

“WHERE MY SIN PROBLEM COMES FROM.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 7:7-13

Introduction.

Tomorrow is an anniversary for me. 52 years ago I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. It might be more accurate to say I was taken captive by Christ, it was pure, undeserved grace that He won my soul from being a slave to sin to being a slave to Christ. I am eternally grateful.

I remember it being a real, noticeable change in my life, everything seemed better. I was sixteen up at Young Life's Malibu Club in British Columbia. I stay on at Malibu for another three weeks with my family there and worked on the work crew. No one prepared me for what happened a couple of weeks later. I was blindsided by sin, by conflict with some of the other workers.

It really messed with my head. We were all Christians, everything was supposed to be better, everyone was supposed to get along. I thought we were over that sin stuff. I didn't know about Romans 7.

God didn't let me go two weeks thinking I was sanctified or thinking I wouldn't have real temptations and experience inner battles with the indwelling sin still in my heart.

Paul wants to protect us from getting blindsided and confused by this sin problem that doesn't go away. Paul spends Romans 7:7-25 helping us better understand our ongoing battle within. If we don't, we will mislead ourselves and others, act hypocritically, or fall into despair when we stumble and fall. So Paul asks and answers three questions. We will take the first one this week.

Vs. 7, the law exposes sin, unmask it, shines the light of God's truth on it.

The main point is the law is not bad, the law is good (vss. 7, 12). The law shows us how bad sin is and how big a sin problem we have.

You have heard the phrase, “Don't shoot the messenger.” The messenger didn't create the bad situation, he just told you about it.

The doctor didn't create your cancer, he just informed you about it. The Law didn't create sin in us, it just reveals the presence of the sin already in us and inflames our desire to sin more. We can't blame the law for our sin, which is like a cancer tumor that was there all along.

Romans 3:20 Through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass.

Romans 7:5 For 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.

I would not know what sin is without the Law telling me. I would not know what covetousness or lust or greed or pride are without the law revealing it and by prohibiting it.

Where there is no law, there is no sin and we are alive, blissfully unaware, oblivious, not thinking about my sin. Then the law comes along and my sin comes alive. Once I know sin, all I want to do is sin and sin using the law kills me. But this is not the laws fault.

The first thing Paul wants to make clear is the Law is not sin. It is holy, righteous, good.

How is the law the source of sin? The law makes us conscious of sin and then activates the sin into action.

First, the law defines sin. Without the law sin has no existence. Until the law says it is sin, we can't know it as sin.

Without a law there is nothing for sin to push against. If there are no posted speed limits then you can drive as fast as you want, like back in the old days in eastern Montana or northern Nevada. But once the law is posted at 70, driving 85 is a sin (even if you are a pastor).

Rules in sports define what is allowable and what is a penalty. Until there is a rule, there can be no fault or penalty.

Vss. 8-11, sin seizes the opportunity and exploits the law.

But the law doesn't just define sin, **it also** inflames or arouses sin, it turns a prohibited thing into a temptation.

In the Garden of Eden there was only one prohibited thing, and what is the one thing Adam did? The forbidden tree was made the most desirable. What is forbidden is seductive. We find forbidden fruit to be the most pleasurable.

What do you want to do when you see a sign that says, “Wet paint, do not touch”?

This passage begins and ends with sin seizing the opportunity. Sin takes the good law and uses it for bad purposes.

What is the law? If you had to boil it down to one sentence what is the law of God? You know the commandment, love the Lord your God with wholehearted loyalty. All the rest of the laws hang on that one law.

So when that commandment comes from the outside into the sinful stubborn human heart what happens? All of a sudden rebellion comes alive.

Think of an occupied country that might be quietly, passively hostile. And then the occupying power sends tax collectors to collect taxes, and all of a sudden the passive hostility wells up into active rebellion.

The early American colonies were under the authority of England, and didn't like it, but kept mostly calm about it. But when England showed up in force to get their taxes (remember taxation without representation) then the colonies rebelled.

When the command of God comes that we should worship and love and obey God, the human heart shows its true colors.

A man is sitting in a room chained to a sleeping monster called sin. While the monster sleeps he is alive. But then the commandment bursts into the room and says in a loud voice the man must kill the monster. What happens? The monster wakes up and doesn't want to die, so he kills the man instead. The man is killed by his own monster who was awakened by the command. (Christopher Ash).

“I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve.”

Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Sin is like cancer. It is there whether we know it or not. The law is like an x-ray that exposes it but also spreads it. The commandment makes sin more alive, more present, more known. The commandment is like the kid who whacks a beehive. The bees were always present, but the kid provokes them to sting. In a similar way, sin is present in us, but the law stirs it up in us.

Sin always deceives (through the law it deceived me and killed me, vs. 11).

First, sin deceives us by making us think it will make us happy, that it will satisfy us. In the end no one has ever found that it did.

Second, sin deceives us into thinking we can make a good excuse for it or put up a good defense for doing wrong. Every defense is futile, especially before God.

Third, sin deceives us into thinking we can keep it under control, just a little at a time, but we misjudge the powerful desires and urges for more and more. Before long we are going places or doing or saying things we never dreamed possible.

Fourth, sin deceives us into thinking we will get away with it and escape any consequences. Sooner or later our sins will find us out.

Here the weakness of the law is seen. The law commands that the monster of sin be killed so he can be free from sin, but it provides no power for doing so. All it does is wake up the monster. It takes something more than the voice of the law to free us from the slavery of sin.

Vss. 12-13, the conclusion.

The commandment which sums up the law is holy, just and good. The law is not sin, the law exposes sin. It is not the law that kills, but sin that kills. Sin uses the law “in order that sin might be clearly seen as sin, and as utterly sinful.”

The law reveals the magnitude of our sin, and the depth of it.

The sinfulness of sin is seen in its ability to take something good, the law, and use it against us. Anything that renders harmful what is otherwise healthy and good, must itself be deadly. This is the awfulness of sin, that it takes what is holy and good, what is from God, and makes it into a weapon for evil.

“So that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (v. 14).

The ultimate purpose was to show not just our sins but our sinfulness, this constant presence of a sin nature. I knew I was a sinner by my sin, but I didn't see the deeper issue, that I was a sinner because of my sin nature. I came to see my sin leading to more sin, growing out of my sinful heart.

Every year as I grow in the grace of being a Christian, I become more and more aware that though I am born again, though all my sin is covered by the blood of Jesus, though I am filled with the Holy Spirit of God, I am still in myself utterly sinful, more chief among sinners than ever before.

And I say to you this knowledge is good, this knowledge drives me to Jesus, to the Gospel, to repentance, to hating my sin and being more willing to acknowledge it, and quicker to confess it. This is the life of a Christian, to be continually and increasingly aware of my sin.

We won't turn to Jesus for the cure unless we know how bad the disease is.

I would like to say that I welcome God's exposure of my sin, but that's not true. I come around to it eventually, but not at first.

When someone like my wife points out my sin my kneejerk default reaction is to be defensive, to defend my pride, my ego, my selfish desires. I want to protect or cover up or hide. But to what end? It's hopeless. The truth is I sin, and I see my sin more and acknowledging it is the only path to salvation and freedom.

He who has been forgiven little loves little, he who has been forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47).

The Law gives us knowledge of the sin that still remains in us. This sin still grips us and lures us and tempts us and causes us to stumble and fall. It is this indwelling sin that makes us hate it, makes us cry out like Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

The more painfully aware we are of our sin and the effects of our sin, the more we long for and desire to be free in heaven.

Implications and application.

You might say the reason God gave the Law at Mt. Sinai was to stir up trouble. God gave the Law to make us worse, or to show us how worse we already are. The Law just made our sin increase. God whacked the beehive with the stick of the Law, and then sent Jesus to clean up the mess.

There is a famous story from Augustine's autobiography, *The Confessions*, Book 2,
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Chapter 4 I willed to commit theft, and did so, compelled neither by hunger, nor poverty through a distaste for well-doing, and a lustiness of iniquity. For I pilfered that of which I had already sufficient, and much better. Nor did I desire to enjoy what I pilfered, but the theft and sin itself. There was a pear tree close to our vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was tempting neither for its color nor its flavor. To shake and rob this some of us wanton young fellows went, late one night (having, according to our disgraceful habit, prolonged our games in the streets until then), and carried away great loads, not to eat ourselves, but to fling to the very swine, having only eaten some of them; and to do this pleased us all the more because it was not permitted.

By myself I would not have committed that theft in which what pleased me was not what I stole but the fact that I stole... This would have pleased me not at all if I had done it alone; nor by myself would I have done it at all.

Behold my heart, O my God; behold my heart, which You had pity upon when in the bottomless pit. Behold, now, let my heart tell You what it was seeking there; that I should be gratuitously (pointlessly) wanton (malicious), having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved to perish. I loved my own error— not that for which I erred, but the error itself. — not seeking anything through the shame but the shame itself!

This is Paul, Augustine, the church today, us. This is our sin problem that we must honestly come face to face with.

Sin is always low hanging fruit, right there deceiving us, tempting us, begging us to take it, just a little, just this once. Our sinful hearts still desire sinful fruit.

The bottom line is this, it is important for us to know our sin. It is good for us to know our sin. You can know how important it is by what happens when you don't know your sin. It is self-destructive, it ruins you and all your relationships, your marriage, family, friends, church. And it is to your eternal peril if you don't know. I plead with you for the sake of your souls, lose your pride, know your sin. This knowing is a good and holy thing. (John Piper).

The more we understand the presence of indwelling sin, this huge problem inside us, the more we will run to Christ. The person who realizes how massive the issue of indwelling sin is within them will love the Lord much. The more accurately you see yourself, the more strongly you will love Him. Next week we will do honest battle with Paul against our sin and find the only hope for our deliverance.