

Sermon Sin and the Law 1

Romans 7:7-13 (NASB)

⁷ *What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."*

⁸ *But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.*

⁹ *I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;*

¹⁰ *and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;*

¹¹ *for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.*

¹² *So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

¹³ *Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.*

The subject that Paul is addressing here is that idea that we can somehow have a righteousness of our own that will somehow make us righteous enough to gain heaven and the Lord's presence.

Those under the Law believed that having the law and personally keeping the law was enough and that would bring them home in the end.

Paul is saying that the Law cannot save anyone. It was not given for that purpose. It was never meant to redeem anyone. Instead it had a different purpose altogether.

And that brings us to the study tonight where Paul has given to us four elements of the convicting work of the Law, they are;

1. That the Law reveals sin (v 7b)
2. That the Law arouses sin (v 8)
3. That the Law ruins the sinner (vv 9-11)
4. That the Law reflects the absolute sinfulness of sin (vv 12-13)

We want to take each of these and look at them through Paul's eyes.

THE LAW REVEALS SIN

Romans 7:7-13 (NASB)

⁷ *On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."*

On the contrary, Paul says, just the opposite is true. (that is that the law is sin?) he says it is outrageous and blasphemous even to suggest that anything God commands could be deficient in the least way much less sinful.

By being perfect itself, however, God's law does reveal man's imperfections.

"I would no have come to know sin, Paul goes on to explain, *Romans 7:7-13 (NASB)*

⁷ *What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."*

"except through the Law". In other words, because God has disclosed His divine standards of righteousness, men are able more accurately to identify **sin**, which is failure to meet those standards.

The apostle has already mentioned or alluded to that truth several times in the epistle:

Romans 3:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**

Romans 4:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.**

Romans 5:13 (NASB)

¹³ **for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law**

Paul is not speaking of humanity's general awareness of right and wrong. Even pagan Gentiles who have never heard of God's revealed law nevertheless have:

Romans 2:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ **in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,**

In this present passage the apostle's is speaking about a knowledge of the full extent and depravity of man's **sin**.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, Paul uses the first person singular pronouns I and me, indicating that he is giving his personal testimony as well as teaching universal truth.

He is relating the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit worked in his own heart through the law before and during his Damascus road encounter with Christ and the three days of blindness that followed (**Acts 9:1-18**)

Although Christ's appearing to him and calling him to Apostleship were sovereign acts of God, at some point Saul (as he was then known) had to confess his sins and trust in Christ for salvation.

God forces no one into His kingdom against his will or apart from faith.

In his testimony before King Agrippa, Paul recounted that, even while he was outwardly persecuting the followers of Christ, he was inwardly kicking against the goads of the Holy Spirit's convicting work in his heart.

Acts 26:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ **O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.**

¹⁴ **"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'**

Paul had been trained in Judaism since his early youth, had studied under the famous Gamaliel in Jerusalem, had tried to follow the law meticulously, and had considered himself to be zealous for God.

Before his conversion Paul could have easily prayed the prayer of the self-satisfied Pharisee the temple who thanked God that he was not like other people.

Luke 18:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹ *"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*

¹² *'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'*

He may have even asserted with the rich young ruler that he had kept all the law since his youth.

Matthew 19:20 (NASB)

²⁰ *The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"*

Philippians 3:6 (NASB)

⁶ *as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

Zealous Jews made such claims because rabbinical tradition had modified and externalized the law of God in order to make an acceptable lower level of obedience humanly attainable.

They did not take into account, personal faith in God, or the inner condition of the heart.

To them a person who lived up to the outward, observable demands of the rabbinical interpretations of the law became fully acceptable to God.

During his pre-salvation experience of conviction, Paul came to realize that the most important demands of God's revealed law were not external but internal and that he had failed to meet them.

It is significant that the apostle chose the most obviously internal injunction of the Ten Commandments to illustrate his personal experience that the law reveals sin.

"I would not have known about coveting, he explains, if the Law had not said, You shall not covet."

It may have been the growing awareness of his own covetousness that finally broke his pride and opened his heart to the transforming work of the Spirit.

Years after his conversion, he told believers in Philippi,

Philippians 3:3 (NASB)

³ *for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,*

The real battle with sin is internal, in the heart and mind.

Counseling, therapy, or even strong willpower often can modify a person's behavior.

People may stop drinking by faithfully following the plan of Alcoholics Anonymous or stop lying or cheating by submitting to psychotherapy.

But only the transforming power of the Holy Spirit can take a sinful heart and make it pure and acceptable to God. The Law's part in that transformation is to make a person aware of his sin and of his need for divine forgiveness and redemption and to set the standard of acceptable morality.

Charles Hodge wrote,

The law, although it cannot secure either the justification or sanctification of men, performs an essential part in the economy of salvation. It enlightens conscience and secures its verdict against a multitude of evils, which we should not otherwise have recognized as sins. It arouses sin, increasing its power, and making it, both, in itself, and in our consciousness, exceedingly sinful. It therefore produces that state of mind which is a necessary preparation for the reception of the gospel, conviction of sin, that is, an adequate knowledge of its nature and a sense of its power over us, is an indispensable part of evangelical religion. Before the gospel can be embraced as a means of deliverance from sin, we must feel we are involved in corruption and misery. (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Erdmans, n.d.]. p. 226)

Apart from the law, we would have no way of accurately judging our sinfulness. Only God's law reveals His divine standard of righteousness and thereby enables us to see how far short of His righteousness we are and how helpless we are to attain it by our own efforts.

The Central Theme if The Sermon on the Mount is that God demands perfect righteousness in the heart., a righteousness that far surpasses the external and hypocritical righteousness typified by the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:20 (NASB)

²⁰ "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jews had no excuse for failing to understand that God demands inner as well as outward righteousness. The Shema (comes from the word hear) comprises the texts of Deuteronomy and Numbers and was recited twice daily by faithful Jews.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NASB)

⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

⁷ "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (NASB)

¹³ "It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul,

¹⁴ that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.

¹⁵ "He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

¹⁶ "Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them.

¹⁷ "Or the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

¹⁸ "You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

¹⁹ "You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

²⁰ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,

²¹ so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth.

Numbers 15:37-41 (NASB)

³⁷ *The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying,*

³⁸ *"Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.*

³⁹ *"It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,*

⁴⁰ *so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.*

⁴¹ *"I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God."*

The two texts from Deuteronomy were also among the four passages that were written on small pieces of parchment and placed in phylacteries worn on the foreheads and left arms of Jewish men during prayer.

The same two texts were placed in mezuzahs, small boxes that Jews attached to their doorposts, following the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:6 and 11:20.

Both phylacteries and mezuzahs are still in use by many orthodox Jews today

The two texts from Deuteronomy include the repeated admonition to;

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NASB)

⁵ *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

Deuteronomy 11:13 (NASB)

¹³ *"It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul,*

When the Pharisee (who were the supreme authorities on the Mosaic law) asked Jesus to identify the great commandment in the Law, He answered by citing Deuteronomy 6:5 and then said that the second greatest commandment is like it, love your neighbor as yourself and then said that on these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

And with great reluctance, His antagonists accepted His answer as correct.

In a reverse situation, when Jesus asked a lawyer of the Pharisees to identify what is written in the law, the man immediately cited Deuteronomy 6:5 as the foremost commandment and, like Jesus, stated that the second great commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10:25-28)

It is clear, therefore, that despite the externality of their rabbinical traditions, which frequently contradicted Scripture, the Jews of Jesus and Paul's day knew that God's two supreme commandments had to do with inner motives rather than outward actions. Yet they continued to place their faith in their own outward achievements rather than in the God they professed to love with all their hearts;

Thus they, and we need to see that the law was given to reveal sin first and foremost. But it went further than that it also arouses Sin and we will take that up the next time we are together.