

Liberation from the Law

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掟からの解放

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ゴットホルド・ベック

Exodus

20:1 Then God spoke all these words:

20:2 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

20:3 You are to have no other gods besides me.

20:4 “You are not to make for yourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on earth below, or in the water under the earth.

20:5 You are not to bow down to them in worship or serve them; because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of the parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me,

20:6 but showing gracious love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

[International Standard Version]

Matthew

5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I didn't come to destroy them, but to fulfill them,

5:18 because I tell all of you with certainty that until heaven and earth disappear, not one letter or one stroke of a letter will disappear from the Law until everything has been accomplished.

5:19 So whoever sets aside one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom from heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom from heaven

5:20 because I tell you, unless your righteousness greatly exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom from heaven!

5:28 But I say to you, anyone who stares at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

5:29 So if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your body parts than to have your whole body thrown into hell.

5:31 It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.'

5:32 But I say to you, any man who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to

commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

5:43 You have heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbor' and hate your enemy.

5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.

Romans

7:1 Don't you realize, brothers—for I am speaking to people who know the Law—that the Law can press its claims over a person only as long as he is alive?

7:2 For a married woman is bound by the Law to her husband while he is living, but if her husband dies, she is released from the Law concerning her husband.

7:3 So while her husband is living, she will be called an adulterer if she lives with another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from this Law, so that she is not an adulterer if she marries another man.

7:4 In the same way, my brothers, through the Messiah's body you also died as far as the Law is concerned, so that you may belong to another person, the one who was raised from the dead, and may bear fruit for God.

7:5 For while we were living according to our human nature, sinful passions were at work in our bodies by means of the Law, to bear fruit resulting in death.

7:6 But now we have been released from the Law by dying to what enslaved us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit, not under the old writings.

7:18 For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but I cannot carry it out.

7:19 For I don't do the good I want to do, but instead do the evil that I don't want to do.

7:20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am no longer the one who is doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me.

7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is infected by death?

7:25 Thank God through Jesus the Messiah, our Lord, because with my mind I myself can serve the Law of God, even while with my human nature I serve the law of sin.

Today, I would like to talk about liberation from the control of the Law.

We, who have accepted Jesus, looking back at all those years that we lived, have somewhat the same

feelings. For many years, I was wandering around meaninglessly with no God, with no hope, having no idea at all as to what I was living for. My heart was never satisfied. I was looking at worldly things and I felt blessed when such worldly desires were fulfilled.

Then, we came to understand the salvation that Jesus, the Son of God accomplished for the entire human race when we heard the amazing gospel. Afterward, we began to realize how hopeless and wicked we were, that we were dead in our sins and that we absolutely needed to accept the salvation of Jesus, the Son of God, who sacrificed Himself.

Then, we began to pray, "Lord, I am so wicked and I am destined to perish. I am begging you, the holy one, that you let me receive your forgiveness of sins through the blood of your Son, Jesus." I guess that you went through a fierce battle in your heart before you finally accepted Jesus.

However, after you accepted Jesus, you were filled with joy and peace and entered the life of blessing. But, afterward, I suppose that you started to feel uncertain about whether your sins were truly forgiven because you sensed your sinful nature still residing within you, driving you to commit the same sins again and again.

Not only did Jesus die to remove our sins, but He also died on behalf of us sinners. It is not just our sins that were washed away, but our old nature is crucified with Jesus. "I was crucified with Jesus." It was the most important experience in our lives that we discovered this truth, which will never ever be forgotten.

When we found out this truth, it was followed by the realization of the amazing fact that we died along with Jesus and also resurrected with Him. At the same time, we came to realize and appreciate the fact that we no longer belong to ourselves, but, we now belong to the Lord because we were redeemed by His precious blood.

Consequently, we decided to devote our whole body and soul to the Lord and entrust ourselves to Him. I believe that this was the path that most of us passed through before we reached the faith. Jesus has accomplished the amazing work of salvation for people like us.

We were given the desire to dedicate ourselves and serve Jesus. Furthermore, we came to the understanding that if we truly want to please the Lord, we are supposed to seek His will sincerely and obey it, instead of trying to do as much service as possible for Him.

So-called the Lord's servants, His true servants refer to those who do the will of the Lord. They are those who pray just like Jesus Himself, "Yet not what I want but what you want," or just like Mary, mother of Jesus, who prayed, "Let everything you have said happen to me." Those who pray this way deserve to be called the true servants.

However, then, we came to realize that although we sincerely want to satisfy the will of the Lord in everything we do, still, somewhere hidden deep in our hearts was something that kept us from doing so. When we found it, we began to feel uncertain of our past experience. I once certainly believed that I was crucified with Jesus. But, was it not true? I was certainly told that I was crucified with him.

Then, we get anxious that we may have failed to surrender everything to Jesus. We certainly have surrendered our whole life to Jesus. Still, someone else is lurking inside us, who goes against our will, who opposes God.

We want to serve no one but the Lord and please no one but the Lord, but we always fail to do so. When we do, we reflect, and we wonder if we might have committed a sin when we did this or if we were not obedient enough when we did that. We try to confess it to the Lord in order to enter the life of victory again. However, as we pray and stand up, we fail again and retreat to the life of defeat.

You believed that you had devoted yourself to the Lord, but you came to feel that you did not do so enough. You are determined to devote yourself anew to the Lord. However, you fail again and you find yourself unchanged. This was actually what Paul cried out about himself in Romans chapter 7, verses 18 and 19 that we read above. I suppose that after all, we will repeat the same thing and we cry out like he did.

Romans

7:18 For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but I cannot carry it out.

7:19 For I don't do the good I want to do, but instead do the evil that I don't want to do.

Chapter 7 of Romans consists of the history of a long spiritual war for believers. It is the record of their liberation from the control of the Law. I guess that this chapter can be effectively discussed from three perspectives.

Firstly, what the Law tells us. Secondly, Jesus as the termination of the Law. Thirdly, the blessing of giving

up on ourselves.

Firstly, what does the Law tell us? The Law of God is, as we all know, summarized in the Ten Commandments of Moses. Jesus cited them and explained in His Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore, Jesus summarized the Law of God in much simpler words, which can be found in Matthew, chapter 22:

Matthew

22:36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

22:37 Jesus told him, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

22:38 This is the greatest and most important commandment.

22:39 The second is exactly like it: ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’

22:40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments.”

This was what Jesus said about the Law. When we need to measure the length of something, we use a ruler. Likewise, we are given the Law of the Lord to judge what is right and what is wrong. However, people are using their knowledge and thoughts as the ruler to measure the right and the wrong. As a consequence, there are wars among nations and conflicts and friction among the people.

When we lived in the city of Naka-Minato, Ibaragi Prefecture, we used to shop in this grocery store. There was a newly employed young boy. It was very funny because he did not know the price of their goods and, every time we asked him, he always added the word “about” before the price, like, “this is about ... yen.” We felt lucky when the price we actually paid was lower than what he said. But, we felt unhappy when we got much less than what we expected for what we paid according to the price that the boy told us.

It was very disappointing. Many people use this word “about” in order to avoid making clear and definitive judgment. They make only vague judgments about their sins, saying, “this should be just about right.”

When people judge between right and wrong, they tend to keep their judgment vague and unclear. However, the Lord never makes such judgments. It was for this reason that He gave us the Law as the absolute scale. The Law is the only mirror in which we can see our true status; the same way the Lord sees our true nature. That is to say, the Law reflects our sins.

Romans

7:7 What should we say, then? Is the Law sinful? Of course not! In fact, I wouldn't have become aware of sin if it had not been for the Law. I wouldn't have known what it means to covet if the Law had not said, ‘You must not covet.’

Romans

3:20 Therefore, God will not justify any human being by means of the actions prescribed by the Law, for through the Law comes the full knowledge of sin.

Are we prepared to stand before this mirror? Or, do we hide ourselves from God? David daringly stood before the mirror of God to see how he truly was. As a result, he was compelled to pray:

Psalms

139:23 Examine me, God, and know my mind, test me, and know my thoughts.

139:24 See if there is any offensive tendency in me, and lead me in the eternal way.

David prayed this way from his heart.

It is absolutely impossible for us to stand before the mirror the way David did, unless we have a desperate hunger and thirst for the truth. Many people are comfortable staying half-way in the darkness and refuse to come to the light. They refuse to stand before the Lord naked.

Once, Jesus said these words in verse 19, chapter 3 of the Gospel according to John, being disappointed in those who refused to come into His light. This is true for many people living today.

John

3:19 And this is the basis for judgment: The light has come into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light because their actions were evil.

3:20 Everyone who practices wickedness hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his actions may not be exposed.

It is so dreadful if you prefer to continue to live in darkness.

These people will eventually awake from their sleep as they stand before the Lord. Then, they will see themselves heading toward destruction and begin to fear, but it will be too late by then. If a cancer patient refuses to follow the instructions of his doctor, instead, does whatever he wants and pursues the pleasure of life, it will inevitably lead to a painful result. Those who

refuse to lend their ears to the Law of God will eventually have to face even harsher consequences. The Law is always there to expose our sins and transgressions.

When we are illuminated by the light of the Law, we cannot help but admit how miserable we are and cry out how we are filled with sins. It is written in this verse from the Galatians:

Galatians

3:10 Certainly all who depend on the actions of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, 'A curse on everyone who does not obey everything that is written in the Book of the Law!'

The Law in the Bible is given by the Lord and thus, it is completely holy, just, and good. Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 7, verse 12:

Romans

7:12 So then, the Law itself is holy, and the rule is holy, just, and good.

The Law itself is good. However, the human-beings who are supposed to obey this Law are so wicked and helpless. We commit too much sin, and it has become impossible for us to obey this Law.

A law to impose taxes of 2000 yen on all residents of Tokyo might be appropriate and reasonable. However, if you have only 20 yen in your pocket, you would never be able to obey this law even if you are willing to. It is simply impossible.

Some people, although they might look quiet and gentle outwardly, suddenly show disobedient attitudes when they are commanded to do something. Little children are cute and lovely. But, when they are asked to do something they do not want to, they often show an unpleasant attitude.

We are exactly like them, aren't we? Our innate nature is, after all, by itself a sin. The Law was given to us from the Lord in order for this sinful nature to be revealed. That is to say, "You must not worship idols. You must not commit adultery. You must not give false testimony. You must love your God wholeheartedly. You must love your neighbor as yourself." The Law is given to us with the intention to reveal our sinful nature.

It is given, not to be kept, but to be broken in order for us to realize our own uselessness and inability. No matter how hard you struggle to obey this Law of God, you will absolutely fail, give up, and end up realizing it is completely impossible for you. The Lord God knows

very well that we are stained and covered with sins from head to toe.

However, the problem is that humans are not aware of this ugliness of themselves and do not care about their own sinful nature, isn't it? The Lord God gave us the Law in order to help us realize our true status. The Lord God gave us the Law, needless to say, being aware that we would never be able to obey it. In fact, the Lord gave the Law so that we break it. The Law was given to us so that our sins would increase.

Romans

5:20 Now the Law crept in so that the offense would increase.

Paul had the same experience.

Romans

7:7 What should we say, then? Is the Law sinful? Of course not! In fact, I wouldn't have become aware of sin if it had not been for the Law.

By the Law of God, our true nature is exposed. And, it tells us how we are completely covered with sins, that we are flawed and stained, and that we would never be able to satisfy the will of the holy God at our present status. Have we already reached this stage of understanding?

When the Lord God gave the Law to humans, He never even imagined for a moment that we might be able to obey it. He gave us the Law knowing that as humans we would absolutely break it. When we thoroughly realize our powerlessness, which makes it impossible for us to obey the Law, God's purpose of giving it to us is fulfilled. Paul said that the Law is the guardian, which leads us to Christ.

Galatians

3:24 And so the Law was our guardian until the Messiah came, so that we might be justified by faith.

When we are guided by the Law and are led to the Christ, Jesus Himself begins to help us to obey the Law, which was totally impossible by ourselves.

End