

Lesson 18

- The letters of Paul 1
- Jesus has all power
- Living gratefully

Lesson 18a

The letters of Paul 1

The four gospels are followed by the book of Acts. We will discuss the contents of Acts in lessons 21b-24b. The rest of the New Testament is made up of letters, mostly written by the apostles. In the next three lessons we will discuss these letters briefly. In this lesson we start with the letters of Paul.

The letters of Paul

There are twenty-one letters in the New Testament. Thirteen of these letters were written by Paul. He was a Pharisee who for a while strongly opposed the Christians but then converted. After his conversion Paul travelled around the world to tell people about Jesus Christ. In lessons 23b and 24b we will discuss these journeys.

In many of the places where Paul and his fellow workers spoke about Jesus, people came to faith. Paul was strongly involved with those new Christians. Because he could not visit them as often as he wanted, he wrote them letters. In his letters he gave answers to the questions these Christians struggled with, he explained more about the Christian faith and he advised them how they should live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace to you

All of Paul's letters start in the same way. They first mention the name of the writer and then the name of the addressee, followed by a blessing. In Paul's day this was the usual way to start a letter. His letter to the Ephesians starts as follows:

Ephesians 1:1-2

'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Paul starts off by telling the people in Ephesus who he is: an apostle, a messenger of Jesus Christ. He is that not out of his own free will, but *'by the will of God'*. Paul shows, as it were, a proof of identity. What he really says is: 'I do not write of

myself, but only because God has appointed me as an apostle.'

Paul directs his letter to the *'saints'*, the *'faithful in Christ Jesus'*. Paul is saying that the lives of the Christians are united with Christ.

Paul goes on to greet his readers saying *'grace and peace to you'*. With this greeting he reminds his readers that because of Jesus they have been freed from their guilt and are able to live in peace with God.

The way the rest of Paul's letters are set up differs from one letter to the other. Most letters contain a part that explains the Christian doctrine and a part that describes what the life of a Christian should be like. These subjects are not always easy to distinguish. They can be intertwined.

In this and the next lesson we will briefly look at each of Paul's letters. We will keep to the order they are in, in the New Testament. This order is based on the length of the letters, from the longest to the shortest.

The letter to the Romans

Paul is planning to visit the Christians in Rome. So far he has not had any opportunity to do so. The church in Rome that Paul writes to is therefore not planted by himself. In this letter he introduces himself to the Christians in Rome and tells them what the Christian faith is. In short, Paul's message is that every human being, whether he is Jew or Greek, counts as righteous before God if he believes in Jesus Christ.

The letter to the Romans takes an important place in the New Testament. It outlines the essence of the Christian faith.

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Romans 1-4:

No one keeps God's commandments. Therefore, God needs to punish everyone, also the Jews. Both Jews and non-Jews disobey God's law. The only way to become righteous is to believe in Jesus Christ who died to restore the relationship

between God and man. Both Jews and non-Jews are counted as righteous through faith.

Romans 5-8:

When someone has been saved by God, he begins a new life. The Holy Spirit is at work in him and makes him into a different person. Someone who believes can be sure that no one and nothing can separate him from God.

Romans 9-11:

The place the Jews and the non-Jews have in God's plan of salvation.

Romans 12-16:

Paul explains what the new life of a Christian should be like.

The first letter to the Corinthians

During his second journey Paul went to Corinth, a Greek port that was known for its wickedness. Paul stayed there for a year and a half. During that time many Corinthians came to faith. It was not easy for them to live as Christians in a city like Corinth and for that reason they wrote a letter to Paul to tell him about the things they struggled with.

In his first letter to the Christians in Corinth Paul addresses the questions they have asked him and the problems in the church. The letter is very serious and contains a lot of warnings.

- *Contents*

1 Corinthians 1-6:

The church in Corinth struggles with numerous things that are not right. The believers are divided amongst themselves and Paul has heard that they allow people to commit adultery. Paul warns the church and tells them that they should get rid of wrong practices.

1 Corinthians 7-10:

Paul addresses the questions of the Corinthians. The questions relate to marriage and to eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. The Corinthians want to know whether it is right for a Christian to eat such food.

1 Corinthians 11-14:

Paul explains what a church should be like, how they should celebrate communion and how they should use the different gifts that the Christians have. Nothing makes sense if it happens without love for one another.

1 Corinthians 15:

Paul explains the relationship between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of believers.

1 Corinthians 16:

Paul discusses a few practical issues.

The second letter to the Corinthians

Not all the problems in the church of Corinth have been solved. About a year after his first letter Paul writes again. In this letter he addresses a number of questions that the church has. He also explains to the Christians what it means that he has been appointed by God to be an apostle.

- *Contents*

2 Corinthians 1-2:

Paul explains why he has not visited Corinth recently.

2 Corinthians 3-7:

Paul has been appointed as an apostle. He is a messenger from God. He does his work in all integrity and he hopes that the Corinthians will recognise that.

2 Corinthians 8-9:

The church in Judea needs support. Paul counts on the Corinthians to join the collection that is being held for them.

2 Corinthians 10-13:

Paul defends himself against the accusation that he would be acting out of the wrong motives. He warns Corinthians against people who act out of wrong motives and he shows how he goes about his work very differently from those people who recommend themselves.

The letter to the Galatians

Galatia is an area in present-day Turkey. During his first journey Paul has visited several towns in that area to tell people about Jesus Christ. After Paul left the Jewish Christians

have caused confusion with the other believers in Galatia. The Jews have told them that a person can only be saved if he keeps the Jewish law and is circumcised. Besides they try to give Paul a bad name with the people in Galatia. When Paul hears about all this he writes the Galatians a letter. He strongly opposes the Jewish Christians. Their doctrine undermines the essence of the Christian faith. A Christian is not saved by keeping the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

- *Contents*

Galatians 1-2:

Paul defends his position. He has been appointed as apostle by God the Father and Jesus Christ. He has always held firm to the truth that God declares a person righteous when Jesus Christ has paid their debt and when they believe in Him. A person cannot be saved keeping the Jewish law or by circumcision.

Galatians 3-4:

Paul uses the Old Testament to prove that people are not saved by the law but by faith.

Galatians 5-6:

Whoever believes is no longer subject to the law of the Old Testament. However, Christians should not abuse that freedom. They should love and help one another. The Holy Spirit will help them to stay on the right track.

The letter to the Ephesians:

During his second and third journeys Paul visited Ephesus, a city in present day Turkey. Towards the end of his life when he is imprisoned in Rome, Paul writes a letter to the Christians in Ephesus. In this letter he writes about God's plan of salvation. Paul explains how before He even made the world, God had already decided to save mankind through his Son.

- *Contents*

Ephesians 1:

Paul thanks God who wants to save people through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:

The separation between Jews and non-Jews no longer exists. Because of Christ they are united and all have free access to God.

Ephesians 3:

The love of Jesus Christ surpasses all knowledge.

Ephesians 4-6:

Paul explains what the lives of people who belong to Christ should look like.

The letter to the Philippians

Philippi is a city in the north of Greece. Paul visited this city during his second journey. When he is in prison he writes the Philippians a letter of encouragement.

The letter is remarkable for its tone of joy. Although Paul is in prison and has little hope of being released, he is not afraid or sad. He knows that Jesus Christ will take care of him in every situation, even if he should die. Several times in his letter he calls on the Philippians to be joyful and grateful.

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Philippians 1:

Paul thanks God for the faith of the Christians in Philippi and asks God to make the love and knowledge of the Christians in Philippi grow. He is delighted that because of his imprisonment more people have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:

Paul asks the Philippians to follow the example of the attitude of Jesus Christ. They need to be like-minded and loving and serving towards one another, not putting themselves above others.

Philippians 3:

Paul warns the Philippians against Christians who bring false teaching.

Philippians 4:

Paul shows the Christians what way to go.

In lesson 19a we will discuss the other seven letters that Paul has written.

Questions

1. How is it possible that Paul can be happy during his imprisonment? Read Philippians 1:12-26.

Lesson 18b

Jesus has all power

In the previous lesson we looked at the content of Jesus' message: the kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus does not only speak about the coming of God's kingdom, he also makes it visible.

He has power over sin and illness

From the very beginning Jesus' words are accompanied by miracles. When He travels around Galilee to tell people about the kingdom of God, He heals numerous people. He only needs to touch a person who is ill or speak a single word and the illness disappears. From all over Galilee people come to see Jesus when they hear the rumours about Him.

Read: Mark 2:1-12

2:10 *the Son of Man**: Jesus often calls Himself this

When Jesus has returned home to Capernaum after his journey through Galilee it does not take long for people to find out. Everyone crowds around his house to see Him. Soon the house is so full of people that no one can come in or go out anymore.

Jesus speaks to them; He tells people about the kingdom of God and calls them to repentance. However, while Jesus is speaking something happens. All of a sudden the sky is visible over his head. A part of the roof has been taken off. The hole in the roof becomes bigger and then a paralysed man is lowered through it in a kind of hammock. It was the only way for the man's friends to get him to Jesus.

Obviously, the man and his friends are completely confident that Jesus has the power and the will to help them. You would think that Jesus would immediately heal the man when He sees his great trust in Him. However, Jesus does not immediately heal him. Instead, He tells the man: '*Your sins are forgiven.*'

That is not what the paralysed man asked for. He came to be healed. Nevertheless, Jesus is not letting him down. He gives the man something that is more important than physical healing, a restored relationship with God. Jesus tells him that there is nothing that separates him anymore from God. Jesus shows here that a person's greatest need is not physical but spiritual. An illness or a disability can ruin a person's life, but sin brings the greatest damage to a man's life. It destroys his relationship with God. That is why Jesus addresses that problem first of all. In the name of God He pardons the man's guilt.

When the teachers of the law hear what Jesus says they are aware that something quite unusual is happening. No human being can forgive sins. Jesus acts as if He were God! What Jesus has said is an insult to God according to the teachers of the law. That is a sin that deserves the death penalty. However, Jesus shows them that He has the right and the power to forgive sins. He tells the paralysed man: '*Get up, take your mat and go home.*' Immediately the man comes to his feet, picks up his mat and leaves. It is a clear proof that God is behind Jesus. God would never give the power to heal someone to a person that has just insulted Him.

He has power over nature

Read: Mark 4:35-41

4:38 *Teacher*: that is how the disciples would often call Jesus

Jesus is tired. He has spoken to people all day. With the use of parables He has tried to explain to them what the kingdom of God is like. So many people came to listen to Him on the side of the lake, that He had to go out into a boat to speak to them from there. If He hadn't done so He might have been pushed into the water. At the end of the day Jesus asks his disciples to sail across the lake to the other side. While they are sailing Jesus has some time for a rest.

A number of the disciples are fishermen. They are used to sailing in the dark and also to sailing in rough weather circumstances. This lake is located between the mountains and it is not unusual that all of a sudden a storm comes up. However, this night the storm is so severe that even the experienced fishermen are afraid the ship will sink. The only one who is not afraid is Jesus. The storm does not even wake Him up! When the disciples wake Him up He reprimands the wind and the sea as if they were disobedient children. The wind and the sea obey Him and immediately the storm is over.

Jesus rebukes his disciples for their fearfulness. They have been through so much with Him and they could have known that they do not need to be afraid. If Jesus wants to go to the other side of the lake, no storm will hold Him back. The disciples are terrified about what happened. Jesus can do things no man can. With a single word He tames the forces of nature. It makes them wonder what sort of person Jesus is.

He has power over Satan

Read: Mark 5:1-20

5:2 *evil spirit*: a devil, a follower of Satan

5:9 *Legion*: a Roman legion would consist of 6000 soldiers.

The man is the habitation of a whole legion of devils.

During his life on earth, Jesus has on several occasions healed a person who was possessed by a demon. The demon, or devil, would take possession of a person and cause him to become physically or mentally ill.

The man in this history is not just possessed by one demon but by a whole legion of them. In the whole area of Gerasenes he is known to be a dangerous man. He does not have a house, but lives in the mountains in the caves that are used as graves. Everyone is scared of this man and makes sure to stay away from him. Everyone, except Jesus. He goes out to meet him.

Jesus approaches the man without any fear. Instead of attacking Him, the man falls at Jesus' feet. The demons, who use the man as a speaking device, acknowledge Jesus as their superior. They are even scared of Him. They know they are confronted with someone who is more powerful than them. Jesus tells the demons to leave the man. From that moment the man, who had been totally possessed by the followers of Satan, is himself again. He gets dressed and shows full consciousness.

Jesus allows the demons to take possession of a herd of pigs. Just like they used to torment the man, they now bring disaster to the pigs.

The people who had been tending the pigs, go to the nearest town to tell its inhabitants what happened. The whole town comes out to see Jesus. They are not very pleased with what He has done. They are afraid of his power. They want Jesus to leave them alone and ask Him to depart from their area. Their attitude is very different from that of the man who was healed. When Jesus boards the ship the man begs Jesus to allow him to join Him. However, Jesus does not allow the man to accompany Him. He has a special task for the man. He needs to go and tell people throughout the area about Jesus who is even stronger than the devil.

He has power over death

Read: Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus returns to Galilee He is immediately approached by someone who urgently requires his help. The man's name is Jairus. He is one of the leaders of the local synagogue. His daughter is dying and the only solution he can think of is Jesus. He throws himself at Jesus' feet and begs Him to come with him and heal his daughter.

Accompanied by a large crowd, Jesus goes with Jairus. Then something happens that seems to distract Jesus from Jairus and his daughter. A woman who has suffered for years from bleedings, has heard about Jesus. She has come to Jesus

Jesus has all power

hoping that she might finally be cured. However, she does not want to bother Jesus with her problem. She trusts that if she will only touch his cloak, she will be healed.

The very moment that she comes up to Jesus and touches his cloak, her bleeding stops. No one has noticed. However, Jesus stops and asks: 'How has touched me?' It seems a strange question. The crowd is so busy that people continually walk up against Him. The woman knows that Jesus is talking about her. Afraid that she has done something wrong, she falls down at his feet and admits that it was her who touched Him. Jesus did not call her forward to punish her. On the contrary, He wants the whole crowd to know that her faith has saved her and that she will be cured of her illness.

While Jesus is still talking to the woman, someone from the household of Jairus comes over to tell that Jairus no longer needs to bother about getting Jesus over to the house. The girl has died. Jesus ignores his words. He does not give his condolences to Jairus. Instead, He tells him: 'Don't be afraid, just believe.'

When Jesus arrives at Jairus' house, He goes inside with three of his disciples. The house is full of crying and mourning people. Jesus asks them why they are crying. The girl has not died – she is sleeping. Why would anyone cry for a sleeping girl?

The people scorn Jesus but He tells them to leave. Together with his three disciples and Jairus and his wife He goes to the room where the dead girl is lying. He takes her hand and tells her in her mother tongue that she needs to get up. The girl comes back to life; she gets up and walks up and down. Not only has she raised from the dead, she is completely healed. The parents and Jesus' disciples are amazed to see the girl walking around. How is it possible that even death is obedient to Jesus? Who is this Jesus for whom death is no more than a sleep that you can simply wake someone from?

What sort of person is this?

The people in Jesus' time witness a lot of miracles. They see how Jesus, a seemingly ordinary man, does things that no ordinary man can do. Wherever Jesus comes, disabilities, illnesses and even death disappear. In Jesus' presence demons are forced to retreat. Even the forces of nature are under his command.

No ordinary man can do what Jesus does. The Jews readily agree about that. However, that does not mean they understand who Jesus is. It is not hard for us to see who Jesus is because we have the whole of the bible. From the New Testament we know:

- Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour God had promised to Adam and Eve. He is one that will destroy Satan restore the relationship between God and man.
- Jesus is the Son of God. God does not just send any man – He sends his own Son to save mankind.

However, for the Jews in Jesus' time, the time before the New Testament is written, it is not so easy to recognise Jesus as the Son of God. Most people who meet Jesus are simply overcome with surprise or fear.

Some people do not trust Jesus. Amongst them are many teachers of the law and Pharisees. From the moment they hear Jesus tell the paralysed man: 'Your sins are forgiven', they regard Him as a blasphemer. The thought that Jesus might be the Saviour that God had promised does not enter their minds. They believe Jesus has received his power from Satan:

Matthew 9:33-34

'The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."

For a long time even Jesus' disciples do not understand who He is. However, Jesus makes sure that his disciples are not

stuck in fear or surprise for very long. It is time for them to understand who Jesus is:

Matthew 14:33 *'Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Matthew 16:15-16 *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

The kingdom of God is coming

In this lesson we looked at a number of the miracles that Jesus did. These miracles do not stand alone. Jesus does miracles to communicate something. He wants to make it visible that the kingdom of God is on its way. He shows that He is the king of that kingdom. He gives, as it were, a foretaste of what God's kingdom will be like.

Jesus frees a man possessed by demons from their power. It is a sign of the fact that Jesus will completely conquer Satan. In God's kingdom is no place for Satan and his followers. A paralysed man hears that his sins are forgiven. That also shows an aspect of the kingdom of God. There will be no more sin that separates man from God. Because of Jesus the relationship between God and man will be restored in God's kingdom. Not only sin, but also its consequences will have disappeared in God's kingdom. The people who have been healed by Jesus and the girl who was raised from the dead are the living proof of that.

Questions

- 1a. What does Jesus show with the miracles He does?
- 1b. What do the miracles that Jesus did mean for us?
Read John 20:30-31.
20:31 *in his name*: through Him
2. How is Genesis 3:15 related to Mark 5:1-20?

3. Very soon Jesus was suspicious in the eyes of the Pharisees, priests and teachers of the law. Give a few reasons. Read Mark 2:1-12, Mark 2:13-17 and Mark 3:1-6.
3:2 *them*: the Pharisees
3:6 *the Herodians*: supporters of king Herod
4. 'If Jesus would have lived in our time and we could have seen the miracles He did, many more people would have believed in Him.'
What do you think of this statement?

Lesson 18c

Living gratefully

In the lessons 3c through 17c we have discussed the Apostolic Creed. We looked at the contents of the Christian faith. In the next eight lessons we will use the law and the theme of prayer to discuss how that faith should become visible in a person's life.

Good works do not help us

God teaches us in the bible that we do not need to achieve anything to gain his favour. Even if we would focus our entire life on doing good, we would not be able to deserve his pardon. God sets us free and promises us eternal life without any effort from our side.

Jesus Christ stretches his hand out to us to save us. All we need to do to be saved is to believe in Him. We only need to grasp his hand. If we do that, we are saved.

Whoever is saved will do good works

Doing good does not contribute a thing to our salvation, our pardon. However, once we have received God's pardon we automatically will start to do good deeds. Not to pay back what God has given to us. That would be impossible.

When someone has saved your life, you cannot possibly repay him with a bunch of flowers or a gift voucher. Whatever you give will be insufficient compared to what you have received, your life. A present is not a payment but rather an expression of gratitude.

In the same way we cannot repay God for what He has given us. His gifts to us, pardon and eternal life, are so enormous that it would be foolish of us to pretend that we could give Him anything of the same value. The only thing we can do is to show God that we are happy and grateful for our salvation. We do that when we do good works.

The Holy Spirit changes us

In our own strength we would not be able to do good works at all. We already said that a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruits and neither can a sinful person do good. However, Jesus Christ not only saved us from the hands of Satan. He gave us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is continually working in us and makes us into different people. He causes us to do good and to be able to do good.

The children in one family can sometimes be very similar, not only physically but also in the expressions they use or their behaviour.

Something similar happens to Christians. God has adopted them as their children. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, regards them as his brothers and sisters. The Christians have a strong relationship with Him and that is visible in their lives. The Holy Spirit causes the Christians to increasingly resemble Jesus. They will start to show similar characteristics. For example, they notice a desire to live the way God asks from them and they become forgiving towards others.

This change does not originate in the Christians themselves. It comes from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes it possible that people truly show their gratefulness to God for what He has given them.

How do we show our gratitude?

God has not left it for us to decide how we express our gratitude. We do not need to think of things that might please God. God has shown us in the bible how we can show our gratitude. We can:

- live according to his will
- thank and praise Him and speak with Him

In the lessons 18c through 23c we will discuss the first way of showing our gratitude, to live according to God's will and in the lessons 24c and 25c we will focus on the second way, prayer.

Living according to God's will

How can we live according to God's will? God tells us in the Ten Commandments. By acknowledging these commandments with our behaviour we can show God that we are truly grateful. The law forms as it were the mould for our gratitude. That is why in some churches the law is read out every Sunday. The Ten Commandments are the following:

Exodus 20:1-17

'And God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

1. *You shall have no other gods before me.*
2. *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
3. *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*
5. *Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*

8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.*
10. *You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.'*

And God spoke all these words

Is the law a heavy burden that God lays on our shoulders? In order to answer that question we should look at the words that introduce the law: *'And God spoke all these words'*. God gives the Israelites the law a few months after He has liberated them from Egypt. God makes a covenant with his people. He tells them who He is: Jahweh, a God that they can rely on. He is the God who brought them out of the land of slavery – Egypt, the country of oppression and famine, where baby boys had to be thrown into the river. God had saved them from that dreadful place. Finally they are free. Now God gives the Israelites his rules. He does not want to limit their freedom but to protect them and show them the way to a happy life.

Delight in the law

Although it might seem strange at first sight, we can delight in God's law. We may regard a law as something that limits our possibilities and reduces our freedom. However, from the bible we know that God's law is not a heavy burden. It is not a straitjacket. It is a beautiful gift from God. An example that tells us that a believer can experience it this way is Psalm 119. This whole Psalm is a song of delight in the law.

Psalm 119:97-102

*'Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
Your commands make me wiser
Than my enemies,
For they are ever with me.
I have more insight than all my teachers,
For I meditate on your statutes.*

*I have more understanding than the elders,
For I obey your precepts.
I have kept my feet from every evil path
So that I might obey your word.
I have not departed from your laws,
For you yourself have taught me.'*

A life without commandments might seem more pleasant, but is that so? In paradise the serpent tried to convince Eve that she would be better off ignoring God's command. Believing the snake caused endless misery. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command they did not gain freedom, rather, they lost it. They became slaves of Satan. The only thing they could do from then on was to obey Satan.

God always wants the best for people. When He gave Adam and Eve the command, it was not to limit their freedom. He wanted them to know that the only way to be truly free and happy is to love and obey Him.

For the Israelites the law was also something good. It was not a heavy burden on their shoulders. The law was not a set of cruel regulations like the commandments of the Pharaoh in Egypt. It was a set of good rules given to the Israelites by a loving God.

If everyone would keep to those rules none of the Israelites would have to be afraid that someone would steal from him or cheat on him or run off with his wife.

God promised the Israelites that it would go well for them if they would keep his commandments:

Deuteronomy 12:28 *'Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right on the eyes of the LORD your God.'*

The law makes life liveable

The law can be compared to a Dutch dike. A dike creates a border around a low piece of land. It is a border that does not serve to disable life but to make it possible. If the dike would

be broken the land would be flooded. Life would become impossible. Just like a dike, the law is a border that protects life and makes it possible. If we keep God's commandments we can live in safety. If we would for example ignore God's commandment not to kill, it would have the same effect as a broken dike. Life would become chaos.

You could also compare the law to traffic rules. If you didn't know better you could think that those rules were only there to take away your freedom. However, everyone who drives or cycles knows that the rules are necessary both for his own freedom and for that of others.

What does the law have to say to us?

When we read the law we might wonder what it has to say to us. We have never lived in Egypt and been liberated from slavery.

It is absolutely clear that the law was originally meant for the Israelites. However, that does not mean that it is meaningless to us. The commandments God gave are still good commandments. God did not replace them by any others.

We have never had to work as slaves in Egypt. Nevertheless, God did save us: from the power of Satan and sin. As a liberated people the Israelites heard how they could show God their gratitude for their salvation. Besides, they heard in the law how they should live if they wanted their lives to be free and happy.

God also tells us: I am Jahweh, the God who has saved you. From now on live as liberated people! Do not become a slave of sin again.

We can delight in the law. God has not only given it as a way to show our gratitude for our salvation, moreover He shows us the way to a good, happy and safe life.

Questions

1. In this lesson we discussed good works.
 - a. List a few requirements need to meet. Read Romans 14:23b, Leviticus 18:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:31.
 - b. Can someone who does not believe in God do good works? Explain.
2. The law of God makes life liveable. Explain this using a few of the commandments.