

Title: The Relation of the Law to Sin

Scripture: Romans 7:7-13

Series: God's Saving Grace

1. Introduction:

a. In our last study, we considered some aspects of how the moral law works in our lives. Most importantly, we considered how it drives us to the Gospel, to Jesus Christ.

i. Two weeks ago, we learned that we are dead to the Law, and the Law has no right over us. Our allegiance now belongs to another.

ii. Today, we explore the utter sinfulness of sin, which is made manifest by God's Law.

iii. Paul begins this section by answering an anticipated objection:

1. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!

2. The law of God is not sin!

a. However, as we will see today, the Law of God opens our eyes to the very sinfulness of the human condition. It reveals humanity's desperate need for a redeemer.

2. Verses 7: The Law of God Reveals Humanity's Sinfulness:

What then 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."

- a. Our text teaches that through the law comes knowledge of sin.
 - i. We previously considered this truth in **Romans 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
 - 1. Knowledge of sin is a great grace because it is that knowledge that can drive the sinner to seek forgiveness in Christ.
- b. We need to see the clear distinction between the righteousness of God's Law and the sinfulness of our response to it.
 - i. The law is not to blame for our sinfulness; it is our fallen corruption.
 - ii. Paul is making the point that God's law is a mirror by which we see the glory and radiance of God's perfection and humanity's total depravity.
 - iii. We note that human beings will not come to the gospel or beg for the mercy of God until the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, and the instrument that the Spirit uses to bring us to the cross is God's Moral Law.
- c. Before his eyes are opened to his sinfulness, the unbeliever walks around ignorant of the radical disobedience he exhibits every hour of his life. He may be willing to admit that he is not perfect, but he does not feel the weight of that imperfection. He makes allowances for that imperfection! He takes humanity's sinful nature for granted. The sinner is naturally comfortable in his sin.

- i. In other words, ignorance of the Law produces an ignorance of humanity's great sinfulness.
 - d. This is Paul's point. The Law of God is good, but humans are ignorant and unaware of their sinfulness apart from the Law.
- 3. Verses 8-9: The Law of God Activates Sin: But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. (9) I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.
 - a. There was a time when I felt secure. I had no conviction of sin. At that time, the full weight of the law had not yet registered in my consciousness and had not yet become an unbearable burden upon my heart. I thought that, morally and spiritually, I was doing well. I even considered myself a good person worthy of God's love and affection.
 - b. But when the commandment came, and I sovereignly understood what the law demanded, I realized what a great sinner I was. I was not a good person who was worthy of God's affection but a vile sinner under the judgment of God. The Law revealed the hopelessness of the human condition.
 - c. Why? Because once a sinner realizes what covetousness is, all he can do is covet! We are so fallen and corrupt (totally depraved) that our nature wilfully desires to act in contradiction to God's Law. The Bible teaches us about sin's active desire to disobey God's Law.

- i. **Romans 5:20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 15:56** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
- d. Human beings desire to rule themselves. We find a perverse joy in doing what is forbidden. Our sinful nature loves to rebel against all authority, especially divine authority.
- i. Having this sinful nature that longs to disobey, the desire to steal becomes even more powerful when we know that stealing is prohibited. Every sin becomes more enticing when God forbids that sin. In other words, **sin takes opportunity by the commandment, producing all sorts of evil desires in us.**
 - ii. Beloved, the Moral Law of God says, "Don't covet," but sinful human nature says, "Ohh, coveting sounds so exciting when God forbids it. I wonder why God has forbidden this? I must know! I must do the very thing God has forbidden!"
 1. Even our perfect parents fell into this trap. **Genesis 2:16-17** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, (17) but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
 2. **Genesis 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a

delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be *desired* to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

3. If this was true of Adam and Eve while they were perfect, how much greater does this truth reign in fallen creatures?
- iii. Fallen humanity finds wicked pleasure in the forbidden. The Law of God cannot be blamed for this. The command is good **but we are evil, sold under sin.**
 1. **Commentary:** Consider the following. If a store were to paint a sign on its window that said: YOU ARE FORBIDDEN TO THROW ROCKS THROUGH THIS WINDOW. We know that the window would not last twenty-four hours.
 2. The sign was right, but humanity hates any kind of restraints. Humanity does not like to be told what to do.
 - e. We must understand that something is desperately wrong with humanity, but nothing is wrong with God's Law. Human nature is radically corrupted, and no earthly power can change it.
 - i. Therefore, salvation must come from outside of us.
 - ii. Human nature can only be changed by the divine and supernatural intervention of God, the Holy Spirit.
 - f. Paul tells us that sin was asleep (in its full power) within us before the Spirit quickened our souls. We

were sinners but not as depraved as we would become when sin would awake. When the Law came, it awoke the sleeping giant of sin and filled us with the horrible desire for even more wickedness.

- i. Beloved, think back to your pre-Christian days. Did a sense of sin and guilt overburden you? No! No, it didn't!
- ii. It was not until the Holy Spirit brought saving conviction upon you, quickened your conscience, and made you alive to the Law of God that you felt the weight of your guilt for the first time.
 1. So, sin used the Law of God to make us even greater sinners, but God uses that very law to drive us to Christ and give us new life.
- iii. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit made us understand the righteous requirements of the Law, when our eyes were open to the vileness of our sinfulness and transgression, we immediately **died**.
 1. What does this mean?
 2. The self-satisfied, self-secure, and blissfully ignorant person I used to be **died**. For the first time, I was aware of my terrible sinfulness and the torments of hell which awaited me.

4. Verses 10-11: Sin Uses the Law of God to Kill: The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. (11) For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

- a. The purpose of the commandment had indeed been to bring life; yes, life everlasting.
 - i. We know that if the law of God were perfectly kept, it would bring life.
 - 1. **Leviticus 18:5** You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.
 - ii. Instead, the breaking of the Law of God brought death.
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 3:6** who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- b. So, instead of expected life, we found death, and instead of expected happiness, we found gloom because, as humans, each of us has broken the very Law of God. Beloved, there is nothing wrong with the law. On the contrary, that law is holy, righteous, and good because it reflects God's character.
 - i. It is evident that it was not the law but sin that made it impossible for the law to make a person holy and happy. The Law, operating by itself, never kills or even hurts anyone. It is sin that kills in its profane use of the Law.
- c. In the Scriptures, Satan is called **the great deceiver** and the **Father of all lies**. We realize this when we consider how he presents sin. Have you ever asked yourself, "What is so attractive about sin? Why would any creature made in the image of God be tempted by sin? Why would we be inclined to steal what belongs

to somebody else? Why would we bear false witness against our neighbor?"

- i. Beloved, we are tempted because the offer of happiness comes with the temptation.
- ii. The Devil never says, "Do this and suffer" or "Do this and die." Our passions are so excited by sin that we believe that unless we act on our passion against the Law of God, we will deny ourselves fundamental happiness, a basic right.
- iii. Sin is attractive because it does bring pleasure for a season.
 1. **Hebrews 11:25** choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
- iv. It brings pleasure but never happiness. Happiness is found in living in obedience to God.
 1. This is the monstrous lie of the **father of lies**: "Do this (disobey God), and you will be happy."
 2. However, sin can't bring happiness, and yet the biggest justification in our secular culture for all kinds of monstrous evil is this idea of doing what makes us happy even if God prohibits it. We are pleasure-seeking people. Humanity cries out:
 - a. We have rights.
 - b. I have the right to do what I want to do.
 - c. I have a right over my own body.
 - d. I have a right to follow my own path.

v. But, if we do evil, what the Law of God forbids us from doing, we destroy all hope of true happiness.

1. **Psalm 144:15** Blessed (*Happy*) are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed (*Happy*) are the people whose God is the LORD!

a. Sadly, human nature cannot understand the difference between pleasure and happiness.

d. The seeking of human pleasure is the vehicle by which **sin deceives and kills an individual.**

5. Verses 12-13: The Law of God Exposes the Magnitude of Sin: So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (13) Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

a. So the law of God is holy, just, and good, but what happens when a holy and just law is delivered to unholy creatures?

i. Well, the law of God, which was designed to bring life, human beings turned it into an occasion of death through sin.

ii. The severe character of sin becomes clear in this very fact that sin used what was holy and meant to bring life as a weapon against humanity to damn them to the lowest parts of hell.

- b. However, this does not make the Law of God evil. It is that very Law of God which the sinner needs. In the hands of God the Holy Spirit, the Law makes it possible for the sinner to see his sin for what it truly is, to see his damnable condition. The holy light of God's commandment makes the darkness of sin stand out all the more sharply!
- i. By using the Law, the Spirit points us to the fount of purity and perfection. The Spirit unveils the beauty of the ***Gospel*** as it teaches the glory of double imputation.
 1. How majestic, holy, wise, and loving is the God who gave us His holy Law. By doing so, He has provided the very grounds for our salvation in the substituted righteous Law-keeping of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

6. Benediction:

- a. **Galatians 3:24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Public Reading of Scripture
Galatians 3:18