

“The new order has come.” Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Our today’s reading helps us to reflect on something that we tend to forget. For it is not so easy to see it in our daily lives. And it is not easy to comprehend what a wonderful gift it is for us. What do I have in mind?

I am talking about Christian life. About the fact that Christians inhabit a very different world, if you will. That our lives are guided by very different set of principles – by freedom, by hope, by joy and peace.

Today we will briefly compare these two very different ways of life. Or better – two orders of life. They both apply to our lives here in this age, and for both of them the crucial point of reference is the coming age, our standing before our Maker.

The first one is the old order. Paul calls it “under the Law”, or “according to the flesh”. Or we can simply say that that is the order where we live on our own. And the second one is the new order. Paul calls it “in Christ”, or “according to the Spirit”. This one is where we live as members of the body of Christ, the Church.

Now, let’s see what is so different about these two, so that our gratitude for being able to live “in Christ” would grow and our hearts would overflow with joy for what our gracious God has done for us, and what is yet to come for His chosen people.

First, let’s reflect on the old order, “under the Law”. What is wrong with the Law? Nothing! The Law of God, or we could say His good and wise design for our lives is good and holy and beautiful. There is nothing wrong with it.

But there is everything wrong with us. Since the Fall, since our first parents turned away from their gracious Creator, we have this problem – we not only don't clearly know God's Law, worse, in our inner being we actively resist it.

We don't want, we can't live according to this good design. Our natural inclinations are hostile to what our Creator intended for us. But because God's Law is built into the very fabric of His creation, we can't escape from its influence.

Even if our flesh desires the very opposite, we all are compelled to live under the Law. How can we see it happening in our lives? It is actually obvious, when we know where to look. The Law of God impacts us in many ways.

It begins with our parents. What do parents do when their babies grow up and begun to express their selfishness more and more? Yes, parents restrain them, if they are wise parents, and teach them what is right and what is wrong.

Then the Law works through the society. Not only parents, but extended family, kindergarten, school and other communities keep teaching the young human beings what is good and what is not. What is permissible and what is not.

What will lead to our flourishing and what will be destructive for us and for others. As we grow up the law of the land steps in, and it too regulates what is allowed and what is not and what punishments will follow if we step on the path of disobedience.

But the Law works not only through negative and restrictive forces. It works in positive and encouraging ways too. If you do what is right, you may receive praise and rewards. As child and as adult as well, and to live that way most likely will be good and enjoyable for you.

Thus, through our whole environment the Law of God positively enforces that to do good and to be good is rewarding, it is wise and we benefit from it. Finally, the Law works through our consciences, it accuses and excuses us internally and thus compels us to live according to its expectations.

Do you see what it means? That in the old order of things, we are slaves and prisoners. Yes, we are slaves to our natural sinful inclinations and desires. They drive us, urge us, they make us to do things against our Creator's good design. And we can't quench these sinful desires and inclinations on our own.

Therefore, we are prisoners. Prisoners of the Law. For these are the multiple enforcements of the Law (remember – parents, society, laws of the land, rewards, conscience) that force us to live according to God's will. This is how we get good people, by the way. It is that simple.

The wiser parents you had, the better was the society you grew up in, the more external rewards and encouragement you received for doing what is good, the tighter the Law imprisoned your natural sinful inclinations.

We know it very well, what happens if in some cases these multiple fences of the Law are not erected to restrain our sinful nature. What happens when people grow up without parents, when they are not restrained and raised by good community? Then we can see the worst of our potential on display. It is ugly and scary...

Remember what pastor Feldmanis said in that high security prison as I related it to you the last Sunday: “There is nothing that you have done, that I wouldn’t be capable of in certain circumstances.” This is true for all of us.

Therefore, for someone who has been blessed to grow up in good family, in good neighbourhood, perhaps in the Church, who has been shaped and moulded by the force of the Law so in many different ways, for them to claim that they are such good people, –

... that is equivalent to someone, who is imprisoned behind many fences and bars, to boast that recently they haven’t done anything wrong. And why is that? Only because of the force that restrained them.

That is our natural state, our natural order for all of us. Now just imagine that even if you have led outwardly reasonably good life, you will need to stand before your Creator – on your own, and you will be held accountable not only for your actions, but also for your thoughts, attitudes, secret desires and sinful inclinations.

How can you stand, when all of that, and for your entire life, is fully revealed, and there is nowhere to hid, and no one else to blame? How terrifying a situation! But that is exactly where the old order of things leads everyone who rejects Jesus.

If someone wants to go ahead and stand before the Judge eternal on their own and with their own “accomplishments” under the Law... good luck with that! As Paul puts it: “Such person cannot please God”. Thus, we can see that living under the old order, according to the flesh inevitably leads to death.

The great news is that we as Christians don’t need to worry about it. At least not for ourselves. We still need to worry and pray and care for those who continue to live under the Law. But how is our situation different?

How is our new order better for us? And what does this mean – to be in Christ? It means that we are literary taken out of the old order, and transferred into the Kingdom of God’s Son. We are no longer under the judgement of the Law.

For we are no longer on our own. We won't need to give an account for our lives. For we are in Christ. And that means that when God looks at us, regardless of what sort of person you may be, what He sees is – His beloved Son.

He sees us as His beloved children. Because being in Christ means that everything that is good and perfect and holy in Jesus Christ, is now accounted to and belongs to you. If you are in Christ, then before the God's judgement throne you stand pure and holy and innocent. Which means – no more accusations, no more condemnation, no more fear, no more judgement.

And this is not because we, Christians, are better than others. It has nothing to do with our goodness, and everything with God's grace and Jesus' goodness. It is entirely possible that there are people who living under the Law have led 100x better and more accomplished lives than some wretched sinners who are now in Christ.

And still, on the Last Day the “good” person will have to stand on their own, and the thoughts and desires of their hearts will be evaluated against the holy Law of God, but the wretched and forgiven sinner will joyfully stand in Jesus Christ.

As beloved and longed for child of God. Guess, who will enter the New Heavens and who will populate the New Earth? Can you see what a wonderful gift our God has prepared for us, that He takes upon Himself all responsibility for what we have done, and now looks at us as His innocent and dearly loved children?!

And even that is not all. We are in Christ and we are in the Spirit. Meaning the Holy Spirit indwells in us. In you. Being in Christ isn't just a nice idea. We, Christians, are very tangibly and incredibly intimately united with the Triune God.

As Jesus, the Son of God, and the Father are one, so we are one with them by means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You are welcomed and embraced in the divine fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is our reality.

As this happens, you are born again. You receive new and pure heart that longs to please its Creator. Your true identity then is no longer defined by the sinful flesh, but by the Spirit of God who indwells in you.

Your new and true self is no longer enslaved to sinful passions and cravings of the old self, your will and longings are now in perfect harmony with the will of your Father. You are no longer prisoners of the Law. The Law will still restrain our sinful flesh, but our new self delights in the Law of God and gladly keeps it.

Now the Law of God becomes the source of joy and peace for us. Remember that in the Bible, the word ‘peace’ carries much broader meaning. It describes complete wellbeing – physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, economic, etc.

When everything is how it is supposed to be. This is where the life in the Spirit begins to lead us already in this age. It's just that in this age we will never get there fully. For we live in this broken world, full of injustice and evil and foolishness.

And here we come to our last point. Because the Spirit of God dwells in you, your future looks brighter than Sun. Remember, it was in the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was raised from the dead. Now the same Spirit dwells in you.

The same Spirit will raise you from the dead, but not as you are now, not imperfect and tainted with our old sinful nature, that would be a disaster, no – you will be raised for new life with God your Father and with Jesus, your Brother, in new body which will be perfectly fit for the life eternal radiating divine glory and beauty.

This is where we are heading. This is why our life as Christians is so different from the life in the old order, under the Law and on our own. By God's grace we are rescued from the slavery to sin and the imprisonment to the Law and death.

We now live in Christ, united with His body by His own Spirit, still saddened by troubles and pains of this life, but full of hope, for the life eternal is coming and we are going to enjoy it. And it is not because of our goodness, but only because we have accepted God's gracious gift of new life in Jesus.

May this reminder of how much has been given to us, and how wonderful it is to be in Christ would excite us and would make us passionate to see more of our loved ones moving from the old order to the new, from death into life, from being on their own, to being embraced and surrounded by our Father and Jesus and the multitudes of God's saints. May we all see it happening by God's grace again and again...

Amen.