

Life Lessons from the Psalms

Losing Law Limits Life

Are You Glad There Are Laws?

When I was in graduate school, early in the morning I was on my way to work at a psychiatric hospital in New Orleans. It was the fourth of July, and no one was on the road. I came to a stop sign and because nobody was around I rolled through it without completely stopping and made my right turn. Immediately I saw flashing lights in my rear view mirror and got pulled over. I was issued a sizable ticket by the police officer for not coming to a complete stop. I was very mad I got the ticket and to make matters worse, it was the day before my birthday. Several years later, I once again came to a stop sign where I also was about to make a right turn. It was pitch black, about five in the morning and as I approached the stop sign, I quickly looked right and then to the left to see if any cars were coming my way. There were no headlights and so once more I rolled through the stop sign and began my turn. This time, there was someone riding his bike from the right, dressed all in black who I narrowly missed hitting. If I had made a proper stop, I never would have risked hitting the guy, but thank God, I didn't even though I would have if he came into the intersection a second earlier. Law is one of the great gifts God has given us and although we may feel like some laws are unreasonable, law is a form of protection for all of us and we need them. Our big idea today is let the laws of God build your life and bless it.

The other day I was substitute teaching in a class of eight year olds and their assignment had a few math questions. One had three rectangles side by side. The question asked them to draw the different lines of symmetry. One of the children brought her paper to me and on the first rectangle she drew a horizontal line that ran from one end to the other. That was a line of symmetry. For the second rectangle she drew a vertical line in the middle of the rectangle that ran from top to bottom. That also is a line of symmetry. For the third rectangle, she drew a diagonal line that ran from the top corner to the opposite bottom corner. I stared at it for a moment and then told her it was not a line of symmetry. She was quite puzzled and asked me "why". I explained and she finally was able to understand. Later in the day, the actual teacher came into the class, and I showed him the question and asked him if he could answer it. He drew lines just as the eight year old had. Because there were three rectangles in the question, it was in fact a trick question. There are only 2 lines of symmetry for a rectangle. There are an infinite number of lines of symmetry for a circle and four lines of symmetry in a square. This is basic to the definition of a line of symmetry and a law of geometry. The universe is filled with laws and your body operates with very specific ones in place. Your internal temperature can only fluctuate within a few degrees, or you will die. Your heartrate if it exceeds or goes below very specific numbers will kill you. The composition of your body must be a precise percent water or you cannot survive. Laws of the body are nonnegotiable and must be kept for your life to continue. Your universe is packed with laws and you are made to live with them as the structure that determines your existence.

The Psalmist has this to say about God and His Law. **Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.** (Psalm 119: 165 NIV) It is not the idea of the law that does us so much good but rather the desire to live by it. **The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just. The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.** (Psalm 37: 30-31 NIV) The law is a protector of your soul and your relationships. It guides you and gives you instruction on how to live. From the very beginning of time, law has been God's way of making our lives good and right. When God created Adam out of the dust and breathed spirit into him, giving him life, and then made Eve his wife out of Adam's rib, God put one law in place. Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was it. God's plan was simple. When the two first humans were created, they were innocent like newborn babies. They had absolutely no experience with evil, with wrong or with obeying what is right. They were morally without experience. God wanted them not like little babies for the rest of their existence but instead, mature by becoming holy and righteous. You cannot, however, be righteous, or for that matter holy unless you become moral, and morality requires making moral decisions and taking moral action, choosing good over evil.

The LORD gave Adam and Eve an incredible opportunity. They could be holy and righteous without ever experiencing the horrible consequences of evil. If I were to ask you if you would prefer being raised by parents who loved you and shielded you from evil or grow up in a home where you are abused by your parents and surrounded by wicked people, which would you choose? Would you rather work for a company where everyone is honest and loves and supports one another or a company where all the others are mean and selfish and backstabbing and corrupt? I think I know

your answer. God gave Adam and Eve the perfect home without even the taste of evil or corruption. But he also provided them the opportunity of knowing good from evil because the choice was before them each day. Choose good by not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or choose evil by taking a bite from the forbidden fruit. The law of God was perfect and good. Stay away from the forbidden fruit because by eating it you will bring death upon you and the generations that follow, and every day evil will be a part of your life. Satan was allowed in the Garden to make the choice clear for Adam. Choose to not eat the forbidden fruit and grow in holiness and righteousness. Learn about right and wrong by doing what is right and rejecting what is wrong. Then if Adam and Eve chose to follow the law, they would have found out by experience the perfect life they could have by rejecting Satan's temptation rather than experiencing the broken and painful life they gained by choosing evil.

The law of God is for your good every time. Many question the chains God imposes on them because of His law. They don't realize that just as it was for Adam and Eve, the law is there to make life good and joyous. Choose one of the Ten Commandments and justify it not being included in the group. Would Uriah the Hittite who David the king betrayed by stealing Uriah's wife and sleeping with her and then covering up her pregnancy by having him killed be in favor of eliminating the command to not murder or the one to not commit adultery? Would you be happy if a mugger robs you of your money and violates the law not to steal, if a car salesman lies to you about the car you are thinking of buying by violating the law to not deceive others or if your children after you have raised them with love and sacrifice reject you and despise you by violating the law to honor mother and father? Of course not. The law is in place, all the laws, to make your life good and right! Obviously it required Adam to maintain his faith in God as unequivocally good to follow the law requiring complete rejection of the forbidden fruit. The same is true for you. Faith in God that He is good and perfect is what drives your commitment to keep the laws of God regardless of whether they seem fair to you or right. Without faith in God, the law is a suggestion rather than a law and you decide if you will obey it or not.

What Adam did not do, Jesus Christ did. Jesus kept the Law. He obeyed it from top to bottom and not a bit of it He defied. Jesus by faith in the Father did everything God said to do. Of course you know that. He is the perfect Son of God. What you may not know is that the power of Christ to keep the law is in you if you are born again. You cannot and will not keep the law if you stay as you are. But once you put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior so that God forgives all the times you have not kept His perfect law Jesus Christ immediately becomes a part of you and He, Himself lives in you and through you. Without the power of Jesus Christ living through you, the law is impossible for you to keep. Here is an example of a law you cannot keep on your own. **"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.** (Luke 6: 27-30 NIV) You may not kill or steal but you won't do this, blessing and loving those who treat you horribly. What you cannot do on your own, with Christ in you, you can. Jesus changes your entire internal ecosystem. Love and forgiveness begin to replace bitterness and grudge holding. Here is a secret that is buried in plain sight. **To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1: 27 NIV) Do you realize what greatness is possible for you since this is true? Your life is never very good if you don't follow the law God has set out in the Bible, certainly not as good as it can be, but if you let Christ live through you, you can and will obey the laws of God and develop a great, heroic and joyful life that is there for those who follow each law of God they find in the Bible. Our big idea today is simple. Let the laws of God build your life and bless it. The best life is always the one that obeys God each time.