



Sermon Notes | Defending the Law | Romans 7:7-12

INTRODUCTION

Augustine of Hippo, was a 4th-5th Century writer. Among his famous writings is his work *Confessions*, a landmark piece of literature concerning anthropology, the study of man, in which he confesses his actions and thoughts about a pear tree. His confession proves very insightful.

Augustine's Confession:

"There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its colour or for its flavour. Late one night—having prolonged our games in the streets until then, as our bad habit was—a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree. We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart—which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error—not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself."

There are very striking points to be made here concerning Augustine's action:

1. It had nothing to do with the pears. Nothing about those specific pears, or the property of the pears, was significant. Augustine and his peers were not hungry for pears.
2. It had to do with 'the forbidden' - the pears being 'forbidden'.
3. It was 'fueled' by being 'unlawful'. This was why Augustine loved it.

If there had been no law against the pears; had there been a sign, 'Come, take and eat the pears freely.', then we would understand that Augustine would not have been 'aroused by sin'. So then, what was the problem? Was the problem defining what the 'forbidden' was? No. The law was clear. Stealing the pears was not 'lawful'. Stealing pears was 'forbidden' by law. The problem was the law.

Today, man says that mankind's problem is 'the law'. There is too much law. There is not enough law. This is the question before us today. Maybe you have been asking this very question, even since chapter 5 of Romans, and especially after studying these particular verses:

Romans 5:20

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Romans 6:14

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

And especially,

Romans 7:5-6

"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. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."

And indeed, as we consider 'law' more fully in Romans,

Romans 7:1-6

"Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law, through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. 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. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."

So, where do we stand? 'The Law' sure can sound harmful. Is this what is being said? Paul understands these questions, and Paul understands the human condition. So Paul continues on with this 'Living Word' and explains the Law's affect for him. For Paul, 'The Law' showed him his 'guilt'.

Romans 7:7-12

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment

that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

So, then, is 'The Law' sin? NO! This is clearly and strongly stated. 'The Law' is not sin! 'The Law' is good. 'The Law' is holy. "The commandment is holy, righteous and good." Therefore, Paul makes a staunch defence for the 'The Law', in terms of both sin and life. 'The Law' is mentioned in every verse. There is no doubt what Paul is talking about.

I. THE LAW AND SIN: (vv. 7-8)

Romans 7:7-8

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead."

Note the expression in verse 7, 'By no means!' The emphasis was done earlier in the letter as well.

Romans 6:15

"What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"

In these verses, Paul is 'defending' both grace and law. Romans 7:7 notes that the change of the law is sin, and Romans 6:15 notes that the change, sin, is okay because of grace. Grace and Law: One is not better than the other. Both are important, for Paul, and for God's Word, and therefore for us also. They are not set against one another. No. This is not how the Bible presents Grace and Law. Paul shows us that 'The Law' has benefit. It showed him the knowledge of 'sin', and the knowledge of 'sin' is needed, as the following example points out.

Consider a road where there was previously no road sign indicating speed limits on their road, no signs to say what speed one should drive while driving on it. The speed limits were thereby 'undefined', poorly attended to for drivers were not consistent in their speeds. As drivers they had a general sense, of course, but there was no defined speed limit. It remained ambiguous, until the day that a new sign was posted on the road. They now knew the limit. Each person in the family was now fully aware, and had clear knowledge about the expectations for their road. The speed sign showed the precise law, and what was required of each of them as drivers. If stopped by a policeman, they could no longer declare they did not know what the actual expectations were. Having seen the newly placed sign, they all now knew the law and what would be considered the wrong speed to drive on their road. This new sign of law was not meant to be a problem, but rather, it was meant to be a help.

Likewise, Paul points to 'The Law' as being helpful. Through 'law' we know what is wrong, and what, thereby, is expected. "I would not have known sin," (7:7) if it had not been for 'The Law', he declares. He is not speaking of a general law, or a moral law. No. Paul is referencing, pointing specifically to, the 10th Commandment of the 'Mosaic Law', that specific Law given to Israel back on Mount Sinai. It was 'Law' for then, and it remains 'Law' for now. It was the standard of Law for them back then, and it remains the standard here now, in the Letter to the Romans, for the first century Jew and Gentile. 'The Law' became 'the standard' for ALL those with faith in Yahweh, faith in Messiah, faith in the Seed, right up to and including the advent of Christ. There was no Gentile version of 'The Law'. The same Law given first to Israel on Sinai, as recorded in Exodus, was given to the nation to 'define' their relationship with Yahweh. 'The Law' came down to bring knowledge of sin (just like a freshly posted speed sign of law would point to wrongful driving), providing clear, specific articulation of what was considered right/wrong before God. Thus was the knowledge of sin. So then, Paul knows, as he writes, that 'The Law' made sin known, and that these Christians of Rome understood that 'The Law' defined sin. Paul knows that these Christian believers know 'The Mosaic Law', and that they too know about 'sin' through that same Law. And so, 'in defence of law' they saw that it was good. 'The Law' provided not only a knowledge of sin, but "all kinds of covetousness" (vs 8), and Paul acknowledges that this 'covetousness' was discovered by and through 'The Law'.

Thus, apart from 'The Law' sin remains dead! (vs 8) So has Paul now turned on 'The Law'? No. Not at all. Paul is turning on the charge against 'The Law', the charge that 'The Law' itself is 'sin'. Paul is correcting this error. He points out that 'sin' is an 'operation' with respect to 'The Law'. In other words, 'The Law' itself is not 'sin', but 'sin' does work through 'The Law'. The meaning of this is seen clearly in a parallel. Question: Are knives bad instruments? No. Knives are good instruments, designed to be helpful instruments, as in a scalpel, a rope cutter, a cutting knife. But, they are not always used for good ways. An evil man can use them for wrong purposes and cause harm in his rage. The issue then is not the knife, but the evil man, who can 'cease an opportunity' just like 'sin' personified. God's 'Law' says, 'You shall not covet', but like an evil man who 'seizes the opportunity', 'sin is aroused' by this Law, and he 'pounces'.

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."

But Paul is 'defending' 'The Law'. Like the knife, 'The Law' is not bad. It is meant to be useful and helpful. The instrument itself is not the problem. How and by whom it is being used makes the difference. 'The Law' is there to ultimately 'teach us'. Like the knife was meant to be 'helpful', so also is 'The Law'. So then, as F.F. Bruce notes concerning Paul's argument in chapters 6-8 of Romans, "sin is the villain, not the Law." We cannot lose sight of this fact. "The Law" provides opportunity, while 'sin', as the villain, twists and distorts truth, and has done so since time began.

Let us look at the first sin to see this picture. The first sin came by Law, for God had 'instructed' Adam and Eve not to eat or touch the 'one' tree in the middle of the Garden.

Genesis 3:1-7

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths."

Satan seized the opportunity to lead Adam and Eve astray, his attack coming by way of the very freshly given 'Law' given by God, God's 'Guardian Law' for Garden life.

Genesis 2:16

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Satan's attack came by way of God's Commandment. He took hold of the opportunity and 'pounced' on it. He 'saw' and 'seized'! 'Sin' worked through the good thing that 'The Law' offered, for an evil end. And this is Paul's point. The problem is 'sin' and not 'The Law'. Sin takes 'The Law' and uses it to 'arouse, encourage and produce' all kinds of sin.

This creates a 'tension' in the believer, a 'tension' that is a natural outlaw of 'The Law'. Paul explains the 'tension' as follows:

Romans 7:22-23

"For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members."

Paul, 'delights' in 'The Law', and regeneration does this for us, as we noted previously with David.

Psalms 19:7-10

*"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;*

*the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward."*

Psalm 119:9-10, 14-15, 33-34, 59-60, 97-98

*"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
With my whole heart I see you; let me not wander from your commandments!*

...
*In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.*

...
*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.*

...
*When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies;
I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.*

...
*Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me."*

But 'believers' also find 'evil' close at hand. This is the 'tension' that 'The Law' creates. Paul explains.

Romans 7:21

"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."

In a body which still is carrying 'unredeemed flesh', that is 'apart' from 'The Law', we will all live in this 'tension', as Paul notes.

Romans 7:8

*"But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of
covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead."*

The 'believer', though 'dead to sin', yet still sins! In Christ we are 'dead to condemnation and its power', 'dead to sin', and are 'dead to sin's opportunity through 'The Law' because of Christ. Yet we still sin and still are tempted. But in Christ, we 'are able' to say NO to the serpent, are able not to 'sin'. The famed Augustine explains, we are able to say 'no' "because in Christ the end of The Law is embodied." A transfer has been made, from Adam to Christ, and now the power source and heart is different, radically different. In Christ we don't want to rebel against 'The Law'. In Christ we want to obey, and this is the glory, that in Christ we can. 'Sin is dead' because He, Christ, 'embodies and imputes and fulfills' 'The Law'. 'Sin lies dead!' No longer under Law, but in Christ, we live out Christ who is the 'standard'. He, Christ Himself, 'embodies' 'The Law', and He

imputes that righteousness, defined by 'The Law', to us. Christ is the embodiment of 'The Law'!

Romans 10:4

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Romans 5:18-21

"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Christ is the 'embodiment' of 'The Law', and we live out Christ who is the 'standard' of that same Law. We do not 'shed' 'The Law'. In Christ, for us 'sin and law' have changed. Law's purpose, which was once to show and give knowledge of 'sin', now is 'embodied' by Christ. 'Sin' is the villain, not 'The Law'!

II. LAW AND LIFE: (vv. 9-12)

Romans 7:9

"I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."

This is Paul, kind of talking in an autobiography. In verses 7-8 he is using pronouns, I and me. "If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'." "But sin... produced in me all kinds of covetousness." Paul declares he was alive apart from the law, (as humanity was in Adam) but then 'sin came alive' and "I died". By these words, Paul is standing in solidarity with his brothers. 'The Law' had been given first to the nation of Israel, then it became the 'how to' of the proselytes of Judaism, and then was given to the Gentiles with faith in Yahweh. Paul had been 'alive apart from the law', the context being, that with 'law' comes the knowledge of sin. 'Sin' is sin, always, but prior to 'The Law', sin was not accounted for. Then came 'The Law' and humanity became accountable for their 'sin'. This is legal language, brought forth because of 'The Law'. Transgression brought the condemnation, that being the guilt that came under 'The Law', and with guilt came death.

Romans 5:14

"Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."

But before Sinai and the giving of 'The Law', kinsmen were not yet condemned by transgression, but then 'The Law' came and 'sin' was then accountable for 'sin came alive', and they became condemned and guilty of their transgressions. For 'The Law' aroused

sin; and once aroused, the guilt was known, and then as Paul confesses, Law came, sin was aroused, and I died! We stood alive before we knew Law, but knowing Law, we died. Once Law came, we were guilty, and died. Paul reflects further that Law seemingly promised life, but once proclaimed, actually brought forth death.

Romans 7:10

"The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me."

Leviticus 18:5

"You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD."

The point being, 'the promise of life' comes with the 'keeping' of these laws, living by them. This is a particular life, a 'life lived' in relation to Yahweh. 'The Law' was not meant to be salvation, neither does it lead to salvation, to either the Jew or the Gentile. No. 'Sin' deceives. To rely on 'The Law' is to rely on sin's weapon. The purpose of 'The Law' was to promote 'life lived' not 'life saved'.

Romans 7:11

"For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."

Through 'The Law' sin kills us. It deceives us using the very Law. There is no greater weapon in deception than through 'The Law'. This is not new.

Genesis 3:13

"Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'."

Considering Eve's words then, we note, the serpent used The Law to deceive. "The serpent deceived me." How then does deception happen?

Let us consider some principles concerning How Sin Deceives Us Through 'The Law':

1. Sin deceives us through 'The Law' by focusing us on what is 'limited' to, not what we are licensed to do.

Genesis 3:1

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made."

Satan perverts The Law. He focuses on the prohibition, that which is limited, and amplifies it.

Genesis 3:2

"He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"

Satan does not focus on all the trees that Adam and Eve are allowed to partake of. No. He focuses on the very tree, the limited tree, the one tree that they are not to touch or eat. Children do this, focusing on what they cannot have. By focussing on what they cannot have, they are blinded to what they can have. Such deception always clouds and hides the licence of God. This is how Satan deceives and kills. Blind to all the trees that are good to eat from, and allowable, we fixate on the one we are not to partake from or look at. We focus on what we are limited from, not what we are licensed to do.

2. Sin deceives through 'The Law' by focusing us on, convincing us, pointing out to us, that we are missing something.

Genesis 3:4-5

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"

Note Satan's crafty retort to Eve. He contradicts God's command, and states instead, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." And of course Eve does not wish to miss out on that, and so she is tempted to disobey. So deceptive! So killing! Sin deceives using 'The Law' with a lie. You are being cheated; you don't want to miss out. This is Satan, using Law, using lies, every time. But in reality, God's Law is protection from bad things, not a lie. God is emphatic when He gives His Law to Adam and Eve. If you do this, 'you will surely die'.

Genesis 2:16-17

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

God was clear. God was protective. God was loving. Do not eat from this particular tree, or you will die! No, Eve, you cannot be God. No, Eve, God has not prevented you so that He could cheat you. No, Eve. You are not missing out on something when you obey God. Never! Believe God's Word! You are not being misdirected and cheated.

3. Sin deceives through "The Law' by convincing us we will escape punishment.

Genesis 2:17

"...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Genesis 3:4

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"

God said that to eat of the one tree would result in death. God's Law is clear. Satan, on the other hand, declares that they will 'not' die. Satan lies and is deceptive. 'Sin' says untruth. To this day Satan continues to deceive, and will continue to deceive until Christ returns at His Second Coming. God's Word is clear about this truth. Yet many do not want to receive God's Word as He gives it as truth. We note the excited, rich young man, for example, who is seeking eternal life, but the things of the world proved more important to him than fulfilling all of God's Law.

Matthew 19:20-22

"The young man said to him, 'All these I have kept (the commandments). What do I still lack? Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

But God's Word says we are to follow God's Ways, for there is a price to pay for not doing so. Blessings and curses exist and will be applied.

Numbers 32:23

"But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out."

But we see from those like the rich young man, and the Pharisees, that they chose to live Law, not as God directed, but in the ways that 'sin deceived'.

Luke 18:11

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector."

This was pure deception. LORD, I've kept more Law than I have broken, therefore let me into Your Kingdom. This is what 'sin' does through 'The Law'. We think, erroneously, that we can escape God's punishment by our own sense of Law-keeping. And thus Israel thought they were okay by living life in this way. But it was deception. They were deceived. We must take caution. Do not look at sin's weapon, that is 'The Law' with disdain.

Paul senses that this might be done, to disdain 'The Law', and so he confirms its importance.

Romans 7:7

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'."

Romans 7:12

"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

Let us be reminded then, 'The Law' is not the problem. 'The Law' is not 'sin'. 'The Law' is holy, and righteous, and good, and was 'the standard' set for God's people. A 'Yahweh' oriented life is defined as a 'life set apart'. And 'The Law' was not, and is not a villain. 'Sin' remains the villain from the time of the Garden, through till the time of Christ's return. Israel, like all people, needed 'The Law' then for living life. We still need 'The Law' today, the good, holy, righteous Law for our own lives and living. While the administration has changed, our headship, 'the standard' set by God for 'living life' has not. Christ lived 'The Law' perfectly as God in flesh. Christ is 'Law fulfillment' and demands action. All is in Him. He is 'Law's final defence'.

Christ laid down His perfect 'Law fulfilling' life for the 'lawbreakers', but not for all, only for those who turn from the 'knowledge of sin', from 'despising' 'The Law', who repent, and understand, embrace and desire 'The Law', those who cry out to God and beg Him to change their heart. But this cannot happen on our own. Christ is the only defence against 'The Law'. He Alone! He is the only Way. Only Christ can change the 'lawbreakers'. Only the 'Law Abider' can do this. Outside of Christ, no one is okay! Righteousness is not measured by 'The Law' itself. We are called to be holy, but holy in Christ. There is no other 'standard', no other 'Law', but Christ. We are called to be holy in Him!

Galatians 6:2

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

You are holding holy words in your hands. We rest with faith in Yahweh, and with David's testimony.

Psalms 119:97-106

O how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Your command makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.

I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules."