

The Law Causes Sin?
Romans 7:5-13

I read somewhere about a hotel in Galveston Texas with location right on the shore; in front of the Gulf of Mexico. In each of the rooms there was a sign that said “No fishing from the Balcony.” Yet every day, the guests of the hotel would throw their lines into the water below from their balconies. The manager decided to take a different tack, he removed all the signs that prohibited fishing. Lo and behold No one fished from the balcony anymore. It would seem that the presence of the the signs had put the idea in the minds of the guests, who upon reading it could not resist doing the opposite.

So what’s the problem here? Is it the **signs**, is it the **rules** that they portray, or is it actually a revelation of something going on with human nature. This is actually the question that Paul takes up in Today’s reading from Romans 7. Verse 5 of that text is particularly revealing. he says “While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the Law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.”

Sinful passions, aroused by the Law of God? I remember about 10 years ago, some horrible sex crime was all over the papers, I can’t remember which one, and some of the clerks in a local mini-mart were discussing it. The preacher in me couldn’t help direct the conversation beyond being appalled, I innocently remarked. “What would make someone do such horrible things?” And one clerks responded: Our society has been so sexually repressed that these things are bound to happen”

Did you get that? His argument was that the Law and cultural taboos is the reason that there are sex crimes. At that moment I remember feeling like I was staring into the gaping maw of hell itself. But then I turn to Romans seven verse 5 and what do I see? Paul agrees with this mini mart dude! He says, While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the Law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.” Both paul and the dude agree on this: The law makes people to want to sin. And we know this. If someone tells us that must not do this or that... we often find ourselves really wanting to do this or that. The Law arouses the desire to break it! Both Paul and the Mini mart Guy agree.

But this is where Paul and the mini mart guy part ways: The mini mart guy concluded that the law is bad and that we would all be better off and happier if we would just get rid it. There would be no repressive rules or cultural norms, people could just reach into their hearts and do whatever they want...So according to him, the law is the source of evil.... and since God is the one who wrote the law on people’s hearts, ultimately God is Evil... that’s the final conclusion that Shaun King came to This is the conclusion that many people are beginning to come to in America. And we are seeing the results of such lawlessness and Godlessness in our cities. We have seen in friends and relatives who have been privately destroying their lives for years, but now its gone public. The Law and those who enforce the Law are the problem. We are told.

But the Apostle Paul, who does initially agree with the proposition that the law does ignite people to sin, takes it in a completely different direction. He writes in verse seven of the text “What then shall we say? That the Law is sin? By no means!” And then in verse 12 he says “...the law is holy.” So it’s not the law which is at fault... nor is it God who is at fault for the

brokenness of humanity which is everywhere evident. The Law merely reveals and underscores that there is SOMETHING WRONG WITH HUMANITY

Some time ago, in a moment of candor on the Radio Dave Dahl, the KSTP Meteorologist revealed that he often gets hate mail. Yeah it's true. I mean who could hate Dave Dahl? He's a puppy dog. But still much hate comes his way and all weather forecasters Why? Because sometimes people don't like the weather they describe Even though Dave Dahl does not cause the weather and merely reports the whether and tries to understand it he get's blamed when it rains on someone's parade. Kinda silly, if you ask me.

The Law of God and those who bring it are treated in the exact same way The Law of God brings bad news. It informs humanity that it is out of whack, twisted and perverse. It shows us the darkness of the sin that dwells with in us. It tells of a great storm of judgment and retribution for those who transgress. People do not like to hear that. They've never liked hear that. And over the centuries there has been much hate mail sent to those who proclaim it clearly. They killed the prophets, they killed John the Baptist, they killed Jesus. The fellow in the mini mart had nothing new to say, He is merely repeating what those who are war with God have always said: "It's not us that are the problem...it's God and his laws which are the problem."

Why did God give his law to the earth? Isn't like asking why Dave Dahl give us the Weather report? Or why our physician gives us a diagnosis? Or why our mechanic calls and explains wha's wrong with our car and how much it's going to cost? Or why our teachers would grade our tests and gives low or high marks depending on our performance? Why do all these people often tell us stuff that is often bad news? Because we need to know it! They are telling us things that we could not know on our own, thing we are avoiding to know. They are helping us. Helping us to prepare stuff, fix stuff, and get better. The law of God is exactly the same. It prepares us. Prepares us to realize that we need help.

As an example of this Paul uses Coveting. He says "...if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said "do not covet". (vs. 10) And then he goes on to explain how in his life before Christ he was at first excited by the command; thought it was an opportunity to prove himself worthy.... but it did just the opposite it proved him unworthy; proved him sinful. Paul even says it "killed me".

I think I can see how the no Coveting thing got to Paul. He was a pharisee before he was an apostle. He was outwardly righteous. But coveting is all about what's going on in here. He probably thought he'd kept the other commandments. He said to himself, nope **no idols** in my house, **no misusing God's name**. Keep the **Sabbath**, check. **Honor father and mother**, yep. Don't murder, wouldn't think of it. **Don't commit adutery**... never have never will. Stealing is right out. Telling the truth, got it nailed. But then comes coveting. ooops... ouch. I fail. I want stuff that others have. I want their stuff, I want their prestige, I want their wife, I want their talents, I want I want I want. This commandment speaks not only to Paul but also to America! I want, I want, I want but at the same time I do not expect to pay for it. Tax those rich people to pay for what I want! It is coveting that chews us up inside Coveting that leads to most crimes. And coveting that is behind adultery, murder, gossip and theft and all forms of malice and hatred And it's all in here in the heart and mind of each person. It's part of us and it's not something that the cruel cruel world has taught us.

Elisa Morgan, the former president of MOPs (mothers of preschoolers, once published something she called “the Toddlers Creed which betrays an inborn coveteousness:

If I want it, it’s mine.
If I give it to you and change my mind later, it’s mine.
If I can take it away from you, it’s mine.
If I had it a little while ago, it’s mine.
If it’s mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.
If we are building something together all pieces are mine.
If it looks like mine, it’s mine.

Do you see? This is not a problem with the Law; this is not a problem with God. This is a problem with us. This is what we are. We need help. And help is given. God’s only son would keep the law perfectly. He would also endure the full extent of the law’s penalty when he went to the cross. He was not merely man but also God so what he did would not just be for himself but for all of us. Faith in Jesus is what Saves. And the Law is meant to help us see how much we need him. Until we know how much we need a Savior, we will not want a Savior. The helps us to see how much we need him. So Paul Concludes and we shall also conclude: “The Law is holy, and righteous, and good.” AMEN