



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 7:7-13

The Apostle Paul has just stated that we are dead to Husband Law and that Husband Law is dead to us via baptism. But now, in verses 7-13 he returns back to the subject of the Law. So what is going on here?

First of all we must consider that unlike sin and death, the Law is from God. That is right; the blame for sin and death are placed upon the evil one and mankind. God is not the author of sin and death. However, God *is* the author of the Law. The Law comes from God, not the devil. Therefore, the Law is good. But this doesn't make sense – doesn't the Law stand against us? Why is the Law so closely associated with sin and death?

For us, as Christians, we can experience the Law in two ways. According to our old Adam we experience the Law as a threat – as a condemning voice. However, according to our new Man in Christ, we experience the Law as the good and gracious will of God.

But here is the catch. Since we are simultaneously sinner

and saint at the same time and at all times, we will always hear the Law as condemnation and gift at the same time and at all times.

Let us examine the Law with respect to our old Adam a bit more, as this is Paul's main theme in our selected verses.

As already stated, the Law is good. It expresses God's good will for mankind. And so, the Law does not belong to sin. But here is where everything goes wrong. The Law is misused by the power of sin, which ends up perverting the good Law to bring about the opposite of what was intended by the Law.

Think back to Genesis 3. God gave a Word to Adam and Eve, "*The tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...*" However, in Genesis 3:1, the Devil comes to sow sin attacking God's Command, "*Did God really say?*" The forces of sin – the Devil – started their battle with God's Law. And, as you know, Adam and Eve violated God's Word of Law by eating the fruit.

And so, ever since the Garden of Eden, sin has taken advantage of the Law to twist and misapply the Law.

So, here is how we can simply understand the Law and Sin? Think of an unruly teenager or a child in their terrible twos. If a parent says, "Don't do that," the teenager and child will do what? Well, even if the parent's command is good, the teenager and youth will seize the opportunity of the parent's command to do the exact opposite – to sin. So, when the parent's command is stated, two things happen. First, sin perverts the parent's command; the command creates an opportunity for sin to raise its ugly head. Secondly, by the command, the parents can recognize the presence of sin, for, without the command, sin would not have raised its ugly head and would not be recognized. It makes sense now why parents often use reverse psychology, "Yeah, go ahead, I don't care if you put your finger in the outlet," when, in reality, they do care. Without even considering the theological implications, parents are often cautious of aggravating the sinful nature to sinful rebellion.

What this means is this: every time God's Law is proclaimed, sin will rebel and want to use the opportunity of the Law to do the opposite of what is commanded. And every time the Law is proclaimed, we will be able to recognize sin, for we know what sin is based upon God's Law. And so, the more a church preaches and teaches God's Law as a way to legislate morality, the more and more rebellion and sin will result in the church. The more and more a parent imposes the Law on a child to bring about squeaky clean children, the more the child will rebel, and the more sin will abound.

So, shall we avoid the Law? Absolutely not! But we must understand how sin uses the Law. We must always consider something called "concupiscence." Concupiscence is mankind's inclination to sin. It is a word that communicates our lust or desire to do the opposite of what God commands. That is to say, even if we do not sin in action, the very fact that we want to sin is evidence of concupiscence. (Keep in mind that concupiscence is sin). All of mankind has concupiscence. And when mankind is presented the Good Law of God, this concupiscence snarls. C.F.W. Walther comments on this saying, "Some treat the Law as if it were a rule in arithmetic. However, let the Law once force its way into a person's heart, and that heart will strain with all its force against God. The person will become furious at God for asking such impossible things of him. Yea, he will curse God in his heart. He would slay God if he could. He would thrust God from His throne if that were possible. The effect of preaching the Law, then, is to increase the lust for sinning."

But doesn't this sound bad to preach the Law to increasing sinning? Walther goes on to say, "The Law uncovers to man his sins, but offers no help to get out of them and thus hurls man into despair." In other words, the effects of the Law are to not only confront mankind's sinful heart, but also to expose sin, and then ultimately produce contrition – the terrors of hell, the understanding of mankind's rebellious heart, the wrath of God, etc. The more the Law is preached, the more it should not only agitate a person's concupiscence but also show just how messed up mankind is.

Think of it this way: ask a pagan if they are a good person, and they will reply, "Yes, I am very good. I am not evil!" The heathen does not recognize their sin. However, when the Law is preached to them, what happens? They become defensive, rebellious, agitated, and will curse the messenger and God in their hearts. The concupiscence within them doesn't like to be confronted, told what to do, or exposed. It makes sense now why pagans do not like coming to church.

And so, the Law kills. It insights the old Adam. It exposes sin. It brings distress. It makes people defensive. It brings forth the terrors of hell. This is not because God's Law is evil, but because of mankind's sinful heart. It is because sin started the battle with God's Law way back in Genesis 3, and it continues to this day.

So, if we are not to avoid the Law and if the Law does not bring about peace, what shall we do? We shall preach the Gospel. C.F.W. Walther states, "The Gospel does not require anything good that man must furnish: not a good heart, not a good disposition, no improvement of his condition, no godliness, no love either of God or men. It issues no orders, but it changes a man. It plants love in his heart and makes him capable of all good works. It demands nothing, but it gives all. Should not this fact make us leap for joy?" (See the Explanation to the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed)

Indeed, the answer to the sin seizing the opportunity with the Law is the Lord's Gospel.

