

*We bow our hearts in prayer:* Dear heavenly Father, to whom we are accountable having been born under the law, we pray You to work faithfully among us today as we hear Your oracles, Your Word, about our sin and about Jesus, the Savior You sent to and for us. Send us also Your Holy Spirit that our hearts believe in Him and our mouths confess Your holy name. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

The last few weeks we have been walking through St. Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

We have heard him talk about the natural knowledge of God:

how humanity is able to see that God exists from things in nature,  
and that even our conscience indicates that a just God will judge us after death.

We have also heard him tell us about how our corrupted sinful nature refuses to honor this God and how God has often given those who refuse to honor Him **up in the lusts of their hearts.**<sup>Rom.1</sup>

Last week, we heard how some of the Jewish Christians were leading others away from Christ by trying to have them find comfort in their fulfillment of the OT laws, like circumcision, even though their comfort was to be Christ's perfect fulfillment of all those laws for them.

This week, we hear St. Paul teaching the Roman Christians, and us, 1 of the proper uses of the Law. You see, the Jewish Christians in Rome and all Christians, frankly, naturally try to use the Law in improper ways, chiefly among them: to justify ourselves.

As you hear the text, listen for him teaching how the Law is used as a mirror, to show us our sin.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

"That You may be justified in Your words,  
and prevail when You are judged."

But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie God's truth abounds to His glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? — as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.

"The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery,  
and the way of peace they have not known."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by

works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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In Catechism instruction, we talk about the 3 functions of the Law.

1. The Curb, 2. The Mirror, and 3. The Guide, or Ruler.

Like a curb, it would keep flagrant outbursts of sin in check.

Like a mirror, it would show us our spiritual reflection, as God sees us, not how we imagine ourselves to be.

Like a ruler, it would guide the Christian by showing the straight way of God's will.

Today, we will focus on just this second function of the Law as a mirror.

Did you hear how St. Paul spoke of the Law as the mirror in the text?

It was in the very last words: **through the law comes knowledge of sin.**

Remember from last week how St. Paul corrected the Jewish Christians who were sinfully proud of their Jewish heritage, thinking that they were better than the Gentiles Christians?

He starts off this reading asking the rhetorical question: **Then what advantage has the Jew?**

And then answers it excitedly: **Much in every way.**

And tells them why: **To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.**

The Jews were blessed by God, they had an advantage over the Gentiles because they not only had the natural knowledge of God, but also the revealed knowledge, Scripture. They didn't have to rely on their corrupted conscience to know if something were a sin, they had God's own sure Word on the matter.

But like many Jews, they were under the false impression that having the law, <sup>Romans2</sup> and knowing the law, even **approving of it as excellent**, gave them the ability to fulfill the law. They were finding comfort and security in their view of the law, feeling justified by their works. But this is an entirely improper view of the law's function.

So to show them the error of this thinking, St. Paul asks a similar rhetorical question:

**What then? Are we Jews any better off?** And then answers the opposite: **No, not at all.**

And reasons: **For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.**

He wants to break them of the comfort and security that they find in the law.

Then St. Paul goes through a litany of no less than 6 Bible passages, mostly from the Psalms to show, from the revealed Word of God, that all humanity, Jews and Gentiles, are sinners. Interestingly enough, most of the texts that St. Paul uses envelop our humanity.

•First covering our whole self, he quotes, **None is righteous, no, not one.**

•Then our thinking: **no one understands, no one seeks for God.**

(3rd Art. Explanation)

You also confess this, that you *cannot believe in Jesus Christ, your Lord, or come to Him.*

•We hear him quote how our **throats are open graves**, we use our **tongues to deceive.**

•We **have venom under our lips. Our mouths curse and** expose our inner **bitterness.**

You know how much your words have hurt even those you love the most – much deeper than even sticks and stones ever could.

- Our **feet** are **swift** to let our hands **shed blood**.  
Instead of patiently bearing with one another in love,  
we are quick to anger, slow to forgive, and long-suffering in grudge-holding.
- And St. Paul concludes that we **have no fear of God before our eyes**.  
Eyes that do not want to look into the mirror of the law, desire to be a law unto oneself.

When we look in the mirror of the law, even the members of our body show the cancer of sin and express what is naturally in our hearts.

Though we might try to hide these sins by justifying them, God sees them very clearly.

But this is who we humans are, Jews and Gentiles; Christians and unbelievers.

We are all under the same law. We have all broken that righteous law.

Therefore we all deserve to be condemned, punished and die, body and soul,  
here in time and hereafter in eternity, under this law of God.

But then we have to ask ourselves, why would God want us to have a knowledge of sin?

Why would He give you the law as a mirror if all you will see is the ugliness of your sin?

Is it because He wants you to hate and despise yourself and work yourself into despair?

Or is He sadistic, taking pleasure in tormenting you?

I suppose that just by the rhetorical nature of the questions,

even children could guess that these are not the reasons.

The law is not suppose to make us secure or comfortable. That is not one of its functions.

The purpose of the mirror is to give us the knowledge of sin

so that we might *grieve to think of them, that their burden might be intolerable to us.* Conf. of Sins, Rite 3

So that recognizing that we are *by nature sinful and unclean,* Conf. of Sins, Rite 1

we might look outside of ourselves for a Savior, for someone more fit to justify us.

Did you happen to notice that St. Paul did not quote a text about our ears?

I can't help but think of what he says later in Chapter 10: **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**

The answer to what we see in the mirror of the law is in what we hear in the gospel of Jesus.

It is in the one and only Righteous One, *who came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.* (Nicene Creed)

This confession is not insignificant because the Son of God took on our nature, our reason, our strength, our mouth, throat, lips, feet, hands, and eyes, yet was without sin.

These He used, while being under God's perfect law, to perform that law perfectly for you.

While you didn't **seek after God**, Jesus sought after you

and taught His disciples so that you may hear and be found in Him.

His mouth was not full of curses and bitterness,

but blessings and sweet words and works of mercy.

His tongue did not deceive, but always spoke the truth – and always in love for you.

His throat revealed, not an open grave, but an open tomb, proclaiming His resurrection.

His beautiful feet walked throughout Israel to **preach the good news to the poor,** Isaiah;Matt.11:5

but finally and deliberately those feet walked toward Jerusalem,

to Gethsemane, to Calvary and were nailed there, swift to let His blood be shed

to take away from you the guilt of sin, the venom of death, and the fear of judgment.

His holy, precious blood has covered you and washed your body and soul in Baptism  
so that, with your heart, previously enslaved to sin and evil lusts,  
you now **believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. You are saved**, as He promises.<sup>Romans10:10</sup>  
With your eyes, you look to God (who gave you the law) with fear, love, and trust,  
in order that you might find Jesus, who is the good news that Paul was not ashamed of.<sup>Rom.1:16</sup>  
With Jesus in sight, you don't need to justify yourself, because He already has.  
With your mouth, you no longer are full of curses and bitterness,  
but are filled with His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins,  
and you confess the sweet truth that Jesus is the Lord, your **Righteousness**.<sup>Rom.10:9; Jer.23:6</sup>

Thanks be to God for opening your eyes to see your sin through the law,  
and for opening your heart to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,  
and for opening your ears to hear the precious declaration of your Lord,  
"Your sins are forgiven you. Go in peace." Amen.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*