

**Set Free to Live Free: Why rules are not enough**  
**Matthew 5:17-22, 27-28 Galatians 3:1-14**  
**Everton Hills**  
**5 June 2016**

This week, we are continue in a series of what it **means to live free**. Last week, Pastor Rob spoke powerfully about how we so easily add rules to faith, because deep down we feel the need to contribute something to our relationship with God. It is almost as though there is an inner security created when rules are present – because we have this list of things that we can and cannot do. And he said the problem with that, is that with that sort of thinking, it doesn't take much to slip into a **Jesus Plus** sort of thinking... rather than simply trusting in the reality that Jesus has done everything.

Now, to continue on that theme, I want to acknowledge that rules do have value. For example, imagine if for a weekend there were no road rules. You could drive as fast as you liked, on whatever side of the road you liked, as carefree as you liked. How would that work for you?

I know some of you are thinking – you little beauty. But the reality is there would be chaos and carnage. People would be killed or injured; many families would be devastated.

Freedom to do whatever we like on the roads would end up impacting other people's freedom to live. Road rules help keep most people safe – most of the time.

Now we often complain about speed limits. Many people look at them as revenue raisers. But once a speed limit is set, you have a choice to either **comply** with the law or **defy** the law. Both compliance and defiance can have their problems. If you comply, you can become so focussed on the speedo that you don't even notice other road users. And if you stay 5-10 km/h under the speed limit, you become a hazard to other road users trying to get past you!

But when you defy the rule, what happens? Either you drive your car looking for that person on the side of the road who is going to monitor you (so you become tricky), or you get booked. And while you might protest the fine, complain about revenue raising or loss of licence, the fact remains that the rule has good intentions and results. Evidence has demonstrated that speed limits does reduce road deaths.

**The purpose of God's law**

Now I want you to know that God has rules too. Moral laws. Laws that are designed to help people live well in society. For example, the 10 Commandments provides an excellent blue print for how people can live well and at peace with each other in community. In a nutshell, the 10 commandments teach us how to live in two sets of relationship – our relationship with God, and our relationship with others. And Martin Luther

wrote a great little book called The Small Catechism that teachers about that.

And Moses told the Israelites that keeping God's rules would be good for them: ***“Stay on the path that the LORD your God has commanded you to follow. Then you will live long and prosperous lives in the land you are about to enter and occupy.” (Deuteronomy 5:33, NLT)***

So let me ask you: Is God’s law bad in itself? No! Following God's commands is the path to a peace filled existence.

### **So what's the problem?**

The problem is me. I can’t keep God’s law. As soon as a command is given, part of me start to question it.

You see that in your kids, don’t you? Perhaps you see it in yourself. Suppose I told you to go home and clean your house. How would you respond? (Talk about it)

Some of you might have thought... you don’t tell me what to do. I’m old enough to be your father or mother.  
Someone else might have thought... I cleaned it yesterday. It’s good enough.  
Another person might... not today, I have family time, or other plans.  
And some of you might actually do it.

So this afternoon, it just happens that Wally Lewis, who is a great mate of mine, and I turn up, unexpectedly at your house with a TV crew, to provide a \$100000 cheque if the congregation has 100% clean homes.

Now what would you do?

Well, some of you would be blaming me for not telling you why I wanted you to clean your house.  
Others of you would be blaming other members in your household for not working harder, or doing their share.  
Some of you might just slam the door in shame.  
And some of you might be a little be smug, and look down on your neighbours, thinking, “At least I didn’t forget”.

God doesn’t always give us lengthy explanations as to why he gives us rules... although, to stop and think a bit, there are some pretty logical reasons. But when we refuse to trust God, when we defy his laws, then we discover that He knew what was best for us all along.

The problem with God’s law, however, it that it is made ineffective because not everyone joins in. Our human nature deep down says rules are OK for everyone else as long as I can do my own thing. And it is that **defiance** that

has been part of our fallen human condition since Adam. While the purpose of God's law is good, our fallen human nature likes to rebel.

Now those of you who are more **compliant** may be thinking, "Hey, PD, basically, I'm not that much of a rebel. I keep my house basically clean. I'm a pretty good person. I try to do what is right". If you think you are a better than most people, then listen to what Jesus does with God's law.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were good church people. They were really good, pious, devout people. They'd never miss a worship service. And not only did they try to keep the laws God gave to Moses, they also tried to keep a multitude of human traditions as well. They gathered for regular Bible study, fasted, prayed and gave to the poor.

What was their problem? They busy comparing themselves with others, so busy trying to look good, and be good, that they were self righteous. Jesus called them "white washed tombs" - bright and sparkling on the outside, but a decomposing corpse within. Whenever we get self righteous, we fail to smell the rotting garbage that we carry inside our hearts: those thoughts, attitudes and desires we like to hide.

In his Sermon on the Mount, **Jesus sharpens God's commandments** to burst our bubble of pride.

***"You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill." (Matthew 5:21-22, The Message)***

***"You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt." (Matthew 5:27-28, The Message)***

See how Jesus exposes our hearts. Once our inner world of unclean thoughts and selfish desires is exposed before God, we can no longer justify ourselves, excuse ourselves, or kid ourselves. You and I stand guilty as charged!

And that gets me to the text for today.

In Galatians 3, Paul reminds his Christian friends - and us - that our life with God is not attained by human effort at keeping God's rules! The fact is, no matter how hard we try, we end up breaking God's law - even if only in our thinking.

God's law always condemns.

Paul writes: ... ***those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law."*** (Galatians 3:10-11 NLT)

God's law accuses us, condemns us, and sentences us to death.

So what is the point of his Law? It is to invite us to rely on what Jesus has done. It is to take our eyes off of what we **DO**, and live on the basis of what Jesus has **DONE!**

***"But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.""*** (Galatians 3:13, NLT)

At the cross, Jesus took the curse for us. He died in our place for our failure to obey God's law - so we might be set free from the condemnation of the law, and made right with God. In another letter, Paul says that the list of charges that stood accusing us has been nailed to the cross of Christ (Col 2:13-14). Our debt has been paid in full by the holy and innocent blood of Jesus.

Because of Jesus we are now forgiven, pardoned, cleansed, and made right with God.

Because of Jesus we are set free from the chains of the law and released from its curse.

Because of Jesus, the devil can't use the charge sheet to accuse us anymore.

Because of Jesus, we are given the Holy Spirit who enables us to walk in this new freedom.

Living in a right relationship with God is not earned by keeping God's rules, but by receiving Jesus and his forgiveness as a sheer gift of grace!

That's why I need Jesus.

That's why you need Jesus.

That's why every person you know needs Jesus.

Jesus sets us free from the curse of God's law:

***"So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free."*** (John 8:36, NLT)

You are set free to live free. Next week, Pastor Rob will talk about in greater detail, what that actually means.