

God's Law

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Preacher: Hunter Quinn

- [0 : 0 0] I thought it would be fruitful for us to turn to Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 over the course of the next two weeks and look at this image of God's law and God's king.
- So if you would, open your Bible to Psalm 1. It's just before the midpoint of the Bible at the very beginning of the book of Psalms. And as you turn there, I want to tell a brief family story.
- Every family has a story that they tell and retell on late winter nights. And this one involves my cousin when he was about three years old, maybe two years old.
- And as you know, every two-year-old, one-year-old, I guess he'd be one, sorry, as I have to think back. Every one-year-old likes to take the food from the tray table and drop it on the floor.
- And my aunt told my cousin, hey, don't do that. That makes a mess. You will not do that anymore.
- [1 : 0 4] My cousin thought, and then he looked at his mom and said, well, I think I will. So I want to ask you a question.
- The question is this. What do you think of God's law? What do you think of God's law? Do you like it?
- Do you hate it? Does it scare you? Are you indifferent to God's law? The book of Psalms is a large book, and it was the book of Israel's temple worship.
- They would gather together and sing these psalms in the temple. And Psalm 1 and 2 set the tone for worship. They've been described as the great doors into the house of the psalm.
- And it's very interesting that Psalm 1 begins with the Lord's law, with God's law. Now, we tend to judge ourselves by our own sense of the law, what is right, what is wrong.
- [2 : 1 3] And we all have slightly different senses of what is right and wrong. But as we read Psalm 1, I want to propose that rather than delighting in your own law, you ought to delight in God's law.
- You must delight in God's law. For two reasons. First, the law is a guide to life. God's law is a guide to life. And then second, God's law condemns to death.
- So God's law guides to life, and it condemns to death, and it shows us that God is righteous. And therefore, we must delight in his law.
- So, with that proposal in mind, let's read Psalm 1 together. And remember, this is God's holy word. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.
- But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

[3 : 32] In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgments, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

Would you pray with me? Almighty God in heaven, you are holy and enthroned in the heavens. We could not find you on our own, nor come to know your thoughts.

So thank you for having mercy on us and giving us your holy word. Would you be with me as I preach your word, and may everything that I say bring glory to you. May your Holy Spirit open the minds of the people here, so that they might understand your word.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God. In Christ's name, amen. So, what does the psalmist think about God's law?

[4 : 43] Look with me at verses 1 and 2. The psalmist writes, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. So the psalmist, we don't know who it is. He's unknown. It's not ascribed to anybody.

He describes a proverbial man, a stand-in individual who could represent any man or woman. And he says that this man is blessed because he delights in God's law.

Blessed here doesn't mean someone who is materially blessed with good things, but rather this person is in a state of happiness because he loves God's law.

And note at the outset that the psalmist refers to the Lord as capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

[5 : 43] And as I've mentioned before, that refers to God's covenant's name. I am who I am. The name that God gave to Moses when he said that he was going to bring Israel out of the land of slavery.

It's the name of a God who forgives sinners and judges others who do not ask for his mercy. This psalmist presumes an existing relationship with the Lord.

So the psalmist delights in the law, but he's not using the law as the road to God, to get God to like him. God already loves his people.

The psalmist is not saying that the law is the way to get right with God, like the Pharisees said in Jesus' day. So the psalmist describes this proverbial man as not doing three things.

The blessed or happy man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He does not stand in the way of sinners. And he does not sit in the seat of scoffers.

[6 : 49] So the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer are all different ways of describing people who do not like God's law. They are guilty of breaking God's law, and they mock God's law, and they invite others to join in that manner of life.

Here in verse 1, the psalmist is describing someone who is rejecting that downward pull of the wicked life. So after reviewing the life that the blessed man does not lead, the psalmist then turns to what the blessed man does.

The psalmist writes in verse 2, But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. The psalmist loves God's law.

So God's law here could either refer to the first five books of the Bible. That's what the Israelites called those first five books together. They called it Torah, or God's law.

Or it could refer exclusively to the individual laws that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Either way, God's commands are in mind, both in story form and in rule form.

[8 : 09] And the blessed man delights in God's law, day and night. At breakfast, the blessed man thinks about how the difference between clean food and unclean food reflects the holiness of God, and how Israel is set apart from the nations.

At work, the blessed man ponders about how his work is preparing him for a day of Sabbath rest and worship of God. At home with his family, the blessed man is teaching his children how the Passover lamb is a sacrifice for Israel's sins, and a reminder of God's redemption from Egypt.

At night, the blessed woman is thinking about the Ten Commandments, and how it reflects God's demands for a holy life. Delighting in and meditating upon God's law characterizes the blessed person.

Delighting in and meditating upon God's law characterizes the blessed man. So how does this fit with grace and with the coming of Christ in the writings of the New Testament? There are a lot of people who say, Ah, that's Old Testament.

The laws don't matter. Set them aside. And also, did not Paul say that righteousness is by faith in Christ and not by following the law?

[9 : 30] Well, it is true that we are set free from following the law. We are not made holy by following the Old Testament law.

Christ did that. He's the only one who could follow the law, and we are made righteous by putting all our faith in Christ. He's the one who justifies.

He's the only one who could completely keep the entire law. He sums up the life of the righteous, blessed man. It's the entire theme of the book of Galatians.

But at the same time, we must bear in mind what Jesus said in Matthew 5, verses 17 through 19. In Matthew 5, 17 through 19, Jesus says this, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

[10 : 36] Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. There's a difference between abolishing and fulfilling. Jesus did not abolish the law.

He fulfilled them. So all the ceremonial laws that talk about clean and unclean foods, methods of sacrifice, temple worship, all that points to Jesus as the great high priest and the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of his people.

All those laws point to him. That's the whole message of the book of Hebrews. And then when Christ died and rose again, the ceremonial law and Israel's civic law that governed it as a nation, those came to an end as well, because Christ alone is the great king.

However, the moral law is still in effect. In fact, throughout his ministry on earth, Christ clarified and emphasized the moral law and showed how you and I cannot fulfill the moral law.

[12 : 00] So Jesus Christ delights in the law, he fulfills it, and he does not abolish it. At the same time, you and I are not justified by fulfilling the law.

That's only through faith in Jesus Christ. So what is the purpose of the law now? Why delight in God's law now? I'm going to go fairly theological here, so please bear with me.

It's important for understanding the psalm. There are three purposes to God's law. Three purposes. The first is what's called the civil purpose of the law.

It restrains sinners from being as bad as they could possibly be. It restrains sinners from following their own law. The second is the reflective purpose of the law, or the mirror purpose.

When you and I look in God's law and we read it, we see our own sinful selves reflected back at us. And it turns us to Jesus in thankfulness, that he is the one who followed the law on our behalf.

[13 : 09] That's what the apostle Paul talks about in Romans 7. And the final purpose of God's law is the moral purpose, or the normative purpose. It is a guide to life for those who have faith in Jesus and have been justified by his righteousness.

It is a way of seeing how our God desires us to live and then walking in that slowly over time in thankfulness. So the blessed man delights in God's law and meditates on the three purposes of God's law.

The civil use, the mirror use, the moral use. And meditating and delighting in God's law has a drastic effect on the blessed man. Look with me at verse 3.

He, the blessed man, is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. So the word planted here technically means transplanted. The blessed man is like a tree that has been uprooted from somewhere else and planted by streams of living water.

[14 : 22] And think of the desert, hot climate of the Middle East. The plant is rooted next to a canal or flowing water and can survive the extreme dry heat of the Middle East.

And the blessed man is like that tree. He's been redeemed by Christ and delights in God's law. He meditates on it day and night.

Meditate here is a very powerful image. It has the sense of muttering quietly to oneself as you think. Like, oh yeah, the law, I really like it.

So, of just constantly going over the law and meditating on it, just being obsessed with it. His delight, the blessed man's delight in God's law, makes him like that tree that can withstand the hot desert sun.

Even when the surrounding life circumstances of the man becomes difficult, his roots are tapped into God through the Holy Spirit by Christ's work.

[15 : 30] His spiritual life does not wither when life circumstances get hard. He produces fruit even when he faces enemies, poverty, sickness, even death.

He delights in God's law and demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So, this man, he's tapped into God's law. He loves it. He adores it.

He's thinking about it day and night. He delights in God's law. So, church, you too must delight in God's law. You must delight in God's law because it gives you life.

Now, back in April, you may remember this, I fell, and I was walking around here with a moon boot and crutches. I went to the doctor, and the doctor said, you must not put any weight on it.

[16 : 39] No chores, no children's bedtime routine. You are to sit on your couch with your leg propped up and do nothing. Well, I thought I knew better than this medical professional, and I continued to do chores, and I continued to do bedtime routines.

Then, a couple weeks later, I went back to the doctor, and she looked at my foot and was like, what have you been doing? You've not been following my rules. It's clear. This should be much better healed than it is now.

I should have delighted to follow her instructions because her instructions were a guide to life and healing. In Psalm 1, the psalmist describes the blessed man.

The blessed, happy man rejects the sinful way of life and instead follows God's law because it gives fruit. It guides how he must live his life, and he produces spiritual fruit.

His life prospers even in difficult circumstances. So, church, delight in God's law. Delight in God's law by knowing God's law. You cannot delight in something that you know nothing about.

[17 : 54] The writings of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the latter part of Exodus, they can be very opaque, and often we struggle to read them.

I've had many a Bible reading plan in my own life get shipwrecked on the shoals of Leviticus. But the law is delightful.

So ask questions about God's law. Just turn to it, go through a couple verses, think about it, ask questions. Go to your pastors, your city groups, your Sunday seminars, and bring your questions with you.

So, delight in God's law by knowing God's law and asking questions of God's law. When you read God's law, ask how a particular law fits into one of those three categories, the civil use, the mirror use, or the moral use.

So let me give you a brief example. Deuteronomy 22, chapter 22, verse 8, says this. When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it.

[19 : 16] But first, that seems like a strange law. God commands Israelites to build a wall around their roof so that no one falls off. Well, in the ancient Mideast, people had flat roofs, and they often still do.

When it doesn't rain in the hot summer, they would go up and sleep on the roof. And a wall prevented people from falling off as they slept or spent time up there.

So think about this particular law with the civil use in mind, the purpose of restraining sinners. This law commands builders to have people's welfare in mind when they build a house.

It restrains builders who want to cut cost. God is holy and loving, and he holds builders accountable for their actions.

Now think of the mirror use of the law. When you read that, you see God's care for dwellings and for homes. You see God's care for people.

[20 : 22] And I don't know about you, but my own heart is exposed. My dwelling, it is to care for others. I should think about how it protects others.

And it shows my heart is exposed when I see, ah, I think about my house for myself. That's it. And it turns me to Christ to ask for a new heart and for forgiveness for not loving others as I love myself.

And then finally, think about the moral use of the law. As a Christian, you have the freedom in Christ to follow that law because you are a beloved child of God who has been forgiven.

So you can ask Christ, give me a heart that wants to love others with my house. So I will keep it ready for the unexpected visitor who might drop by.

As a dad, that really speaks to me because our house is chaos 99% of the time. And I should have it ready for other people. Or if you don't have kids, think about how you might bless children who come into your house.

[21 : 33] How you might protect them. Sharp corners that could be, that could have a little something on it so that a baby doesn't fall and hit their head. As you look at Deuteronomy 22.8 and meditate on it, the Lord will make you like a tree planted by rivers of living water.

The light in God's law because it gives you life. And it guides you to a life in Christ. But like all laws, God's law comes with a sharp edge.

And as a law, it must be followed. And there are consequences when you don't. So what happens if you do not follow it? Or if you don't want to follow it, what then?

Well, let's keep looking at how the psalmist delights in God's law. He delights in God's law because it condemns to death. Look with me at verses 3 through 4.

The psalmist writes, He, the blessed man, is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

[22 : 45] In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. So here the psalmist compares the blessed man with the wicked man.

The wicked man is not like a fruitful tree. The wicked man curses God's law and follows his own law in thought, in word, and in deed.

So as a lawbreaker, the psalmist compares the wicked man to chaff. Chaff is the dry outer coating of grain. And you have to separate the chaff from the wheat in order to get to the nutritious wheat.

Farmers, in some parts, and even today, they take the chaff and the wheat after it's been threshed and separated, and they throw it up into the air.

The grain is hard, and it falls straight back into the basket that the farmer has. But the wind comes and blows the chaff away out into who knows where.

[23 : 53] God's wind will blow the wicked man into the wilderness like chaff. The psalmist then expounds upon the ultimate fate of the wicked.

Look at verses 5 through 6 with me. The psalmist writes, Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. The judgment in view here is the final judgment of God, when God brings all before him, and he separates the righteous, who will dwell together, and the wicked, upon whom he will bring down his full wrath.

Those who have faith in God, and are in Christ, will be in God's presence forever, while those who reject Christ will be assigned to eternal judgment, as discussed in Matthew 25, Luke 16, and 1 Thessalonians 5.

As the psalmist says in verse 6, the way of the wicked will perish. Not only will the wicked be subject to the final judgment, but wicked lifestyles and habits will be utterly destroyed by God's judgment and his wrath.

[25 : 15] God's law will judge the wicked. And God's law reveals the rebellious hearts that we all have. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 7, verses 7 through 8.

He says, Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin, for I would not have known what it is to covet, if the law had not said, you shall not covet.

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Do you see what is happening here?

The person who does not love Christ cannot love God's law. Our sinful hearts see God's law as a big do not touch sign, and then we immediately want to break it.

They were painting in my building and there's wet paint there. It said, Wet paint, do not touch. And I just felt that inner, unexplainable urge to just plant my hand in the paint.

[26 : 20] And I know you have all experienced that yourselves. The desire to do something just because it is forbidden. Look what else the psalmist says in verse 6.

The Lord knows the way of the righteous. Know here has the sense of acknowledging, approving something. Because God loves the righteous and their life, he will separate it out from the wicked and their life at the day of judgment.

In every human being, you and me will be judged according to the law and whether or not we have kept it. So why does the psalmist delight in God's law?

Well, he delights in God's law because it condemns to death. God's law condemns to death. So when I get the opportunity, I like to watch English football.

And I'm always looking for fouls and fouls that perhaps the referee is not catching. and I get outraged when I see someone who is clearly doing a flagrant foul, you know, hitting someone with their cleats, their boots, and then the referee does not catch it.

[27 : 42] It's like, ugh! But then when that happens in the direct view of a referee and the referee calls them out for it and gives them a red card, oh, there's something just delightful about that.

Justice has been dished out on the offender and he suffers the consequences of breaking the rules of the game. In Psalm 1, the psalmist delights in God's law not only because it gives life, but because it judges the wicked.

It brings God's consequences on those who break the law. Those who rebel against God and break God's law are judged by the standards of the law. sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous.

So one component of delighting in God's law is acknowledging that that law condemns you and it condemns me. All of us do not follow God's law.

We all break it in some form, in some thought, in some deed, some action. And if you're anything like me, your initial action may be to try to justify yourself.

[28 : 59] I did that because I was tired. Oh, I said that because I'm under so much stress. Well, she isn't a kind person, so it doesn't really matter what I say or how I treat her.

That's self-justification. It's shifting the blame onto something outside of me, some outside circumstance or person. And while shifting the blame that may make me feel better, it doesn't exonerate me.

I'm still guilty of breaking the law. In acknowledging that God's law condemns me as a wicked person, as someone who does not love God with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, body, or strength, it allows me to turn to Jesus.

You can turn to Jesus. He asks you to come to him. He is your righteousness and your life. He has fulfilled the entire law for you.

And until you acknowledge that you need him, you cannot come to him. So put your faith in Jesus. because he saves you and he will save you.

[30 : 20] Now, if you've already placed your trust in Jesus, acknowledge that God's law condemns you in three ways. First, acknowledge to yourself that God's law rightly condemns you.

Acknowledge that God's law rightly condemns you. That is the first step to then delighting in God, is acknowledging that you've not fulfilled it. It frees you from the tyranny of self-justification and lying to yourself about who you are.

It frees you from shame and instead, it leads you to freedom. Freedom in Christ. And your gratefulness for Christ's work will only deepen.

Second, acknowledge to others that God's law rightly condemns you. Acknowledge to others that God's law rightly condemns you. There's freedom in that.

There's freedom in acknowledging that God's law rightly condemns you. So when you sin against another person, when there's family tension, when there's tension within your friendship, you have the freedom to say, hey, brother, hey, sister, hey, mom, hey, dad, hey, friend, I sinned against you.

[31 : 36] I did something that was not right, and God commanded me not to do it, but I did it anyway. Will you forgive me? It's amazing how that can release tension in the family or in a relationship.

It frees you to be who you really are. So many relational dynamics trace their way back to one person refusing to acknowledge that they are part of the problem.

So as Christians, recognize that your life is hidden with Christ on high, and acknowledge to others that God's law rightly condemns you. And third, acknowledge your own lack of delight in God's law.

Acknowledge your own lack of delight in God's law. Turn to God and say, please, Lord, give me a heart that loves you. Give me a heart that loves your law. I don't love your law right now.

Will you give me a new heart that loves your law? It's a lifelong process. You will never be 100% like the blessed man who delights in God's law day and night.

[32 : 47] Only Jesus could do that. But over the course of a lifetime, God will change your heart through the power of the Holy Spirit to give you a love for the law, a love for him and his righteousness.

righteousness. So, in Psalm 1, we've been looking at why the psalmist delights in God's law. We have seen that the psalmist delights in God's law because the law guides to life and the law condemns to death.

Because the law guides to life and condemns to death, it is delightful because it reflects a holy God.

God in heaven, thank you for making yourself known to us.

Thank you for revealing your will for us in your holy law. We pray today that we would delight in your law as a reflection of your holiness and as a guide to living a redeemed, forgiven life in your Son, Jesus Christ.

[33 : 56] We also ask that you would delight, that we would delight in how it condemns us and our sinfulness, driving us with great thankfulness to your Son.

We praise you that you do not leave the sin of the world unpunished, but will restore the world to sinless perfection at the coming of your Son. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen.