

Last year, Robyn and I got to go to Tasmania for a holiday ... And, it was a really good trip. There's plenty to see in Tasmania..., and it's such a small place.

(One truckie said he went to Tasmania once, and he had to reverse out)...

So, you don't have to spend all day driving to get from Point A to Point B. But of course, a lot of the places we wanted to go, included a lot of twisty-turny mountainous and coastal roads.

But the road rules in Tasmania – particularly the ones I was interested in – the speed limits – are very different, to how things are set up in Queensland.

In Queensland, as soon as you get onto a road with a few twists and turns, they legislate for safety, and they police it with the law, and they'll set the speed limit at 60 km/hr; or 50; or 40, and if you happen to wander over that (on a nice long straight stretch), you'd watch out, because you're going to get booked...

But when we got off the plane in Hobart, right there in the airport was a sign, that said, "Welcome to Tasmania", and then it went on to say something along the lines of "Tasmanians drive to the road conditions, and we'd like you to do the same, so that you're still alive to get onto your plane home." That's not exactly what it said, but that's the gist of it. And it's true.

On a twisty-turney road, that in Queensland would've had us down to 60 or 40, or maybe even 20, in Tasmania, the speed limit stayed (most of the time) at 100.... What difference did it make?

*It made a lot of difference... The difference was **freedom** – and believe it or not, it was also **safer**.*

What it meant, was that on the roads, I didn't have to constantly be looking down at my speedo – I could actually keep my eyes on the road; And I could watch the corners; And I could watch the other traffic;

*And at times, I might've been doing only 30 or 40km/hr in a 100 zone, but that didn't matter, because everybody else was too. When it wasn't safe to be doing 100, we drove at the speed that **was** safe. And then, on the straights, you could drive at a decent speed, without fear of getting booked...*

It was safer, because I wasn't afraid of what the law was going to do to me, if I happened to wander over the speed limit. And my whole concentration, was on driving to the conditions, and being safe about it...

*There are 2 systems. The **aim**, of **both** systems, is to keep people safe on the roads. One system legislates, with low speed limits, and if you get caught over those speed limits, we're going to hit you hard and punish you. The other system, still has the same aim – to keep people safe on the roads, and it encourages you, to drive (with relative freedom) in the spirit of safety.*

Mind you, the Tasmanians also have their issues, with trying to legislate for safety – when it comes to driving on gravel roads... Maximum speed 80km/hr, even on a really good gravel road.... And a lot of us here, that would drive us crazy...

Now, why am I telling you this? Was this my little self-righteous rant about speed limits and revenue raising? No. I tell you this, because this is the best analogy I could think of, to describe the difference between “being held captive by the Law”, and “to live by the Spirit”.

And so let’s bring this back to today’s reading:

In the letter to the Romans, at times it feels like we’re getting ‘mixed messages’, on whether the Law is a good thing or a bad thing. And I think it’s important at this stage, for us to identify, that (in **this** section of the letter), when Paul is talking about the Law, he’s not talking about road rules, and he’s not talking about the laws of the land, he’s not talking about the stuff that Jesus said – he’s talking about the Jewish Mosaic Law – the Law of Moses, which included the 10 Commandments, and a lot of other laws as well... But it’s also referring to a whole heap of (what I’m going to call) by-laws, which the “teachers of the Law” had built up around the Law of Moses over the centuries.

And sometimes, the picture that Paul is painting of the Law, is a bad picture. He says things like:

- Our sinful passions were aroused by the Law – alright, so the Law was supposed to be a deterrent, but instead, when the Law says “Don’t covet”, because **we’re** sinful creatures, when we hear that command, and we go “Owww, I wasn’t coveting, but now that I’m sort of aware of coveting, I sort of want to covet...”

And he says things like:

- ...apart from the Law, sin lies dead... and;
- when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died...
- ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

And so the Law is painted as a bad thing...

But then he counters this by saying:

- Shall we say that Law is sin??? No way!!! - it helps me to **recognise** sin, for what sin is

He says:

- The Law is spiritual... ; and
- ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. – There's no ambiguity there, is there? the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good

And so it **seems** like we're getting these messages – but the outcome of it is, “The Law **is** a good thing” – it helps us to recognise what sin is.

And the Law itself, didn't bring death – **our** sinfulness, is what brought us death. What the law did, was increase the threat of punishment – because when the Law tells us it's wrong, there's no excuse...

So, if the Law's a good thing, why did Jesus die, to release us from the Law? And why, when we are baptised, is part of

that, “Dying to the law”? Why is it a good thing – “to die to the Law”? Why is it a good thing – “to be released from the Law”?

I’ll tell you why – It’s because the Law, shows us what sin is, but it cannot stop us from sinning... It cannot help us – it cannot rescue us.

The Law is good and wonderful and true and Holy and righteous... The trouble is, we are not. Without Jesus, there is no way that we can ever live up to the demands of the Law... Many have tried... And they’ve all failed...

Think about the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They lived such righteous, holy lives... And yet the way Jesus spoke to them, you’d think that they were the devil incarnate... Because their eyes were fixated on the written law. And they would not break that law. And they judged everybody else who did break that law... And while they were **trying** to be righteous, they weren’t righteous, because they didn’t love... Their outward actions may have appeared righteous, but their hearts weren’t right before God.

A really good example of this, is when Jesus’ disciples picked a few heads of grain, and rubbed them out and ate them, as they walked through a paddock, the Pharisees said “You did that on a Saturday – You’re working on the Sabbath!!!” - that wasn’t work. That was having a little snack. And then when Jesus healed a withered hand, so that that man was whole and restored, the Pharisees were setting him up, to say “You’ve done work on the Sabbath” ...

You see, the written Law, said “Here’s a day, so you can have a day of rest every week – don’t work on it”. And then with their by-laws, they legislated what constituted work. :

- So, you could not light a fire / put a fire out
- couldn’t cook food / heat food, but you could make a salad
- You were only allowed to walk a certain distance in a day

And the way that their by-laws had so tied up this day of rest, it came to the point where they would punish Jesus, for a miracle of God on a Saturday... And at one point, Jesus said to them: ^{Mark 2:27} **The Sabbath was made for man - not man for the Sabbath**”.

No matter how good the law is, because sin lives in us, we cannot keep the Law... Even when we know that it’s Good – Even when we love the Law, we can’t keep it... It just leaves us feeling shackled; inadequate; sinful; wretched.

What we need is righteous freedom – and that is something that the Law cannot give us.

Alright, so if we are set free from the Law, it’s important for us to understand what this looks like. If **sin** continues to be my master, and I get set free from the law, well **sin** will use this freedom to descend into lawlessness...

Alright, so let’s go back to my driving analogy: If a wild, arrogant, careless, risk-taking driver, was on those twisty-turny roads in Tasmania, and his passenger was urging him

on (“Come on, you can go better than that” ... Woo Hoo! Take the next corner faster!”)... he’d probably speed up to break-neck speeds, and it wouldn’t be long until he’d slide off the road, and crash down a cliff...

Alright, so if sin continues to be our master, and the Law is taken away, sin will use that freedom, for us to descend into lawlessness.... But that’s not what it means, for a Christian to be set free from the Law.

V⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

*Freedom from sin also means “serving” righteousnessⁱ. The old way, was to live by a set of written laws. And we’ve been set free from that – not to Lawlessness – but to **serve in the new way of the Spirit.***

When the Holy Spirit, is living inside of us – **that’s** the source of freedom. **That’s** where the righteousness of God comes from. What a wonderful concept. Living a righteous life – not because we’ve studied up on all the codes, but because the Holy Spirit is our guide...

I want you to imagine, that you’re driving on that dangerous, twisty-turney mountainous road again. And there are no speed limits...

And I want you to imagine, a very skilled navigator, is in the passenger’s seat beside you... And I want you to imagine that

his son died, not long ago, because a careless driver killed him in a car accident, on a twisty-turny mountainous road...

And your navigator says to you, “Slow down, you’re coming up to a sharp corner, and you’re going too fast for it. Don’t look at that scenery – you keep your eyes on the road...” Be careful of that other driver...

Jesus Christ died, to set us free from sin. He died to set us free from the Law. He died, so that He could guide us to serve righteousness....

Now, a big question, which Bible scholars have had to deal with, with this passage, is Paul’s description of the inner struggle, of **wanting** to do right, but being **unable** to do right... Is he talking about “before we become a Christian”, or “after we became a Christian”?... In theological terms, if when we become a Christian, we are regenerated to become something new, are we talking about an unregenerate, or a regenerate??? – Before we’re saved? Or After we’re saved?

Biblically, I have little doubt that he’s talking about a non-Christian – somebody who hasn’t been regenerated... They have the **incapacity** to do what the law requires, and they need to be free – they need to be rescued, and Jesus is the only one who can do that...

And yet, when **I** read the Bible, **I** read it as if he’s talking about **me**... I’m afraid that, as **you** read this, I feel that I’ve got to hide, because you know, “He’s talking about Michael.” ...

And I believe every Christian would naturally read this passage as if it's talking about them... And the reason for this, I believe, is because we are not yet perfected. Old habits die hard.

The Law, continues to set a benchmark. The Law continues to tell us God's righteous decree... And the Holy Spirit, as He guides us, will guide us in agreeance with the Law... But sometimes we disobey. Sometimes we need forgiveness...

And so this, for you and I, is a reminder of the freedom that comes with forgiveness. We need to hear it again, and again, and again... And we need to understand this, because unless we begin to understand, what this freedom from the Law is about, even as a Christian, we will continue to feel "inadequate", "bound" and "wretched"...

So this is for us:

Romans 7:14-8:4 (NIV84)

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not

want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Do you ever feel like that? Even as a Christian – do you ever feel like that? Well, let's go on.

Who will rescue me from this body of death?

²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life **set me free** from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his own Son** in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.

And so he condemned sin in sinful man,⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

I'm a little bit jealous, because in 2 weeks time (when we next meet), Justin gets to preach on that – It's one of the most wonderful passages in the Bible – about living in the Spirit...

Wonderful stuff...

Let's pray:

¹ Moo, D.J., 1996. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.