

The Law of the Spirit of Life

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to grab your copy of the scriptures and open up to the book of Romans chapter 8.

If you don't have a copy of the scriptures with you, then we have Bibles that are spread around in the chairs amongst you. You're welcome to grab one of those. And in fact, if you've brought a Bible with you that is not an English standard version translation, then you might want to grab one of those Bibles anyway so that it's easier to follow along.

Otherwise, the words, of course, will be on the screen. And this morning we're in Romans chapter 8 covering the same verses we covered last week, though looking at some other aspects of this particular passage.

And so we're going to be in Romans chapter 8 verses 1 through 4. And we like to stand together as we read God's Word as a sign of our respect for His Word. So would you all stand? The Apostle Paul writes, 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.

[1 : 17] 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.

We give you thanks for this Word, Father. We give you thanks for the Spirit who inspired this Word and for the Apostle who wrote this Word. And we ask right now that you would give us a right understanding so that our hearts might be shaped by your truth.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I was thinking this week and really kind of marveling this week as really the political and election processes have really just really now really begun in preparation for next year's presidential election.

And I was thinking this week about how fascinating our government is and how much of a wonder and a marvel it is that we have the kind of government that we have. We don't always like the things that our government does.

We don't always agree with the decisions that are made by those who are in charge. But we have to admit that the system of government that we have is pretty remarkable with its separation of powers and the way that things are structured to protect the people of the country from the overreach of those who are in leadership.

[2 : 38] Because we know, and I think the founders of our country knew, that we have a tendency as fallen human beings to overreach our bounds and to try to grab for more authority than is rightfully ours.

We all want more than what is rightfully belongs to us. And so we have this system of government with all of its checks and balances. It's not perfect. It does not always work. But it is remarkable.

But I was reading this week and thinking of one particular aspect of our government that's enshrined in the Constitution that initially, as you start to read, it seems to be in contrast to the rest of that.

And that is this remarkable authority of the President of the United States to pardon criminals of offenses that they've actually been convicted of and committed to prison for.

That they can actually commute a sentence. That is, they can reduce a sentence from what has been decided by either a judge or a jury. Or they can completely pardon someone for a crime that everyone knows that that person has committed, that the court agrees that they've committed, that they've been sentenced for, and yet the President has the authority to pardon people.

[3 : 46] And when someone is pardoned, they are thereafter for the rest of their life treated as if that crime had never been committed. They are treated as if they are completely innocent, as if they had never even been charged with that sort of crime.

So any civil rights that they had lost as a result of the crime that they committed are restored to them. That's a remarkable power that the President of the United States has. The ability to simply erase your wrongdoings of the past in the eyes of the law.

To simply remove it. And yet we see something similar happening by the power of the Gospel. We see here in Romans chapter 8 that begins with this great declaration that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

that God Himself has the power to do something very similar. That God declares over those of us who are actually guilty of breaking His law, who are guilty of committing crimes against God and against the rest of humanity.

He has the power to wipe the slate clean. He has the power to say to those who are rightly condemned, and who deserve to be condemned, He has the power to say, you are no longer condemned.

[4 : 56] And that happens for all those, Paul tells us, who are in Christ Jesus. And so we talked about that last week. But one thing that we saw last week as we talked about that verdict of no condemnation over those who trust in Jesus is that it does not originate out of thin air.

It does not come just sort of capriciously. That God does something to secure that declaration. In fact, we focused a bit of our time last week on verse 3.

We were told that God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. That by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.

So we saw that God has done something to make it not only possible for Him to declare those who are guilty to be innocent, but make it possible for Him to do that in a way that He upholds His own holiness and righteousness.

So that unlike the president, God does not simply wipe the slate clean as if nothing had ever happened. No. God actually does condemn our sins, but He condemns our sins in the flesh of His own Son.

[6 : 05] So that when Jesus was suffering upon the cross, He was suffering for the sins of all of His people. He was suffering and being condemned in our place.

Jesus has done something for us so that God the Father can do something for us. What Jesus has done is suffered in our place, and now what God is able to do is declare that we are not condemned.

And much of the book of Romans tells us how that happens. One thing that we do know clearly, though, from the book of Romans is that that does not happen by the power of the law of God.

In fact, that's what verse 3 begins by telling us. Notice what it says here in verse 3. It says that God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

The law is unable to do certain things. You know, God's law is a great blessing to His people. David sings of the greatness of God's law throughout the Psalms.

[7 : 05] And in fact, when you come to Psalm 119, you come to the longest single chapter of the Bible, and it's all about the beauty and greatness and majesty of the law of God. So that the law of God, as Paul tells us in Romans 7, is a good thing.

It is a holy thing. But the law of God has limits. And the book of Romans shows us what the limits of the law are. In fact, in chapters 3 and 4, the Apostle Paul instructs us and tells us that the law, in fact, is incapable of declaring us to be righteous in God's sight.

So that the law is incapable of taking a condemned person and making them not condemned. The law cannot take an unrighteous person and make them in the eyes of God to be righteous.

The law simply cannot do that. And the word that Paul uses for that is justification. To be justified by God, we have seen over and over throughout the book of Romans, means that you are declared to be righteous by God and in His sight.

And the law can't get you justified. So when Paul says that God has done something that the law could not do, the first thing that he means is that the law could not justify you, the law could not render you not condemned, and yet God has done that.

[8 : 23] In fact, you can see that clearly if you'll turn back a few pages in your Bible to Romans chapter 3. Where in Romans chapter 3, we read this in verse 20, that by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

No human being gets declared righteous. No human being has their sins forgiven. No human being gets the verdict not condemned by the power of the law.

The law cannot do that. You see it again in verse 28 of Romans chapter 3, where Paul says we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

So when Paul says in chapter 8 that God has done something that the law cannot do, he means first of all that God has made a way for us to become righteous in His sight, to be declared righteous before Him.

It's not by the law, it's by faith in Jesus. So that all those who are united to Jesus by faith, or shorthand, those who are in Christ, are justified.

[9 : 29] They are not condemned. But I am convinced that Paul means more than simply that God has justified us in verse 3. Because there is more that the law cannot do.

The law not only cannot get us declared righteous in God's sight, the law also cannot make us righteous. The law cannot make us into holy and righteous people in a practical, everyday way.

Yes, the law fails to have us righteous in God's sight, but the law cannot even take people who have been forgiven and turn them into actual righteous people. The law does not have that power.

You see, we might be tempted to think that, okay, the Christian life begins by faith. The Christian life begins by trusting in Christ and what He has done, and God will declare me righteous.

God will justify me on the basis of my faith. But surely after that point in time, surely after that, my actual becoming righteous, my practical life of holiness, surely that's accomplished by God's law.

[10 : 36] Surely that is something that the law of God actually does, that the law of God actually accomplishes. And I am convinced that when Paul says that there are things that the law cannot do, not only does Paul mean that the law can't justify us, I believe that Paul means that the law can't sanctify us.

The law can't by itself make us into holy and righteous people. And just as Romans 3 and 4 and to a certain extent in chapter 5 show us in vivid detail the law's inability to justify us, so Romans chapter 6 and 7 and now the first part of verse 8 show us that the law does not have the power to sanctify us.

Which means on a practical level, if you look at your life as a follower of Christ and you say, I'm not living my life the way that I ought to.

I'm not rendering to God the kind of obedience that I know that I should. There's just, there's so much lacking in my Christian life. I'm not as obedient as I ought to be.

The problem is not that you need to buckle down and memorize the law one more time and try a little bit harder to obey the commandments.

[11 : 52] That's not the solution to your problem. That's not the solution at all. The law is not capable of justifying you. The law is not capable of sanctifying you.

And all of Romans 6 and 7 and now the first 17 verses of chapter 8 are aimed at showing us that how do we go about becoming holy in God's sight? We know how we're declared righteous before God.

We know how we're justified. But how can Christians, how can those who've been justified, how can we actually become holy people? How can we be sanctified?

And Paul begins in chapter 7 to really lay it out. In chapter 6 he tells us that there's no excuse for unrighteousness in the life of a Christian.

In chapter 6 he tells us that all those who've been justified have been set free and that we ought to live holy lives. But beginning in chapter 7 he's going to show us how that actually happens.

[12 : 52] So if you guys remember, and I know that it's been quite a while since we've looked at these things, but in chapter 7, at the very beginning of chapter 7, Paul lays out for us two potential paths to practical holiness and righteousness in our lives.

Two paths. One of them, he's going to spend the rest of chapter 7 showing us that it's a futile path, that it will not work. And the other one he's going to show us now in chapter 8 is the way to become a holy person.

Take a look in chapter 7. I just want to review this very quickly. In verse 6, Paul lays out these two ways of pursuing holiness. holiness. He says in chapter 7 verse 6, he says, Now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we may serve, so I take serve to be serve God, live a holy life, so that we may serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

In other words, Paul says that you can try to serve God in the old way of the written code, that is you can try to serve God by obeying all the details of the law or on the other hand, you can try to serve God by the new way of the Spirit.

And then of course the rest of chapter 7 tells us what happens when someone tries to obey God simply by trying to obey all the various commandments of the law. In chapter 7, by the time you get to the end of chapter 7, you arrive at a place of futility, so that if you look down towards the end of chapter 7, you have Paul declaring in verse 24, Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

[14 : 37] That's the conclusion of all those who try in their own strength to obey God's law. That's the conclusion. At the end of it all, you will have failed and you will just simply cry out with the Apostle Paul, I am wretched.

who's going to deliver me from this body of death? There is, on the other hand, the way of the Spirit. Not the way of the written code, but the way of the Spirit.

And most of the first half of chapter 8 is devoted to showing us what that looks like. What does it look like for a Christian to pursue obedience, not through the law, but through the power of the Holy Spirit?

We're going to spend the next three or four weeks answering that question. But before we can answer the question in detail, we need to make sure that we understand this contrast a little better because Paul opens chapter 8 by displaying the same contrast that we see at the beginning of chapter 7.

So let's look at the contrast one more time this morning and then beginning next week, we'll walk through the rest of these first 17 verses of chapter 8 as we see practically how this happens in the life of a believer.

[15 : 47] But first, let's see the contrast again. Verse 2 of chapter 8. Here it is. Paul says that the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

The first question that we need to answer about this passage to really try to understand things is what is Paul talking about to what is he referring when he speaks of the law of the Spirit of life and when he speaks of the law of sin and death.

Because we know most of the time throughout the book of Romans that when Paul uses the word law, he's talking about the law of Moses. He's talking about the Ten Commandments primarily and the other regulations that God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses.

That's what he's talking about most of the time. And in fact, that's what he's talking about in verse 3 when he says that God has done what the law could not do. The law in verse 3 is no doubt the law of Moses.

The Ten Commandments and all the other laws. That's what it is. But what does the law mean in verse 2? Because there is a contrast. There is the law of the Spirit of life and there is the law of sin and death.

[16 : 59] So we at least have two different laws here in verse 2. Are either one of these phrases a reference to the law of Moses? I don't think that either of them are.

Let me show you why. Let me begin with this phrase the law of sin and death. Because we could be tempted very easily to think that the law of sin and death must be the law of Moses because Paul has already contrasted the Spirit and the law in chapter 7.

So surely the law of sin and death here is a reference to the law of Moses. I don't think it is because of something Paul says toward the end of chapter 7. Notice verse 21 of chapter 7.

Paul says, So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right evil lies close at hand. So there's that word law. I find it to be a law that when I want to do what's right evil's right there.

Verse 22. For I delight in the law of God that's clearly the law of Moses. The law of God is the law of Moses. I delight in the law of God in my inner being but in my members I see another law waging war against the law of my mind.

[18 : 10] So now at the end of chapter 7 we're seeing two laws. You have the law of God but there's another law Paul says. The other law is the law of verse 21.

A law Paul finds that when he wants to do what's right evil's right there. Which means that here the word law is used to refer to a principle or a power or a rule something that holds sway over Paul.

I find it to just be a power or principle or rule in my life that when I want to do right evil is right there and that kind of principle is in opposition to the law of God.

The law of God would show us the right way but this rule or this principle this law at work within me keeps me from obeying the law of God. But then if you move further down to verse 25 we see what this other law is called.

Verse 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord so then I myself serve the law of God with my mind there's the law of God but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

[19 : 17] So the other law as opposed to the law of God the law of Moses the other law is the law of sin which is the only time in Paul's writings that we find a phrase that is even close to the phrase that he uses in verse 2 of chapter 8 refers to the law of sin and death.

So here in Romans chapter 8 verse 2 the law of sin and death is not the law of Moses. The law of sin and death is a principle it is a power at work in you that causes you that leads you into sin and ultimately to death because of that sin.

That's what the law of sin and death is. There is a principle a power at work within us that would lead us towards sin and ultimately death. But there is another law for those who are in Christ.

There is another rule another principle at work that Paul here calls the law of the spirit of life because before we came to Christ we were in a sense slaves to the law of sin and death.

That power that principle ruled over us but now in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit we have been set free from that. Now this is not a new thought for the Apostle Paul.

[20 : 31] This is a theme that he's been hitting on since chapter 6 because in chapter 6 Paul presents sin itself as a kind of power or authority at work in us and sometimes ruling over us.

So if you turn back to chapter 6 you can see that in chapter 6 verse 12 the Apostle Paul speaks to this issue and he tells us therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.

So sin in Romans chapter 6 is something that seeks to rule and reign over you. You move down two verses to verse 14 for sin will not have dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace.

So sin in chapter 6 is pictured as a kind of power that seeks to rule over you but now here in chapter 8 Paul tells us that through the power of the Holy Spirit those who are in Christ have been set free from the rule law or power of sin that once held sway over us.

So that Paul begins here in chapter 8 to show us the way but he begins by showing us first and foremost you must understand the freedom that you have in Christ and you must understand that the source of your freedom in Jesus is the power of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 53] That's the source of your freedom. The source of your freedom is not your own willpower. The source of your freedom is not your own ability to sort of pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and just make yourself obey God's law.

That is not the source of your freedom that will not be the source of your obedience. The source of your freedom the source of your obedience must and can only be the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if you ask why why is it that the power for righteous living comes only through the Holy Spirit the answer is found right in the phrase itself. We are told that this is the spirit of life.

The spirit has the power to set you free and the spirit has the power to cause you to walk in holiness because the Holy Spirit can give you life.

life. In fact the reason that the law cannot be a means to a life of holiness and obedience is because the law itself is not able to give life to those who are spiritually dead.

[23 : 05] The law cannot impart life. In fact if you notice in verse 3 where we are told that there is something the law cannot do you will also notice that it is not because there is a defect in the law.

It is not that there is something wrong with the law it is not that there is something missing from the law when God gave the law to Moses. The law is perfectly good and holy and righteous. There is nothing wrong with the law.

No. The problem is with us. Notice what he says. God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

The law can't make us holy because the law cannot overcome the spiritual deadness of our own fallen sinful nature. That is what the word flesh refers to throughout Paul's writings most often.

The flesh refers to our fallen sinful nature and the law when the law comes into contact with a fallen sinful person the law cannot overcome that.

[24 : 06] The law cannot turn those who are spiritually dead into those who are spiritually alive. In fact the law will do just the opposite. The law can only condemn those who are in the flesh.

The law can only bring condemnation and death to those who are in the flesh because the law promises punishment for those who fail to obey the law.

And on our own apart from the power of the Holy Spirit to give life to us and lead us into obedience on our own we do not have the power to obey the law.

Every time we come into contact with the law we will only fail to meet its demands. That's what Paul has told us over and over. In fact if you remember he told us that in chapter 7.

Look back in chapter 7. Chapter 7 you can begin in verse 7 where he begins to sort of defend the law. He says what shall 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 for I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet.

[25 : 14] But sin seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all sorts of covetousness. You see what happens when the flesh comes into contact with the law? Sin or the flesh uses the law to produce more law breaking.

Apart from the law sin lies dead. verse 9 I was once alive apart from the law but when the commandment came sin came alive and I died. So apart from the power of the Holy Spirit when you and your flesh encounter the law the only possible result is condemnation and death.

So it is sin working through the law or you might say it is the flesh fallen sinful nature working through the law to produce death in us.

But it's not the law itself. No. The law itself is good, holy, and righteous. But even in all of its goodness it cannot do the one thing that we need most desperately.

It cannot overcome the flesh. In fact you can see that clearly. Hold your place in Romans 8. I want you to turn to one other passage here outside of Romans to Galatians chapter 3.

[26 : 33] In Galatians Paul is dealing with many of the same issues. In Galatians Paul defends the doctrine of justification by faith alone just like he does in Romans. In Galatians Paul has to argue that justification by faith doesn't lead to a life of sin.

So Galatians is very similar to Romans in many ways. And in Galatians chapter 3 verse 21 we see a statement about the law that is similar to what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 8.

He says in verse 21 Is the law contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not. In other words the law is good. For if a law had been given that could give life then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

You see what's missing? There's nothing wrong with the law. The law is not contrary to the promises. The law is good. Here's the deal. The law cannot give life. If the law could give life then sure righteousness would be by the law.

But the law can't do it. The law can't give you life. The reason that we fail over and over when we just try to buckle down and obey the law is because the law just doesn't have the power to infuse us with the kind of life that is necessary to live in holiness.

[27 : 47] Only the Spirit of God has that power. And the Spirit of God comes to work and dwell and give life to all those who are in Christ.

Which is to say that all those who have been declared righteous by God have been indwelt by God's Spirit and He is at work to turn us into righteous people.

Let's look at the rest of Paul's argument in this opening paragraph chapter 8. Verse 3, 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.

That's justification. Right? He condemned sin in the flesh. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

So now there's a result or there's a goal or there's a purpose to justification. God condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

[28 : 53] Now there are two ways to interpret that phrase. You could interpret that phrase to be simply another reference to justification. So what Paul might be saying here is that God has condemned sin in the flesh of His Son so that now the righteous requirement of the law we might be counted as having fulfilled the law in God's sight.

That could be what the Apostle Paul means. But I don't think that that's what he means. I think what he means here is that Christ died and took upon Himself the penalty for our sins so that we are now forgiven and free and righteous in God's sight with the result that or in order that for the purpose of that the righteous requirement of the law might actually be fulfilled in us so that we might now having been justified we might become the kind of people in whom the requirements of the law are fulfilled in our lives as we live out our lives.

Now why do I think that that's the right way to understand this passage? I think that's the right way to understand it first of all because it fits the context of the first half of chapter 8. The first half of chapter 8 is showing us how we can actually be righteous people by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So that in chapter 8 there is a concern for practical righteousness. But even more importantly I think the immediate context leads us to think that the righteous requirement of the law being fulfilled in us is actual real practical righteousness being worked out in our lives.

And I think that's the case because of what he says in the rest of verse 4. He describes those who have the righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in them as those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

[30 : 46] All those who walk according to the Spirit have the righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in them. That's the point. This passage moves from no condemnation to freedom from sin and death.

And then it moves again from no condemnation through the death of Christ dying in our place to the righteous requirements of the law being met in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

One of the things that I think we need to notice before we get into the sort of the more practical aspects of what it looks like to walk according to the Spirit, what it looks like to have the Spirit of life at work in us, before we get to those things, I think there's a really important point that we need to take from these verses this morning.

And that is that we are not the primary actors in all of this. We are not. We are not the ones who are making ourselves holy.

No, that's not what's happening here. We have a part, we have a role, we have things that we need to do in the rest of these verses. In chapter 8, we'll spell that out. But we need to begin by recognizing that fundamentally we cannot give ourselves life.

[32 : 06] That fundamentally we cannot make ourselves holy and righteous. This is the work of another. This is the work of the power of the Holy Spirit. Just look at how things are worded throughout these verses.

The law of the Spirit of life has set you free. He has done that. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us. Not that we are automatically fulfilling it, but that it is fulfilled in us.

Yes, we walk. We must walk, or that is, we must live our lives by the power of the Spirit or in the Spirit, so we do something. But unless you begin by recognizing that your pursuit of holiness can only be successful if it happens through the power of the Holy Spirit, then you'll never be successful in pursuing holiness.

You know why so many Christian men continue to go back to the computer screen and look at pornographic images over and over and over and over, even though they've told themselves that's the last time, we'll never do it again?

You know why? Well, there are a lot of reasons, but one of the reasons is that oftentimes you're trying to fight the flesh with the flesh. You must recognize you don't have the strength to exist that difference in the earth, but fear it not through the world in the earth that you think of.

[33 : 37] Why are churches so often these things have the same kinds of problems over and over? I mean, it's almost become a joke about the world when you can look at this church, and this church, and this church, and you can see all of the problems, whether it's a problem of doctors, or whether you're backbiting, or whether you're arguing over who has the right to have this house, or who can do this, or who can do that, whatever the issues may be in various churches.

Part of the problem is that even corporately as a church, sometimes we try to do things and accomplish things, and we try to grow in holiness by our own church.

So you think they both do X, Y, and Z, and we can talk to our own. And Paul would remind us here, yeah, you've got to do this stuff, you've walked, you've walked in the spirit of the spirit, all of this in and through.

And what we also do in Roman Christian is that we've had two or three times when we last in the Roman. Because I think when we begin to talk like this, and Paul began to talk like that we can begin to despair and think, well, what's the point of the law?

Can we just ignore the law altogether? If we can't become holy by obeying the law, then maybe we should forget about the law. the law. Here we have a reminder of what the spirit has done.

[35 : 08] Verse 18, and 13, 13, O know what he means to love another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

that's the same phrase that we find back in chapter 8. It's the same phrase from righteousness and the law fulfilled, and now here we see the law fulfilled.

But how is it fulfilled? It's fulfilled in all things. Verse 9, you shall not murder, and shall not steal, and shall not covet, and any other command that started up in the word, you shall love them and love and love them the they love and the love the primary work of the spirit!

And to! to! to change our hearts so that we become loving people. Because that really and truly gives the key to our life.

The power of spirit at work in our hearts to make our sin to love and peace. So for instance, if you find yourself trapped In the cycle of chronology, then you are also finding yourself trapped!

[36 : 27] in a loveless heart love. Because you're not loving your neighbor if you're looking at you're certainly not loving your neighbor if you're married and looking at those neighbors.

If you're not loving a future spouse if you're doing that, to become entrapped in that cycle is not just a failure of your own ability to get out of it, it's a failure to love.

Or if you find yourself frequently in the cycle of gossiping about people, if you find yourself tempted all the time to tell someone else the things you heard about someone else, someone, you can't seem to break out of that, you need to realize that the real problem is not loving the people about being the gospel, the same thing about you about you about the gospel, you're not loving the person to your gospel because you're putting a temptation in front of them to go out of gospel, it's a failure to love and only the spirit of you and the promise that will free you from life to talk about that that the key in all of our principles the key is recognition to the key is recognized it is not me not any power that I forget it is the law of the spirit of life and work in us that of him can to the way the!