

“The Law’s Vindication”  
Romans 7:7-13  
(Preached at Trinity, November 16, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we’ve seen, Paul is giving a protracted exposition of the Law.  
In **Chapter 7** Paul is continuing to teach about the proper place of the Law in the life of the Christian.
  - A. When we were lost, dead in sin, the Law stood over us to condemn us. It made demands that we could not fulfill.  
Under the Law we were condemned and had no ability to escape its bondage.
  - B. The Law was weak in that it provided no change in the heart. It offered us no means of righteousness to justification. The Law has no power to subdue sin.  
The Law can neither save us nor sanctify us. It can only condemn us.
2. Paul has made several statements that might cause one to conclude that there is something inherently evil with the Law.  
**Romans 5:20** – “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.”  
**Romans 7:5** – “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.”
3. One might feel legitimate in concluding that the Law itself is sin.  
Paul deals with this sharply in this passage  
“What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid.”
4. First, let me affirm again when Paul is talking about the Law here he is talking about the Mosaic Law. Notice in **Verse 7** Paul speaks of covetousness, the 10 Commandment.  
**See Romans 13:8-10.** NCT teaches that you cannot separate the Mosaic Law
5. The Law reflects the holiness of God. The Law comes from God. In **Verses 22, 25** Paul refers to it as the “Law of God.”  
God is infinitely holy. He cannot do evil or produce anything evil. To declare the Law of God as evil or sinful is to attack the holiness of God.
6. In these verses Paul seeks to vindicate the Law by stating three good things that the Law does.
  - I. The Law reveals the sinfulness of sin  
**Romans 7:7** – “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”
    - A. The Law reveals the true nature of sin – Paul gives a personal illustration  
“I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”
      1. The KJV translates the first word “lust” and the second “covet” – it is really the same word – the first a noun and the second a verb  
This is a good translation here – it helps to give clarity to the passage
      2. It translates the word similarly in **Galatians 5**  
**Galatians 5:16** – “*This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

3. What is the meaning of lust?
    - a. The word ἐπιθυμία literally means to have a strong desire
    - b. Jesus used the same word to describe His great desire  
**Luke 22:15** – “And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:”
    - c. Desires become sinful lusts when they involve desires for that which God forbids.
  4. The Jews had always seen sin as being limited to something you did – external actions
    - a. You weren’t guilty of murder unless you actually took a life
    - b. You weren’t guilty of theft unless you actually took another person’s goods
    - c. To simply desire something was not considered sin
  5. Jesus exposed the fallacy of this line of reasoning  
**Matthew 5:21-22** – “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: <sup>22</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”  
**Matthew 5:27-28** – “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: <sup>28</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”
  6. Paul is saying that he would have never known that desires and lusts were sin if the Law had not enlightened him.
- B. The lost man really doesn’t have an understanding of sin
1. Paul isn’t saying that didn’t have an understanding sin in an absolute sense
    - a. Paul knew much about the Law – In fact as a Pharisee he sought to obey it perfectly
    - b. According to the standards of the Jewish religion Paul was blameless  
**Philippians 3:6** – “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”
    - c. Before God convicted him of his sin through the Law Paul thought he was a moral man.
    - d. Paul is saying that he did not have a true understanding of sin until he had a true understanding of the Law and it crushed him
  2. We must concede that lost people have some understanding of sin  
Lost people have an understanding that certain things are wrong or even sinful
  3. What the lost man doesn’t understand is the extent to which the Law condemns him. He is cursed by God because he has broken God’s Law.
  4. Listen to **Genesis 6:5**  
“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that every* imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

- a. God looks upon the hearts of man. He sees sin as it is.
  - b. God said that all of the thoughts of our hearts are evil all the time – All the time
  - c. What was the basis of this judgment? The Law. No one sees the full extent of his lawlessness.
5. Remember the words of Paul from **Chapter 3**  
**Romans 3:10-12** – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: <sup>11</sup> There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. <sup>12</sup> They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”
6. No man naturally owns this. No one believes this. No one sees himself, herself as wretchedly wicked. No one really believes that every inclination of his heart is truly wicked continually. No one believes God is angry with them.
- C. The moment a man understands the true nature of sin he seeks a Savior
- 1. The reason people see no need of Christ is they don't understand their sin  
 I might have told a few lies but I'm not a liar.  
 I may have looked in lust but I'm not an adulterer.  
 I may harbor anger in my heart but I'm not a murderer.  
 Surely God doesn't look upon my lustful desires as great evil.
  - 2. Until a person comes to an understanding of his sin he will never seek Christ.
  - 3. This is why the Law is an essential element of the Gospel. You can't understand sin apart from the Law and if you don't understand sin you will see no need for Christ.
  - 4. *John Bunyan* –  
 "The man who does not know the nature of the law, cannot know the nature of Sin; and he who does not know the nature of Sin, cannot know the nature of the Saviour."
- II. The Law provokes sin in the sinful heart  
**Romans 7:8** – “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.”
- A. Word Studies – let's look at the text
- 1. “But sin” – Paul is talking about more than just acts of sin. He is talking about the very principle of sin that controlled his whole nature
  - 2. The word “occasion” is from a word that refers to a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations. It refers to all the resources necessary to carry out the undertaking.  
 Paul is saying that this commandment not to covet provided him the very desire to covet.
  - 3. The word for concupiscence is the same translated “lust” in **Verse 7**
    - a. Paul is talking about unbridled lust – uncontrolled desire for those things God forbids.
    - b. This indwelling sin enflamed by the Law produced all manner of lust.

- c. Paul is saying that the Law actually aroused his sinful passions. Those who hear the Law actually do bad things they would otherwise not do.
- B. How is it that God's holy Law actually increases sin?
  - 1. Because of the corruption of our heart and the power of indwelling sin we have a natural propensity to rebel against authority. We desire absolute autonomy and do not desire to bow before anyone.
  - 2. We can easily see this in the hearts of men, in our own hearts
    - a. This is why children find it easy to run against the authority of their parents.
    - b. This is why people despise civil authority -- why the 60 mph sign makes us want to go 70, why we want to race through the yellow light, why people feel justified in cheating on their income tax
    - c. This is why we find it easy to dismiss pastoral authority and care little for church authority
  - 3. When God says, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" we naturally want to rebel
    - a. Look back to the garden. It was full of luscious fruit. There were hundreds of trees from which to eat. God placed a prohibition upon one. There must have been scores of trees that Adam and Eve had never eaten from. They had no desire to. But oh how they wanted to eat from the forbidden tree. Forget the other trees, we want that one.
    - b. We can see it in our children. Tell a child not to touch the knickknack on the coffee table and that immediately becomes the object of desire.
    - c. This is why people will now turn to Christ. The lost man will not bow, will not submit
  - 4. Due to the sinfulness of our hearts, the Law only served to enliven sin within us. God says, "Thou shalt" and we shout NO!!
  - 5. Again, Paul is not stating that the Law is evil. The Law is holy. Our hearts are evil.  
**Romans 7:7** – "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid."  
**Romans 7:12** – "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

### III. The third thing the Law does is bring us to the end of ourselves – **Verses 9-11**

- A. Paul says there was a time when his conscience was unaffected by his failure to keep God's Law - **Romans 7:9** – "For I was alive without the law once"
  - 1. Paul was a Pharisee. In his self-righteousness he was blameless.  
**Philippians 3:6** – "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."
  - 2. Be absolutely clear, however, he was blameless in his own eyes.
  - 3. This describes all men. They are living without fear. They do not see themselves as wretched in the sight of God. They do not see God's wrath kindled against them – His holy anger.

- B. When he came to a right understanding of the Law he was crushed  
**Romans 7:9** – “but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”
1. Paul described his conversion as the Holy Spirit crushing him in his sin. He saw himself as a condemned, dying man.  
**Acts 26:14** – “And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*”
  2. This is consistent with every conversion. We can see it clearly on the Day of Pentecost  
**Acts 2:37** – “Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart,”
    - a. They were stricken with a deep felt anguish
    - b. The word for “pricked” is, καταλύσσω - to prick, pierce, to pain the mind sharply, agitate it vehemently
  3. Listen to David after he came to a knowledge of his sin  
**Psalm 51:2-4** – “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight. . .”
  4. Paul is saying that God sent His Law to expose the exceeding sinfulness of sin.  
**Romans 5:20** – “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound”
  5. God uses His Law to expose our sin and leave us helpless. There is nothing we can do to remove our guilt – nothing we can do to escape God’s condemnation.

#### Conclusion:

1. If the Law actually increases sin isn’t the Law itself sinful. In No Way!!  
 God’s purpose for the Law is holiness.
2. Every Christian here this morning was crushed by the Law. This is why it is so tragic to see churches replacing the Gospel with self-help sermons.
3. Have you seen your sin? Have you repented of your sin? Have you cast yourself upon the mercy of Christ?