

I delight in the law of the Lord – 07-03-2011

Most all of us would agree that laws are good to have. There may be some laws that are unjust and evil, but having no laws is not going to be effective. For instance, I would love to be able to drive as fast as I wish to drive on freeways and other streets, but I also am thankful that the traffic laws prevent some other crazy drivers from driving as fast as they wish. While most agree that laws are good to have at least to some extent, there are very few that actually enjoy following the law. I aim to follow the federal, state, and city laws for the most part, but it isn't like I get a sense of pleasure or enjoyment out of it.

That brings us to Psalm 119 (please read at least verses 1-24). What's that, the psalmist "delights in *God's* statutes"? The psalmist's "soul is crushed with longing" for God's law? Is this author crazy (of course I would never think this)? Can God's law really be that good, that desirable?

Maybe we need to go to the New Testament to get it right, especially the writings of Paul. Paul makes it very clear (especially in Romans) that salvation cannot be earned by works of the law (actually the Old Testament does as well, hence the sacrificial system, Psalm 143:2 & 130:3 are also good examples and are actually quoted by Paul). Some people in Paul's day and our day as well take this as to throw out the Levitical law altogether, but if we read closely we find something interesting (please read Romans 3:28-31 & 7:4-13). To summarize Paul is explaining that it is impossible to completely follow the law, and thus the law cannot impart eternal life, but on the other hand it is still "holy, righteous, and good". Paul explains that though those under the New Covenant are not expected to follow the letter of God's law, we are still expected to follow the spirit of God's law. [Surprisingly even without all of the food laws this actually makes following God's law more comprehensive, not less, as it includes our motives, thoughts, and step by step obedience to the Spirit.] We do not inherit eternal life by being "good enough" through following the law, but that doesn't make the law evil. We are saved through Christ's sacrifice and resurrection alone, freed from the condemnation of the law, but at the same time we are freed in order to bear good fruit (v4). In the new covenant we are filled with the Holy Spirit and caused to want to follow God's law (Ezekiel 36:23-28 is a good prophetic word about this).

Does following God's law seem like a thing of pleasure yet? Let me tell a story I heard a long time ago (I do not remember the name of the young man who shared it) about two horses, talking horses, but not from Narnia as far as I know. As young colts they both loved to run in the fenced in pasture, it was a large pasture. Eventually one day there came a man who attempted to put this restrictive thing around the two horses and sit on it (it was a saddle). The first colt wasn't sure but allowed the man to ride on top of him, but the second refused bucking and throwing the man to the ground. For this second horse the same rang true for the rest of his life, never allowing anyone to infringe upon his freedom. He spent all of his days running and playing to his heart's content in the pasture. The other horse however was gradually asked to put on more and more to carry. This horse even got up to the point of carrying heavy carts, responding to whips (though the blows were not severe), and having its vision obscured by blinders. This horse went through a great amount of training. One day the wild and free horse saw a beautiful carriage in the distance, pulled by very regal looking horses. As the carriage approached the wild and free horse recognized one of the horses as his good

friend. The wild horse asked, "How is it that you were put in that position? Can I join you and your team of horses?" The trained horse responded, "You cannot join me, for you have not accepted any training. We are in charge of the king's safety, we must stop when commanded, hurry when prodded, and never be startled by danger. We will go far and wide, but it must be in obedience to our driver. You will have to stay here in the pasture."

The point of this story is that though God's law and Lordship seem restrictive to us, it is actually meant to lead us out of the fenced in area and to freedom. What seemed like freedom (sin) proved to be bondage and what appeared to be bondage proved to be true freedom (obedience to God). It is somewhat backwards to how we typically think of freedom. Typically freedom is thought of as the ability to do as one pleases, but this story illustrates how submitting to the Lord allows us to free to leave the fenced in pasture and become vessels that God is able to use for His kingdom.

God gives us His law not to be a burden, but rather to clothe us in honor by using us for His glory. We can delight in God's law just as the psalmist of Psalm 119 describes. The law doesn't exist for God to have an opportunity to be angry with us, though He very well might have anger. The law exists as a statement that "we can be pleasing to God." We will always be in need of mercy, but in that we will always have another opportunity to please our Master. God is not the boss that is impossible to please as your work is never perfect. Rather God sets out His law before us so that we know what pleases Him. In having His law we have a clear invitation and opportunity to be pleasing to Him.