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Sermon Notes

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The Law Attacked and Vindicated

Romans 7:7-12

I. God's Law Attacked (vs. 7)

A. Sin's Defiant Pride: Hurling the Mirror

Illus. Hubble Space telescope... optical system uses a huge mirror: the most expensive mirror ever made, said to be also the most perfect... ground so precisely to 1/800,000ths of an inch... If the mirror were scaled up to the diameter of the earth, the largest bump would be only six inches tall

This nearly perfect mirror can take the tiniest details from the most distant reaches of space and reflect them into the telescope with almost perfect precision... if the mirror were flawed in any way, the telescope would be inaccurate... if the flaws were big enough, the telescope would be useless

Yet even this man-made mirror was flawed and needed to be corrected

1. Law functions like a mirror... showing us ourselves spiritually

God's law is a perfect mirror... not of what can be seen, but of what cannot be seen—the basic nature of a human being

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

2. Without the mirror of God's law, our sinful pride would assume we're better than we are
3. Some never gaze at their own reflection in the mirror of God's Law

Illus. Hiroo Onoda Last Japanese soldier in WWII found a guerilla war on a remote island in the Philippines for 30 years before he finally surrendered in 1974; the Japanese government and the

local Filipino government tried many expeditions to convince him that the war was over; they sent his brother and his father to speak through loudspeaker to various parts of the jungle where he'd been seen; they sent his commanding officer to come give him new orders, and Onoda allowed himself to be photographed... he eventually saw the photograph of his own face, and was amazed how much he'd aged, and how much he looked like his uncles... two days later, he surrendered

Sinners apart from the law would never know how God sees them in their sin

They always assume that they are better off than they truly are

God's law is the perfect mirror that He holds before us, that we may know who we truly are

BUT sin HATES the truth, and seeks to hurl the mirror away!!!

vs. 7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?

B. Paul Defends His Message

1. Seems that he's been attacking Law

Romans 2: Jews are not justified simply because they have God's Law...

Romans 2:13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 3:20-21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Romans 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Romans 3:31 Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Romans 4: [Abraham not justified by observing the Law... he wasn't yet circumcised!]

Romans 4:14-15 For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Romans 5:13 But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.

Romans 5:20-21 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 7:1-6 We died to the law through Christ's body... we have been released from law to serve in the new way of the Spirit

2. Leaves simple question: Why did God give the Law if it's led to nothing but wrath and condemnation for Israel??

vs. 7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?

3. Deeper issue: the Law is God's word as much as the Gospel is... does God's word fail??

C. Clear Teaching Vindicates God's Word

II. God's Law Explained (vs. 7-11)

vs. 7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

A. Law Reveals Sin

1. Paul speaks autobiographically... but also as a Jew
 - a. Romans 7 is deep and challenging
 - b. Paul's use of the word "I"
 - c. is he giving an autobiographical account of things he wrestled with??

Best answer: Paul IS relating personal experience... but also speaking as a representative Jew

2. The definition of sins
 - a. "I would not have known what sin was..."
 - b. law defines sins

Negatively: Ten Commandments

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- You shall have no other gods...
- you shall not make/worship idols...
- you shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain...
- Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy...
- Honor your father and mother...
- you shall not murder...
- you shall not commit adultery...
- you shall not steal...
- you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor...
- you shall not covet

Positively: Two Greatest Commandments

Matthew 22:37-39 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

BUT these were just summaries!!! God's Law extended to the most minute areas of Jewish life:

Jewish rabbis: 613 commandments in the Law... 248 mandates ("You must...") 365 prohibitions ("You shall not...")

Mandates included: worship regulations, laws about the Temple, sacrifices, vows, rituals, national regulations, rules about kings, wars, taxes, family duties, etc.

Prohibitions included issues covering: idolatry, blasphemy, worship, sacrifices, priesthood, diet, agriculture, loans, personal property, justice, etc.

All of this put together defined what sins were... sins were individual acts of rebellion against God's law

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

c. Paul discusses "coveting" or "lust"

vs. 7 Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

Greek word = "desire for something unlawful"

Usually used to refer to sexual desire... BUT probably here refers to yearning for anything that God has said is wrong

Probably related to Ten Commandments

Leads into the HEART!!! Coveting is a HEART issue... not merely a matter of behavior!

Jews (like all of us today) tended to externalize sin, and make it a matter of merely behavior

Can any of us say we've never coveted?

Coveting is a basic discontent with what God has provided... it reveals that we've exchanged the glory of God for something lesser; we are not satisfied with God and what God provides

3. Deeper... the virulent nature of SIN itself

Stephen Charnock: "A legally convinced person would only be freed from the pain, an evangelically convinced person from the sin, the true cause of it."

- a. sin is a heart attitude of rebellion against God
- b. law provides the focal point of that heart attitude
- c. individual sins are manifestations of SIN itself

NOTE carefully the difference between Sin and SINS... SIN is a heart of rebellion toward God... an attitude of lawlessness; SINS are the specific actions that flow from that heart... SIN is the tree, SINS are the fruit of the tree

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

Illus. Lightning... cloud heavy with electrons wants to dump those electrons to the ground; a tree and some other tall object provides the focal point for that discharge, but its going to happen somewhere... in the same way the sinful heart HATES God's authority and it MUST express it somehow... the law provides the pathway for expression

Romans 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

B. Law Excites Sin

vs. 9-11 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹

For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

1. The words of the Law arouse SIN and get it moving
2. Ideas are put in the head... the drive to rebel MUST express itself
3. Sin used the Law for its own twisted perverse purposes
4. Concepts:
 - a. "seizing the opportunity" = used as a base of operations
 - b. "every kind of covetous desire" = not just lust, but wanting ANYTHING that God refuses us... WANTING is the beginning of every sin
 - c. "apart from law, sin is dead" = SIN cannot express itself if there's no commandment
 - d. "Once I was alive apart from law"

VERY COMPLEX!! Is this Paul's autobiography?

Is this making a statement about "age of accountability"? That babies are not under law because they don't understand it?

Lloyd-Jones: "Paul is speaking relatively... we are born in sin, under law... but we don't feel it/understand it... Law 'comes to us' in our understanding; sin has always been there lying dormant but it springs to life like a motor when you touch the gas pedal... at that moment, Paul died in his relationship with God"

C. Law Condemns Sinners

Ezekiel Hopkins: "Certainly if the giving of the law were so full of terror, much more terrible shall be our being judged according to that law."

vs. 9 sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

1. "Death" is relational with God

Ephesians 2:1-2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

2. Death will be made judicial on Judgment Day

1 Corinthians 15:56 “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”

- a. “court seated, books opened”
- b. Law will testify against the sinner
- c. Law brings wrath

Romans 4:15 “Law brings wrath”

D. Law Cannot Save Sinners

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Thomas Adams: “The law may *express* sin, but cannot *suppress* sin.”

- 1. Law merely points out how we should and should not live
- 2. It has NO POWER to change anything

Illus. Man drowning in a lake... law stands on the shore and calls out to him what he must do to be saved; grace dives in, swims out to the drowning man and pulls him along to shore

III. God’s Law Vindicated (vs. 12)

vs. 12 “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”

A. Law Reflects God’s Character

- 1. God is “holy, righteous, and good”
- 2. God’s law reveals God’s character
- 3. God was “holy, righteous and good” in giving us the law

Psalm 19:7-11 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much

pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. ¹¹ By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

B. Law Humbles the Sinner for Salvation

Daniel Cawdray: "As a looking-glass doth neither wash nor make him fair, that looketh therein, but giveth him occasion either to seek for water or else for some other thing that may make him fair and clean: even so the law showeth unto us our sins, and maketh known unto us our miserable estate and wretchedness, and how that there is nothing good in us, and that we are far off from all manner of righteousness, and so driveth us of necessity to seek righteousness in Christ."

1. Law and Gospel: Partners in God's communication to humanity

John 9:39-41 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." ⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" ⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

- a. blind people need a Savior
- b. healthy, sighted people need nothing

Luke 5:31-32 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

- c. Law makes us realize our helplessness

NOTE: All of Jesus' miracles a parable of human weakness, Christ's power

Can't see... can't walk... can't live... can't recover... can't stop bleeding... can't raise my daughter from death... can't eat (cause we have no food)... can't walk on water... can't use my hand... can't be rid of the demon... can't hear... CAN'T CAN'T CAN'T CAN'T!!

Suddenly Jesus appears with the power of God... and human powerlessness is changed into CAN CAN CAN CAN

Thus it is with the most basic spiritual issue of life: can't obey God... can't stop sinning!

Law proves it to you day after day!

God has given us 10 Commandments: We can't keep them

God has given us 2 Great Commandments: We can't keep them

Romans 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

d. Law leaves no hope... Gospel alone has hope

Galatians 3:10-12 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." ¹¹ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

George Swinnock: "The law is a court of justice, but the Gospel a throne of grace."

Law and faith are opposed if speaking of justification

BUT law serves faith by driving us to Christ

2. Law's saving purpose: Drive us to Christ

Galatians 2:19-21 "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained by the law, Christ died for nothing."

Martin Luther [Commentary on Galatians]: "Although the Law kills, yet God uses this effect of the law to a good end, that is, to bring life. For God, seeing that this universal plague of the whole world, namely, man's opinion of his own righteousness, his hypocrisy, his confidence in his own holiness, could not be beaten down by any other means, he would that it be slain by the law.... God must therefore have a mighty hammer to break the rocks, and a hot burning fire in the midst of heaven to overthrow the mountains: that is to say, to destroy this furious and obstinate beast of human pride, that when a man by this bruising and breaking is brought to nothing, he should despair of his own strength, righteousness, and works, and exceedingly quake before God; being thus thoroughly terrified, should thirst after mercy and the forgiveness of sins."

The Law breaks you and makes you a spiritual beggar!!

3. Law's ongoing work: Make us spiritual beggars

So also, the law keeps you a spiritual beggar... we see God's perfect standard, but can't live up to it

We despair of ourselves and continue to hunger and thirst for a righteousness which only Christ can give

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the spiritual beggars, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”

True progress in sanctification only happens through moment by moment reliance on Christ through His Holy Spirit

C. Law Reveals God’s Ongoing Will

William Secker: “The law by which God rules us is as dear to Him as the Gospel by which He saves us.”

Ezekiel Hopkins: “We find the same rules for our actions, the same duties required, the same sins forbidden in the Gospel and in the law.”

1. Christians are free from the law as condemning force
2. Christians are NOT free to ignore the law as a revelation of God’s daily standards for us

Is a Christian free from loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Can a Christian ignore the responsibility we have to love our neighbor as ourselves?

IV. God’s Law Fulfilled in Christ

Romans 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This means: Christ is the goal, the purpose, the intention of the law... in order to accomplish righteousness through FAITH

- A. Christ Lived Out The Perfect Standards of the Law
- B. Christ Died Under the Law’s Demands
- C. Christ Purchased Us a Righteousness Superior the Law
- D. Christ Enables Us to Live Out the Law’s Requirements

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous

requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

V. Application

- A. Acknowledge sin: deep-seated resistance to God's Law
- B. Delight in God's law: holy, righteous, good [Don't accuse the law because you can't keep it!!]
- C. Flee to Christ
- D. Let Law keep you continually humble
- E. Ask God to fulfill law in you by His Holy Spirit