his rear-view mirror, he saw the flashing light of a police car. Jeffrey pulled over, rolled down the window, and let out a long sigh. The police officer asked for Jeffrey's license and wanted to know how he was doing. Jeffrey shook his head. "Not well."

To Jeffrey's surprise the police officer did not give him a ticket for speeding, but instead provided a stern warning about disrupting traffic due to his slow driving. Jeffrey sighed again. He was totally unaware that his anxiety had manifested in a slowing down. Clearly, Jeffrey was not paying attention to his driving and was a risk to other drivers.

1. Give other examples of how police officers might enforce the law for good and safety.
2. Give an example of when the enforcement of the law has caused harm.

Theologians have long debated the uses of the law. The list varies, but many consider civil law as the first use of the law in that the law becomes a valuable aid to help a community of people live among and alongside each other with both good order and justice.

3. Describe what it would be like if there were no civil laws. Begin with no traffic laws.
4. Why are civil laws a necessary part of a just society?

In his letter to the Romans, Apostle Paul describes another use of the law—to show our sin. Like a mirror, the law shows our shortcomings. For we do not love God and others in a perfect way. Again and again, we fall short. The law becomes a teacher for those who are ready to learn.

5. What and when does the law of God teach us about sin?
6. If the law of God is a mirror, what do you see when you look at that mirror?

An additional use of the law might be as a moral compass. The law becomes a helpful guide on how to live daily in this world. Because we have experienced the love of God, we choose to love others. We freely choose to follow the Ten Commandments not out of fear of punishment, but because we love God. Thus, we don't lie, kill, or steal because we have been changed by God to be persons of love. Christ has set us free for love.

7. How are you freed to follow the law?

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, to love one another." Take a moment to imagine a world in which we followed this single commandment and we loved one another.

8. What would it be like if the only law was to love?

Prayer

Gracious God by your grace you have set us free. We are freed to be a good neighbor. Thank you for sending Jesus Christ to release us and empower us to be people of love. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Acts 9

last word

Live this week under the law of love.



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