YOUTH UNIT II: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Law Reveals Sin YOUTH TOPIC: Freedom

LESSON 6 DATE: October 8, 2023

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:1-25
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 7:1-12

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

"Blue Laws ... Say What?" – Tiffany and Jordan were on the HBCU (historically Black college or university) college tour sponsored by one of the fraternities, a trip they had been looking forward to going on since they were in the ninth grade. They were now tenth graders and getting closer to having to make a decision about college. This September, as a part of this HBCU college tour they were visiting Howard University, Virgnia State University, Hampton University, North Carolina A&T University, Livingstone College, Morehouse College, and Spelman College. Tiffany thought she really wanted to attend North Carolina A&T, while Jordan thought he wanted to attend Hampton. For their spring break in March, they also would be visiting a few PWIs (predominately white institutions), the University of North Carolina, Virginia Tech, and the University of Virginia.

The bad thing about this HBCU college tour was that Jordan's father was a member of the fraternity that was sponsoring the trip, so he had come on the trip as a chaperone. While they were touring Hampton's campus, Jordan asked the student tour guide what there was to do on the weekends in the Hampton Roads area. She shared information about all of the things to do from Williamsburg, VA to Virginia Beach, VA, and in the other cities that make up the Hampton Roads area. When she finished answering Jordan's question, his father piped in, "When I went to Hampton, everything was closed on Sundays. Even the mall was closed on Sunday." Jordan's father had graduated from Hampton in the late 80s. Jordan responded, "Say what? The mall was closed on Sunday?" "Yes," Jordan's father replied. "When I was in college there were still blue laws on the books."

Jordan had never heard of blue laws. His father explained that blue laws was a term used for state laws or local ordinances that prohibited or regulated entertainment and commercial activities, including the sale of alcohol, on Sundays or religious holidays. Blue laws are also referred to as Sabbath laws in some places. They originated in England and were enacted through colonial America to protect the Christian Sabbath in light of the Commandment "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you." (Deut. 5:12 NRSVue) Jordan's father explained that most of the blue laws were lifted by his sophomore year in college, though some remained.

Today, despite centuries of change, blue laws remain in effect in many states. Mostly, they center around when alcohol can be sold and served. Jordan's father reminded him that the blue laws relating to alcohol sales and consumption would not affect him in college since he would not be old enough to drink most of his college years, and more importantly because he hoped that Jordan would not develop a dependency on alcohol in order to cope with and enjoy life. While many states still have some blue laws, they are most frequently challenged as unconstitutional establishments of religion in violation of the First Amendment. While the Supreme Court has acknowledged the overtly religious origins of blue laws in *McGowan v. Maryland*, they were upheld as advancing the secular purpose of creating a uniform day of rest.

Jordan's father had blown his mind with the information he had shared about blue laws.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- Do you think it is a good thing for local, state, or federal governments to enact laws based upon religious beliefs and practices? What are the pros and cons of doing so? Discuss the opinions among class members.
- Does your school system have breaks from school around Christian holidays? Jewish holidays? Muslim holidays? Is this a good or bad thing. Again, discuss this among the members in your class.

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

KEY VERSE: Now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. Romans 7:6.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? ²Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged

from the law concerning the husband. ³Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

⁴In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

⁷What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' ⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. ⁹I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived ¹⁰and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹²So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.



Today, our focus is on what it means to be free from trying to live up to the Old Testament laws. other words, somegovernments times and religions try and legislate. However, laws can never make us act in faithful wavs. Acting in faithful ways is a by-product of a change in our hearts, which can only happen by a move of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul begins with an analogy drawn from conventional views on marriage. A marriage covenant was no longer binding after the death of a spouse. Similarly, one is no longer bound to the law once one participates in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is an example that people in Paul's time would have easily understood. In our time, we could say that if a couple has a prenuptial agreement, its terms die if one of the spouses dies. The deceased spouses desires about their possessions would have to be outlined in a will because the "prenup" has no force and effect. Jesus' death and resurrection would be like the will that now dictates the terms of what the surviving spouse can experience, including new life in Jesus Christ.

Paul contrasts the old life "in the flesh" with "the new life of the Spirit" (v. 6). Paul is not necessarily saying that our bodies, which is a different Greek word than "flesh," is bad/sinful, while the spirit or soul is good. We believe this because in other places Paul speaks of a "spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44). Paul simply uses the phrase "in the flesh" to mean life lived in slavery to sin.

When Paul writes, "if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (v. 7), he is not saying that the law is the source of sin. Rather, he insists that the law is "holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (v. 12). He argues that the source of the problem is sin. Consistently, Paul argues that in saying that we do not do what we want to do, which is to keep the law, we are admitting that the law is good/has a purpose (v. 16). Again, the law is not the problem in itself; it is sin that keeps us from being able to keep the law.

Paul is acknowledging the tension between good and evil that is thus found within each individual—"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (v. 19); "with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin" (v. 25). All of humanity requires deliverance from the sin that thwarts good intentions. And so, Paul's question, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (v. 24) finds its answer in the next verse: "Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25). While the law cannot bring deliverance on account of our enslavement to the power of sin, faith in Christ brings deliverance from the power of death.

KEEPIN' ITTOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Are you a rule breaker or a rule follower? Parents will tell you that they can have two children born to the same parents and it is possible to raise one child who follows all the rules and another child who breaks all of the rules. It seems that some people were just born to break the rules.

Jesus did not come to break the rules, but he did not always follow the conventional understanding of the rules. No, Jesus came to fulfill the law. He said so

himself, saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (Mat. 5:17 NRSVue) But what did Jesus mean when he said he came to fulfill the law? He meant that Jesus came to be the living example of how the law should be understood.

In our Bible lesson today, Paul wanted both Jews and Gentiles to understand that while God established the law of the Old Testament for the benefit of the Jewish people, he desires for us to live lives of freedom, free from being slaves to laws of the Old Testament. As Christians, are there rules that we follow, in the name of God, that don't promote the will of



God? God says, do not sin, but Jesus hung around with sinners. God says, do not take advantage of others, but Jesus hung around with dishonest tax collectors. It isn't that Jesus was saying that we should ignore God's laws. Rather, God recognizes that each of us is a sinner, that the existence of laws will not solve our sin problem. Rather, only our faith in Jesus Christ can resolve our sin problem, which will make us want to live the law by loving God with everything within us (including obeying the law) and living out the love of God in community with our neighbors.

The blue laws mentioned at the beginning of our lesson did not keep people from engaging in activities that governments and some Christians believed were sinful. People found ways to sin on Sundays even when blue laws existed. The issue today is not that we no longer have blue laws, but that our hearts have not been changed in ways that keep us from sinning, not just on Sundays, but on Monday through Saturday as well.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- Create a poster of how you envision "life in the flesh" and "life in the spirit."
- Organize a potluck for youth with leaders in your church and discuss ways that youth feel the church can better fulfill the law, including loving God and others.
- Let's have a debate! One team will argue that we need to do to strictly obey the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament Levitical laws? The other team will debate that we need to do to obey Great Commandment and not the Old Testament Levitical laws.