



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## The Law of Love

October 6, 2019

Romans 7:7-12

Clint Pressley

*7 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? 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 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. 6 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. 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.” 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

*(Pastor prays)*

A personal testimony is a great thing, a healing thing, and a cleansing thing. Your story is profound because it's yours, written by God and given to you. You have that story to remind you of God's goodness and as a means of grace to give you confidence for the days ahead. A personal story of what happened to you and how God saved you, and in the world of

Christianity, we call that a *testimony*. We testify to God's work of grace in us through our faith in Jesus. It's how we were converted and then our lives become living testimonies of how God works and convicts and forgives and sustains and provides and heals us. It's a testimony.

Paul does something unusual in this passage before us. He pauses to make sure he's not misunderstood because he has taught that we are not under the law but under grace and that the law increases the trespasses. And he's afraid that people will think he believes the law is by nature harmful and not useful. And if that were the case it would destroy Biblical continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It would put the Old Testament and the New Testament at odds with each other. It would put the law against the Gospel. It would put Moses against Jesus. It would make the Old Testament irrelevant and then it would be okay to break the law for love. In order to keep us from thinking that, for the first time in Romans, Paul uses the pronoun "I." He makes it personal and shares his testimony.

And right here he's doing a couple of things that are important for us this morning. He's going to defend the goodness of the Law and the 10 Commandments. And He's going to show the devastation of sin on our lives and he will use both of those to point us to the Gospel of grace. So I'm going to make it personal in hopes that you will do the same.

### **I Need God's Law to Show Me God's Love**

Let's get to it.

#### **I need to know my sin so I can truly love grace**

In verse 7, Paul once again starts out with a rhetorical question: What then shall we say, that the law is sin? *Genoito!* By no means! Then he elaborates down in verse 12 telling us that the Law is holy and that the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Why is Paul telling us this now? Because he knows our nature and how easy it is to say, "Well that's the Old Testament and I am a new testament Christian." Or I've heard people say, "I'm a *red letter* Christian." But here Paul points to the Old Testament law and says it's good. It's good because God gave it to us as His divine standard of righteousness and, because of that, we are able to identify sin and to see how holy God is. It shows us how far short we have fallen and how much grace we actually need. The more Bible you know, the more grace you love!

Look at the statement Paul makes in the middle of verse 7 and how he quotes the tenth commandment: *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."*

He wouldn't have known the gravity of sin because the law unmask and exposes sin as actual rebellion against God. It's interesting that Paul uses the tenth commandment over all the others. The tenth commandment is internal and deals with desire, a drive, a lust, an ambition, a want that will open a Pandora's box of illicit living. And the commandment opened his eyes to his own depravity.

You know the real battle with sin is not the action on the outside that's external. The real battle with sin is internal within the heart and mind. And only the Holy Spirit of God by faith in Jesus the Son can take a sinful heart and make it pure and acceptable to God. And if we didn't have the law, we wouldn't know our sin. The central theme of the Sermon on the Mount is that God demands the perfect righteousness of the heart.

There's something else we need to know about our sin. It's good for us to know our sin. John Piper says there is a great pain that comes to the soul and to the marriage and to the family and to the church and to the world when we don't actually taste the pain of our sin. If there is any hope for redemption or cause for healing, if there is any road to reconciliation, if there is any joy or love for people, it will come from knowing your sin and 'your pounding need for grace, a grace that is found at the cross of Jesus. I need to know my sin so I can love grace.

Paul goes further in showing us a little bit of how sin actually operates in verse 8. He personifies sin. *<sup>8</sup>But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.* Let's pause and take a closer look at how sin can take something good, like God's law, and use it in a terrible way.

Look at the language in verse 8. It says sin seizes the opportunity through the commandment. It's like a Trojan horse. The word opportunity is *aphormen*. It's a military base, a starting point, a base of operations for an expedition. Paul uses picturesque language here as sin engaging in an aggressive and daring military operation. God told Cain that sin is "crouching at your door and its desire is for you but you must master it." So what's so distressing for us is that all of us feel the rebel inside. It's not just our sinful nature, it's also our American culture. We do not like anybody telling us what to do.

Here's the command: you shall not covet. Sin sees the opportunity and says, "Why not? Why can't I covet?" It's the *forbidden fruit* syndrome and it affects us all. Even Paul. The law is so good that it shows us God's character, but sin is so bad that it twists the law and uses it to provoke sin. And we naturally rebel against it. Do not push this button. Don't open the door. Those words make us want to know what happens *if* we push the button or what's behind that door that I can't see. It can be more profound and devastating when it comes to marriage and sexuality or homosexuality and gender. The law is here so that I can know my sin and see that I actually do need Jesus the Redeemer to fulfill the law for me and also pay my sin debt on the cross. The law reminds me that God is holy, I am a Sinner and Jesus saves sinners only through the cross. The knowledge of sin that you experience is on purpose. The guilt you feel is right but it's not the purpose. The purpose of the law is grace, to push you to grace found at the cross of Jesus. I need to know my sin so that I can truly love God's grace.

### **I need to spot lies so I can really love the truth**

You see, sin lies. In verse 9 Paul says that the commandment lets me know that even though I thought I was alive, I was actually dead in sin. I came to realize my true condition. When Paul saw the majesty and holiness of God's perfect law, he was broken. It's why legalism is so bad. There is no peace of mind, no calmness of the heart, no security in life, and the effect of sin is found in verse 10. What a sad verse: *The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.* The psalmist says in Psalm 19:7-9, *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.*

Paul is saying: I know that the Bible is supposed to be uplifting but it is oppressive. What's my problem? He answers the question in verse 11. *For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* Deceived me and killed me. You see, sin lies to you. Sin is life's most beguiling deceit. It deceives us into thinking wrongly about God and the things of God.

You know this about temptation. There is always some level of deceit in temptation. Sin makes evil alluring and obscures the fact that there is death in the end. Listen to what the writer of Proverbs says about adultery in Proverbs 5:3-4. *For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, <sup>4</sup> but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.* Sin lies. Sin uses charm and tells you a tricky half-truth, especially when God's word is involved. It's a stretch or a slight or an exaggeration or a phrase like "Jesus understands." It deals large on emotions and small on commitment. Sin highjacks love and turns it into a concubine of manipulation and feeling. Sin knocks truth off the throne and emotion becomes king.

And you need to spot the lies, either the ones you've been told or the ones you've told yourself. God's word points out the truth of sin, where it will end and the damage it will cause and the heartbreak that will ensue. And grace brings you to the reality and the truth of Jesus. The law makes me look to the Gospel, look to Jesus on the cross and see His wounds and hear His words. And now, hold your sin up to Jesus. Is your sin worth that? See the lie of your sin and turn to the cross of Jesus and see the truth of God's love and forgiveness and hope and joy promised for tomorrow. I need God's love to show me God's love in Jesus. I need to know my sins so I can truly love grace. I need to spot lies so I can really love the truth and that truth is found in Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*