Sermon Sunday 26 January 2025 St Pauls The Law of God is Good

**"The Law of God Is Good!"**

*Opening Prayer:*
Grant us refuge, dear Jesus, in Your holy wounds, from which You poured life and blessing for all Your children. Because You value all Your people, teach us to love and serve one another humbly and according to our calling. Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The word “***law***” doesn’t always have a positive ring to it, does it? I guess you could say that when you say “Law” …. Nobody likes to hear that. When we hear about laws or rules, our first thought might be restrictions, punishments, or limits to our freedom. But God’s Law is different—it’s good… it’s perfect… and matter of fact…. it’s life-giving. In fact, Martin Luther taught us in his Small Catechism that the Law of God has three key purposes *(can you remember way back then??? Lol):* The Law acts as a **mirror** to show us our sin, the Law is a **curb**… it works to restrain evil in the world, and the Law is a **guide…** it’s there to help us live in ways that please God.

God’s Law isn’t something to be feared or resented… but it is something to be cherished. Psalm 19 reminds us this morning that, **“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”** The Law is meant to guide us, restore us, and bring us joy! Seriously! Can you just imagine thinking about the Law of God in a positive way??? Well... you most certainly can!

But let’s be honest—sometimes the Law doesn’t feel that way. I know that. You do too. Sometimes, it feels heavy, especially when it convicts us of our sin. Seriously… we human beings just don’t take well to being told we’ve been wrong! Do we. But… perhaps nowhere is this truer than in our struggles with our relationships: how we get along ***with*** (or how we ***DON’T*** get along with each other….)

Take grudges, for example. ***These are one of the most corrosive sins we can hold onto***. They warp our thinking… they can rob us of peace and calm…. and grudges can keep us from living out the love our God commands us to have for our neighbors. You remember the greatest Commandment, don’t you? Jesus told us what the greatest Commandment is… He said: **“… you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** It is our love for God and one another that is the most important thing in all of Creation. There may have already been… or there may yet be that one, special time in your life… where you will so desire the deep-seated, warm and genuine love of another person… and maybe… just maybe… a stupid, ugly and petty grudge could rob you of the most important love you would ever need………….

I hope you were paying attention as we read Psalm 19 a little bit ago… it really paints a beautiful picture of God’s Law. It says, **“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”** Folks… The Law of God ***is not*** meant to crush you or destroy your life… but it’s given by Your Father in Heaven so to restore you and teach you how to live in harmony with God and each another. For without the Law of God? That’s how wars begin. That’s how countries are torn apart. And that’s how a congregation and church can be strangled into nonexistence.

What happens when we don’t live according to that harmony? Let’s consider a hypothetical example of someone holding a grudge. Imagine a man, we’ll call him Jack, who had a falling out with his neighbor years ago. Maybe it was over a property line dispute, or a perceived slight that was never addressed. Over time, the grudge grows. Every time Jack sees his neighbor; his heart hardens a little more. Instead of forgiving, Jack replays the offense in his mind like a tape on a loop, fueling his bitterness.

The longer this goes on, the more damage it does—not to the neighbor(!), but to Jack himself. He simply can’t see the good in his neighbor or even love him as God commands. Jack is drinking the poison of his grudge, hoping it will hurt someone else, but it’s destroying him instead. It’s like pouring gasoline on the fire in your own house – hoping that burning your own house down pisses off your neighbor…

This is why the Law is so good—it breaks through the poison of sin. It challenges us to forgive one another, to settle disputes among us… and to show one another the love our Lord so desperately wants for us to have. God’s Law is like a mirror, showing us where we are holding onto arrogance and grudges and reminding us that our relationships are meant to reflect His love.

In the Old Testament reading today… we see a beautiful but convicting moment. The people were all gathered in the ‘church’… and Ezra (the priest), he stands up and reads God’s Word to the people. Upon hearing God’s Law, the people came to understand their sins… and they were so overwhelmed by their sin(!)… that they begin to weep. They realize how far they’ve fallen short of God’s standard. [LP]

Have you ever had that experience? You hear God’s Word, and it cuts to your heart. Maybe it’s a command to forgive, and you think of that one person you’ve been avoiding. Or maybe it’s a reminder to be humble, and you recognize pride that you didn’t even want to admit was there.

Our first reaction to the Law is often to clam up or shut down. It’s hard to hear about our sins! But Nehemiah gives the people, and to us, an important message: **“Do not mourn or weep… The joy of the Lord is your strength.”**

Here’s the key…. when the Law convicts us, we must stay in the moment. ***Don’t run away*** from the discomfort… but listen… listen very carefully. Why? Because when we stay present, we’re going to be able to hear the wonderful Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Law’s purpose is not to leave us in despair—it’s to lead us to God’s sweet grace… for **“… when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem [us] who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”** It is by Christ’s atoning sacrifice that you and I have been given grace to live. By His death and His rising from the tomb that the Lord’s joy flows upon us and grants us everlasting life!

In Luke 4, Jesus reads from Isaiah and declares, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”** Christ came to fulfill the Law on our behalf, living a perfect life of obedience and taking the punishment, we deserved. This means that the Law no longer condemns us—it becomes a blessing. Through Jesus, we are freed from the fear of failure and empowered to live in joyful obedience.

Obeying God’s Law isn’t about earning His love. ***It’s a response to His grace***. It’s about living in the freedom Christ has given us and loving others as He has loved us.

So, how do we live the Law in our daily lives? Psalm 19 gives us the answer: **“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord.”** When we see the Law not as a burden but as a guide, we find joy in following it. Imagine forgiving someone you’ve held a grudge against for years. Imagine the weight that would lift off your shoulders. ***That’s*** the power of living the Law in light of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do this. We don’t live the Law in our own strength but in the joy and strength of the Lord.

**Conclusion**

Let’s return to Martin Luther’s teaching on the three uses of the Law. The Law is a **mirror**, showing us our sin. It’s a **curb**, restraining evil in the world. And it’s a **guide**, teaching us how to live in ways that please God.

When we understand these uses, we can see that the Law is **not against us**—**it’s for us**. It points us to Jesus, who fulfilled the Law perfectly and empowers us to live in freedom and joy. So today, let the Law do its work in your life. Let it show you where you need forgiveness. Let it guide you to bringing together instead of tearing apart… and let it guide you to love. And most of all, let it point you to the grace of God, which is yours through Jesus Christ.

**Closing Prayer:**
**Lord, we thank You for Your good and perfect Law, which guides us, convicts us, and points us to Christ. Help us to release grudges, live humbly, and love as You have loved us. Empower us by Your Spirit to walk in joyful obedience, trusting in Your grace every step of the way. Amen.**