

Sin & The Law

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[0:00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Romans. You'll remember that Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD.

It's called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that Paul writes it to the churches located in the city of Rome. And the book of Romans is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.

We've been on a little bit of a break. The last time we were in Romans was Sunday, December 21st, right before Christmas. So I'm guessing that you have forgotten everything. So I'm quickly going to review for you where we've been.

We just started chapter 7. And chapter 7 of the book of Romans is about the law. Now we want to be clear, want to define our terms and be precise.

[1:01] When we talk about the law in chapter 7, we are talking about the law of God, that is God's commands to mankind. The law is what God has commanded for humanity.

And the law is summarized in the Bible in two particular ways. In the Old Testament, the law is summarized in the Ten Commandments.

In the New Testament, Jesus summarizes the law in Matthew chapter 22. He says the law is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

And those are not in conflict with one another. When Jesus says the law is two things, he's actually summarizing the Ten Commandments. So he's saying, look, Commandments 1 through 4, love God.

Commandments 5 through 10, love your neighbor as yourself. So that's the law. That's what we're talking about. That's our definition, our terms defined. And then we talked about it a little bit in the first six verses of Romans chapter 7 last month.

[2:08] And in those first six verses, Paul pointed out three problems with the law. And two of those problems appear in the song we just sang. Funny how that works.

Which you'll find on page 6 of your worship guide. And I'm going to review those for you. So problem one we saw a month ago is that the law condemns and accuses.

The law says obey me or die. And we just sang that. My accuser, he may roar of countless sins that I have done. That's the law accusing you and condemning you.

So that's problem one. Problem two with the law is that the law gives you the command to obey. But it does not give you the ability to obey.

And we just sang that as well. Run and run, the law demands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. Command, but no ability. The law says love your neighbor as yourself, but the law does not change your heart.

[3:10] It doesn't give you the ability to love your neighbor. Third problem with the law, and we're going to especially focus on this Sunday, is this. The law actually makes your behavior worse.

When we find out we can't do something, we suddenly want to do it more than ever before. You'll remember I gave you this one quote that says, We hear you shall not.

And it makes us think, why not? So when we see the law, it makes us want to sin more. That's our review. That's what we looked at a month ago. The three problems of the law. It accuses and condemns.

It commands with no ability. Makes behavior worse. With that, we have a lot before us this morning. Romans chapter 7 is one of the most challenging chapters in all of the Bible.

And so I'll say what I've been saying a lot recently. I'm going to say something, not everything. This passage this morning presents us with a problem. We've looked at all these problems with the law.

[4 : 09] We saw that in verses 1 through 6. And yet, what did Scott read for us this morning? Psalm 19. And what does Psalm 19 say? The Psalm 19 says, hey, the law is actually really good.

So we're caught in a bind. There's a contradiction. Paul just said, here's these three major problems with the law. How do we put that up against the Old Testament that says the law is wonderful? That is our question this morning.

What is the relationship between the law and sin? What is the relationship between the law and sin?

It's with that that I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 7, starting at verse 7. You'll find it on page 7 of your worship guide. No matter where you find it, remember that this is God's word.

Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces, which means that God's word is so powerful that nothing can stand against it.

[5 : 12] And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 7, starting at verse 7. 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. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[6 : 18] Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you this morning that your law is holy and righteous and good. We ask that you would use your words in a powerful way in our lives this morning.

That you would show us our sin, our great need for you. And even more than that, you'd show us your grace that you meet us at that very same point of need.

We ask that you would show us Jesus. That we would see his glory and beauty and holiness and power and authority. His mercy and his grace and his love.

That we would grow in our love and our affection for him. Our reverence and our awe for him. Our obedience to him. We ask all of these things in his mighty name. Amen.

This weekend and next weekend, there is a limited time event happening across the country. Which is this. There are movie theaters that are replaying the three Lord of the Rings movies that came out, if you're old like me, in the early 2000s.

[7 : 34] And if you are familiar with the trilogy, you know that there are these creatures called orcs. And the orcs are slaves or servants of the dark lords.

And the dark lords are evil figures like Sauron or Saruman or others. And they're these ugly monsters. They were originally elves or men.

That's the simple explanation. It gets a little bit more complicated depending on how nerdy you are. But they are these terrible, ugly monsters. Right? If you've seen the movies, you're not thinking, man, I would love to sit down and get a beer with an orc.

And there's a scene in the last book of the trilogy, The Return of the King, where Frodo and Sam are talking about the orcs. And Sam asks Frodo, do the orcs need to eat and drink?

Or do they have some kind of other way of existing? And Frodo answers him, this is on page 7 of your worship guide. He says, yes, they do eat and drink.

[8 : 33] The shadow that bred them can only mock. It cannot make. Not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs.

It only ruined them and twisted them. So Frodo is saying, yeah, they're like us. They're like us, just ruined and twisted.

And he's making a really critical point that we have to understand about the nature of evil. Evil can only mock. It cannot make.

Evil can only ruin and twist. Can't create anything. It can't make anything new. It doesn't have creative power. All it can do is corrupt. C.S. Lewis makes the same point.

He writes a letter in 1933. This is on page 8 of your worship guide. I'm not going to read the whole thing, but there's two phrases that are important. He says evil is simply good spoiled.

[9 : 34] And then he says evil is a parasite. And these are all ways of saying the same thing, which is that evil comes in, it takes what God has created that is good, and it twists it.

We could put this another way. Evil is lazy. Evil doesn't create new things. No, it just takes things that already exist and turns them upside down.

Once you see this principle, you cannot unsee it. There is no sexual perversion unless we first have God's great gift of sexual intimacy to a husband and a wife.

There is no greed unless we first have God's great gift of wealth. And so understanding this, understanding the nature of evil, helps us understand and resolve the tension that's here in this passage.

Remember, we just reviewed verses 1 through 6. The law has all these problems. And so that takes us now to verse 7. Paul says, And that's in a certain sense a legitimate question.

[10 : 44] If the law is so problematic, is not the law itself bad? Paul immediately responds to that same verse, By no means. And Paul's saying that in part because he's drawing on the rich tradition from the Old Testament, which Scott read for us this morning in Psalm 19, also Psalm 119, but our reading this morning was from Psalm 19, which says the law is really great.

So what do we do? How can the law both be really great and have all these problems? And Paul's answer is this. The law is really great.

That's how he concludes in verse 12. The law is fantastic, but sin uses the law to accomplish its purposes.

What did we just see about evil? It takes things. It spoils them. It twists them. And so now we're just going to work through from top to bottom. Paul's identified this challenge.

He said, Paul here is making just a very simple statement of logic.

[12:00] If you look on page four of your worship guide, you'll see our confession of faith from this morning, which gives us the definition of sin. Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

So by definition, if there is no law, you actually can't have sin. Paul's really saying the most simple thing here. Sin exists in relationship to God's law.

It's derivative of it in a sense. Then again, verse 7, for I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had said you shall not covet. Remember I told you at the beginning, one of the summaries of the law is the Ten Commandments.

Paul here is referring to the tenth of the Ten Commandments, which tells us do not covet. And Paul's saying, look, I actually didn't realize I was coveting until the law told me.

And so we're seeing here the law does a number of things, and one of the things it does is it shows us our sin. The law came to Paul.

[13:07] It said do not covet, and Paul in that moment realizes how sinful he is. Simple enough, right? The next verse, though, is where things start to get more interesting.

Sin here is where we see the principle applied. It takes what's good and it twists the law. We're now in verse 8. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness, for apart from the law, sin lies dead.

So it's not just that the law shows us our sin. It's not just that it reveals our sin. The law actually increases our sin. And it increases our sin because there is something about the nature of the human heart that wants what it can't have.

The forbidden fruit is attractive because it is forbidden. When we find out that we're not supposed to do something, we want to do it even more.

And so it's not just that Paul has now discovered what coveting is. He actually thinks coveting is better than ever before. He is coveting more than he has ever coveted in his life.

[14:30] That's how sin uses the law against us. That's how it twists it and spoils it. It says, look, here's sin. Isn't it attractive?

Oh, this is something you're not supposed to do? Wow, that must be something really, really good. There's a book that came out a number of years ago called Think Like a Freak, which is written by the same people who wrote Freakonomics.

And it tells the story of Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. That park had a problem, which is that people would come to Petrified Forest National Park and they would steal the petrified wood.

So they wouldn't just come to view it, they came to take it. And there was a sign that said this, your heritage is being vandalized every day by theft losses of petrified wood of 14 tons a year, mostly a small piece at a time.

So it's telling people, look, your national forest is being destroyed little by little. There was a man who decided to run an experiment. He seeded multiple trails with little pieces of petrified wood.

[15:51] On some of the trails, he put that sign. Some of the trails had no sign. And then they watched it for a while. The trails with the sign saw almost three times as much petrified wood stolen as the trails without the sign.

So when people saw they weren't supposed to take the petrified wood, they actually became more likely to pick up some. We might say this, sin, seizing an opportunity through the sign, produced in park guests all kinds of stealing.

And so the book goes on to make some guesses as to why it is that people would steal more wood because of the sign. The park's warning sign, designed to send a moral message, perhaps sent a different message as well.

Something like, wow, the petrified wood is going really fast. I better get mine now. Or, 14 tons a year, surely it won't matter if I take a few pieces.

The sign against stealing produced three times as much theft. Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

[17:24] That's how sin twists and spoils the law. Then verse 8, the end, he says, for apart from the law, sin lies dead.

It's the same thing we've seen before. There's a sense in which sin requires the law because by definition, sin is a violation of the law. When I was in high school, I took a class on U.S. government and I learned that in the U.S. Constitution, it is forbidden for any state or the federal government to enact what's called an ex post facto law.

An ex post facto law is a law that's instituted after the fact to make something illegal. So think for a second, if Colorado in 2026 decides to make it illegal to drink coffee, they cannot prosecute me for all the coffee I drank in 2025.

Praise God. I'd be in trouble. Because they can't make an ex post facto law, right? They can't make a law after the fact and say it was sinful in the past to drink coffee.

No, if they're gonna make the law, it's gotta start with the coffee I drank in 2026. My coffee drinking in 2025 was not a sin. I want you to know because there was no law against it.

[18:47] And that's part of what Paul is saying. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. The two concepts actually rely on each other. Sin by definition is a violation of God's law.

It cannot exist apart from law. The forbidden fruit is not forbidden until it is forbidden. You cannot have orcs until you first have elves and humans.

You can't have sin unless you first have the law. Okay, that takes us to verse nine.

I'm gonna tell you guys about verse nine and then we're gonna pause for a second. Verse nine is the toughest verse in this section because Paul uses death and life not in the way he normally uses it.

He kind of uses it autobiographically here. Okay, verse nine, he says, I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

[19:47] When Paul says, I was once alive, what he's saying is this. I was living life oblivious to the fact that I was under God's judgment.

Sin didn't bother me. I didn't think it was a big deal. I was living life and it was great. Verse nine, but when the commandment came, sin came alive.

Sin came alive here in at least a couple ways. First, the law does what we've already talked about. The law condemned him. So the law came alive in the sense that it could accuse him.

The law also came alive and now that he knew it, it had the chance to stir up more rebellion in him. One pastor uses this illustration. He says, when sin came alive, it is like insects when a stone is lifted.

So they were there, but man, you lift the stone, what are they gonna do? Gonna be all over the place. All over the place. Then Paul says, I died.

[20:54] So he's saying, I became aware of the sin that was in my life, became aware of God's judgment. So I was living life apart from the law.

Things were great. The law came along, did two things. It accused me, it condemned me. It made my sin even worse because it stirred it up.

Okay. If you feel confused at this point, that's legitimate, this is one of the most confusing chapters in all of scripture. So I'm gonna pause for a second.

Remember I've been telling you Romans is complex and intricate. It is hard. It's climbing a mountain, but it's worth it. So if you've tuned out, this is a great chance to tune back in. Here's what I've told you so far.

First, we talked about the nature of evil. And I told you, evil cannot create anything. It only twists and spoils what is good. Evil has no generative power.

[21 : 54] Okay. Then we talked about how that applies to the law. The law comes. First of all, the law shows or reveals my sin. I finally find out that coveting is wrong.

When I find out about the law, I realize that I'm under God's judgment. judgment. So there's that sense in which the law comes alive. Then the law accuses and condemns me.

And not only that, I actually sin more than ever before. So the law shows my sin. It condemns me. It stirs up my sin. It makes me more sinful than ever before.

That takes us to verse 10. It says, the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. We've already seen that the commandment promised life.

This is from Psalm 19, which we read earlier this morning. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. But sin came and twisted it and used it to produce death.

[23 : 03] How did sin use the law to produce death? Well, verse 11 answers that. Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Now how did sin deceive Paul? How does sin deceive you? How does sin deceive us? Think back to Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve are in the garden.

The serpent comes to Eve. God has forbidden the eating of a specific fruit. What does the serpent say? God forbid that because he's trying to keep from you what's really good.

God actually doesn't want what's best for you. God said not to do that? Wow, that's something you should really consider doing.

It's actually a sign that that's something that's pretty positive. In other words, sin deceived Paul because sin lied to him about the goodness of God.

[24 : 08] Sin deceived Paul because it told him God does not want what is best for you. In the law, it's actually a path to frustration.

It's not a path to life. Sin lies about what will bring us true joy and delight. In that sense, the law, or sorry, sin deceives and kills.

Paul tells us, final verse, here's what's actually true about the law. Verse 12, the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

The law isn't here to kill your joy. No, the law is actually here to give you joy. The law isn't here to steal your life. The law is here to restore your life.

The law is the manual written by the creator of the universe telling you how to prosper. The law is informing you how to live in line with the grain of the universe.

[25 : 18] The law is telling you the path to a life of blessing. You want to know what a life of blessing looks like?

Looks like keeping the Ten Commandments. You want to know what a joyful life looks like? It looks like loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

That's what's actually true. But sin comes in twists it and spoils it and says God is trying to keep the best things from you.

God says don't do it. Even more reason to do it. Do it as much as you can. There's still more for us to see in chapter 7 in the next two weeks about the law.

What I hope is clear now and this is part of the point Paul is trying to make that the Jews in that time thought hey the law is going to be able to make us good. And Paul's trying to say actually the law isn't going to make you good.

[26:29] Even worse than that it's going to make you bad. The law by itself becomes an instrument of sin. The law by itself is going to be twisted and spoiled so we need something actually more than the law.

We need something greater than the law. We need someone who can do two things. We need someone who can release us from the penalty of the law and we need someone who will change our hearts.

We need someone who will help us to actually love our neighbor as ourself. We need someone to come and give us a desire to love God. Of course that's what Jesus does at the cross.

At the cross Jesus takes the penalty that we deserve for our sins. He frees us from the penalty of sin and then Jesus is risen right?

He rises from the dead. He ascends into heaven at the right hand of God the Father and what does Jesus do when he's sitting at the right hand of God the Father? He sends the Holy Spirit to his people.

[27:28] What does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit does what we've discussed so many times in Romans changes our hearts takes them from hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh that we can walk in what Paul has already called newness of life.

That is the life enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. So Jesus keeps the law for us and he enables us to obey it.

That's what actually changes our hearts. in other words it's not the law that saves us it's love. We're already saying that this morning page 3 of your worship guide love constraining to obedience.

How is it that we obey and love the law? The last verse says this to see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and duty into choice.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven we do thank you and praise you this morning that you have changed us from slaves into children.

[28:43] The law can no longer accuse us and condemn us because we have your forgiveness. the law gives us no ability to keep your commands but you do by your Holy Spirit by your supernatural truth this morning that you would stir up our love and our affection for you we follow you in faith and obedience and we ask these things in Jesus name Amen.