

The New Normal: A Fresh Perspective on the Law
Romans 7:1-13

Tear it all down. The past is a symbol of what is wrong with our world today. We have the opportunity to be different. I don't want the normals of the former days. I want something new. We've been given the chance to explore a new normal. The new normal is one without law, without that oppressive systems of the past. The old system was used to keep people down, to keep them in line. It was used to let only a few rule over the masses. The whole thing needs to go. So let's topple it down. Let's disassociate ourselves from it. Let's knock down every last pillar and stone. Every jot and tittle must be erased. It's done its damage to us and now we need to return the favor. We don't need these structures and systems over us. We are free from it now and we don't need to look back. Our new movement is beyond the law. We don't need the rule of law anymore. It has no power over us. We can leave it behind as we progress forward. Now, you may think I'm channeling the sentiments of protesters across the country from this last week, but I'm not. In Ecclesiastes it says that there is nothing new under the sun and that is true with these words, too. I'm sure there have been many other times in human history when people felt this way. But we aren't talking about political movements today. No, today we are focusing on the early Christian church and just like their feelings back then, we too struggle with the law in this day and age.

We only have a couple weeks left in this Pentecost sermon series, *The New Normal*. In this series, we have been discussing how the Christian church is called to be different in the world. We are a holy people, not in the sense of holier than thou, but in the biblical sense of being set apart for a purpose. As the church is born at Pentecost, we are brought into a new normal, a new way to live and be in the world. The new normal has a fuller definition than the old ways. We have seen the diversity of God's family in this new normal. That God doesn't just set apart a certain people group or ethnicity to be his people. All are welcome into his family and it is God's greatest desire for all to be with him. We've seen God fully reveal himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We learned in the new normal that we are to listen to those outside the church, hearing their stories and letting them reveal themselves to us so that we have the opportunity to reveal God fully to them. We've talked about reconciliation and grace in the new normal. We don't keep running tabs of other people's sin. We forgive and we move on. We love because He first loved us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We need to be willing to share that grace with others so that they know the true heart of God. Last week we learned that a new life in Christ means we are his treasured possessions. We are no longer slaves to sin, but now slaves to righteousness. This is how we are to live, under Christ and his kingdom. We take all of these things, all of these truths and bring them with us as we step out into the world today.

Each week the topics have been timely and relevant because God's word is always timely and always relevant. Today is no different. Today, we explore the new normal for Christians as we wrestle with the role of the Law in our lives. Paul addresses this in his letter to the Romans. He writes to these new Christians to help them understand how to treat the Law. When I say "the Law", I mean the Torah, the sacrificial system and laws concerning holiness given in the first five books of the Old Testament. This Law was the guiding principle for God's people for centuries. There seemed to be a misunderstanding about this Law among new Christians. They believed that since Christ died on the cross for them that this Law no longer applied. They felt they were free from the Law and in many cases they actively showed that in their lives. They leaned so heavily on the forgiveness of Jesus that they felt they could live however they wanted. They wanted to move beyond the old ways of this Law. They wanted to live as people who were free in Christ, not bound by old sacrificial systems. Paul tells them, and us today, that the Law still applies. The Law still has a role. It still has authority over us. We need it. It isn't something that needs to be destroyed or ignored. Christ came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. It is for our good because it protects us and shows us our need for Jesus.

Before we talk about our need for the Law, let's talk about our urges to reject it. Our sinful nature constantly fights the heaviness of the Law. We don't want to be oppressed. We don't want to be told what to do. We don't want to face the consequences of our actions. We can do just fine on our own. So we openly rebel against it. We do what we want, when we want. We set up our own rules, ignoring God's commands, for things that are much more convenient or acceptable by the world's standards. God calls us to be set apart but we'd rather look like the world. We are scared to stand up for God's Law. So, we fight the will of God. We put emotions first. We put ourselves first. We put our desires to fit in first. Each of us has done it as we've navigated our daily lives. Each of us have created our own systems that push back against God's. We do it for several reasons. God's Law is too antiquated. It's out of date, out of style, unpopular. It doesn't seem right or fair or loving based on what's happening in the world today. How can I stand for something like that when the world pulls me in the opposite direction? Let's not get confused. When we reject God's law we are sinning. When we replace God's law with something else, some other standard then we are guilty of treason against the kingdom of God. We'd rather upset God than man. We'd rather reject our Heavenly Father than have to face a person and speak to them the truth of God's law and will for our world. We deny God's Law because we've decided that we know better. Or we at least know we can receive forgiveness later, so we give in to the world's demands rather than listen to Almighty God.

How then should we treat the Law? How are we supposed to behave if we've been doing it wrong and masquerading it as freedom? Well, we should treat it as the holy thing that it is. We should treat it with reverence, respect, and joy. The psalmist says that the Law is as beautiful as the sun. Paul says in our reading today that the Law is holy and righteous and good. We need the law in our lives. We need it working on our bodies and pressing on our consciences. We need it. We need it and it is good that we need it. I think we misinterpret what "free in Christ" really means. It doesn't mean the Law should go away. It means we no longer have to fear the law because Jesus fulfilled its demands in himself. We don't have to fear the eternal consequences of breaking the law because Jesus' death pays for my sin. It doesn't mean we go and sin because we know we can be forgiven. That cheapens the grace that flows from Christ. That cheapens the blood shed on the cross for you and me. We still live according to the Law, we just don't need to fear it. Jesus has us covered. His blood covers us and we are forgiven and free. But as Christians there still is an expectation that we abide by God's value system. We can't tear it down because it teaches us about our Heavenly Father and it shows us how much we truly need Jesus.

The Law functions in three ways in our lives. First, the law acts as a curb. It keeps everyone in order. God works through human laws and his divine law to keep our behavior in check. We can rejoice in this because it is there to protect us. When we abide by the law and so does our neighbor then we are safe. We don't have to worry about hurting each other or cheating one another. This first use of the law, when we follow it, keeps us all in line. It keeps society running smoothly. The second use we still have of the Law is as a mirror. Now, I don't know what you think when you look in a mirror. Maybe it depends on the time of day. But the Law as a mirror shows us our true, sinful selves. Your reflection doesn't hide anything. Sometimes you don't know how bad you look until you see it for yourself. This allows us to reflect on our sin and see that our lives need to change, perpetually. We are constantly in a state of repentance and forgiveness that bends our behavior back toward God. This self actualization moves us toward the saving grace of Jesus. We see the mirror where our sins are obvious and then we turn to the cross and see exactly what the punishment was for those sins. Jesus takes our sin and shame, all of our warts and transgressions, onto himself at the cross. He pays for them all so that we can be clean and holy again. That is Jesus' fulfillment of the Law. The third use we have for the Law is as a guide. This is where we as Christians are called to live differently. We can't look like the world. We must value what God values, even at the cost of our lives or reputations. We can't give in to the world when it conflicts with God's law.

In all of this, we see the new normal peeking through. Jesus doesn't come to destroy antiquated systems and if he didn't then why would we? He came to be the ultimate sacrifice, the perfect Lamb of God slaughtered for our atonement. He fulfills the Law's demands on our

behalf. So, out of joy and thanksgiving we abide by God's value system laid out in the Law. We can't live however we want. We aren't free to dabble in the value systems of the world. God's law isn't a buffet where we pick and choose what we should and shouldn't do or believe. We live according to God's law because in this system we are free. We are loved and cared for. We are made better people. We are forgiven over and over again. We belong within this system, slaves to it as we talked about last week. We belong under it in His Kingdom. Simply put: we love and live by the law because we as God's children our Heavenly Father has rules for us to follow. We should cherish the Law because it gives us a glimpse of God's heart. It shows us what he cares about and what we should care about too. Loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Loving our neighbors better than we love ourselves. Speaking for life when the world fights for death. Standing up for justice when the world turns a blind eye. When we stand for what God values then we actually extend that shelter of protection over the less fortunate, the abused and abandoned, the ones on the margins of society. Then we show them what it's like to live as God's children. What a glorious thing it is to be in his family, living under his roof, his rules, his kingship.

This new normal isn't starting over with something new. It is recognizing how God has used it to bring us to himself. The world kind of seems lawless right now in a lot of ways. What could living and sharing God's value system in the Law teach the world? It would be a loving act. We have confused love with acceptance these days. It is loving to direct someone in the way they should go. Sometimes love is pressing down with the law. That law becomes the mirror that shows us our sin but pushes us toward Jesus. We can't expect the world to live according to God's law but we should do it ourselves as Christians. Part of that practice is recognizing our failure to be perfect and clinging to Jesus' cross as our only salvation. That keeps us from being the pharisees of Jesus' day. That keeps us from being the pious elites that think they are better than the rest. We aren't better, we just recognize that our goodness comes from outside ourselves. The law gets us there. It shows us our sin. It guides us in our daily walk with Christ. It brings us to our knees at the foot of the cross to receive forgiveness over and over again. As we do that, we grow. We grow in faith and in love toward each other and our great God who didn't tear down the system, but upheld it through his son for our eternal salvation.

So please, don't discard or disassociate from God's law. Embrace and love it. We can only do that because of Jesus' work on the cross. As we do this we begin to have the eyes and heart of God. We can actually stand for true justice. We can truly serve with humility. We can be the real change that the world needs. Just like the systems of atonement they have created, the world also creates their own law structures and value systems. Don't get sucked in. Don't buy it wholesale because only through God's law and gospel does true change come. Only through our eternal sense of justice can we recognize injustice. We can be that change. We can show that change. We can enact that change. In the new normal. As the world opens up. As things settle in a new way we can show the world the protection of the Law, the sense of belonging it creates, and the rescue from its punishment we have in Jesus. That's better than whatever else they have going on out there. We can do better. We can show them better. Amen.