

We bow our hearts in prayer: O Lord, we have been deceived by sin and its tantalizing temptations to offend against Your holy Law. Forgive us for our inability and, frankly, our lack of desire at times, to obey Your Word. Thanks be to You, O God, that You will deliver us from these bodies of death through Jesus Christ our Lord. May our lives reflect Your love for us and our neighbor. Amen.

In the name of Jesus. Dear fellow redeemed,

We have before us a longer section of St. Paul's letter to the Romans for our meditation today.

In it St. Paul reasons that the Law of God is holy, righteous, and good.

As baptized children of God, we completely agree with St. Paul.

But as children of Adam, sold under sin and born in corruption, we don't always see it that way.

In fact, often we see God's laws as burdensome, tedious, and overbearing.

So we find, along with St. Paul, that we have this inner struggle of 2 opposing desires;

one from our corrupted nature, which he calls fleshly, and is self-seeking and

the other from the image of God being renewed in you through faith, which he calls spiritual, which is self sacrificing.

And unfortunately, we will not be free from this struggle until these bodies die.

But fortunately, we will be free from it after the death of these bodies in our heavenly inheritances.

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

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 and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 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. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.^(ESV)

It is something marvelous to see a master “physician of souls” at work as we see in Gospel text. By just the man’s question, Jesus correctly diagnosed the man’s real spiritual need and while initially the lawyer didn’t/couldn’t/wouldn’t recognize that he was sick, Jesus drew him into conversation so that he might at least know there was a problem.

Jesus started him with a very simple question.

“What is written in the Law?” about how one earns a heavenly inheritance.

It was a rather simple answer, too, because the lawyer simply had to quote Scripture,

“Love the Lord with all heart, soul, strength, and mind and your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus’ answer was in turn also very simple,

“You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

Dear fellow redeemed, It is always that simple: Do the works of the law, and you will live....

But this answer completely disarmed the lawyer. He wasn’t expecting it.

But the beauty of Jesus’ simple answer is that it leaves the man to examine himself.

Jesus didn’t need to try to convince him of his sin. The lawyer’s own conscience did that.

And we see his conscience at work when he asked, **“And who is my neighbor?”**

We are told he was trying to justify himself.

...

As the lawyer began his conversation with Jesus, he felt secure.

He thought he was well on his way to earning an eternal inheritance among God’s people.

He followed the Jewish traditions and laws. So that was good enough, right?

But the telling of the good Samaritan revealed that God’s law is deeper than mere actions.

When God commands love for our neighbor,

He requires hearts that truly love and feel for our neighbors, that desire to show mercy, without regard for our own selfish felt-needs or wants or inconveniences.

It hopefully became clear to him that God’s law is not fulfilled by a fleshly eye-service obedience.

For we know, St. Paul testifies, that the law is spiritual.

This has always been the case, as we hear even in the Old Testament:

“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Leviticus19:2

Hopefully he realized, as St. Paul said in our text,

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

As you have been washed in the waters of holy Baptism, you are declared holy.

You **have been baptized into Christ’s death** and so have **died to the law**, as we heard last week.

You **have been buried with Him through baptism and so have risen to newness of life**,

to a life of Christ’s perfect love imputed, that is given, to you as your very own.

This new live of love is yours to reflect back to God and to your fellow man.

It loves endlessly; gives generously; sacrifices selflessly;

even corrects courageously and guides gently when one errs against a neighbor or God.

How do we know? Because this is Jesus’ life of love, not only for you, but for all people.

And yet, is this what we see and experience in our daily lives... from ourselves?

Do we turn a blind eye to the needs of others, not even offering up a prayer on their behalf?

Do you justify yourself, saying "it's someone else's problem," when you could've done something?

St. Paul was right. We need the Law to show us our sin.

Otherwise, it would be perfectly natural to leave the man half-dead for self-preservation.

Otherwise, it would be perfectly natural to covet someone else's talents and life and blessings, and not be satisfied with your daily bread.

And greedily horde up for yourself a life of ease.

And stingily begrudge the charity for which God has enriched you as a steward of His gifts.

We would like to think that we are protected from such temptations and sins, but we aren't.

St. Paul has our plight nailed down.

For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

I want to be generous & helpful to those in need, but I covetously keep back what I can share.

I want to truly love and have compassion for my neighbor,

but I so quickly find it easier to disregard those that frustrate me

or even retaliate in haste and anger against those that have offended me.

And wouldn't we love to say that this used to be our problem before we became Christians, and that now, I have conquered all my sins and evil lusts.

Except, just as St. Paul says, **the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

The fact is: **I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.**

The Law tells me what pleases God, but it doesn't give me the ability to do it,

not as long as I live in this body that has been corrupted by sin inherited from Adam & Eve.

So how is it that you and I who have inherited bodies sold under sin and held captive by death may even think about a heavenly inheritance?

Wretched man that we are, we find that such an inheritance cannot be given to us for our sakes.

We cannot justify ourselves by a law that requires, not just moral perfection, but also holiness.

Though we might be tempted to walk past such a fellow, so close to death,

our Great Physician dismounted from His donkey to take up your cross to Calvary.

There He was pierced... He was crushed... So that by His wounds, you would be healed.

By His blood, He washes away your offenses... and think of it, the offenses of your neighbor.

He comes and stoops down to bind up your brokenness... and the brokenness of your neighbor.

He comes to wrap you up in His perfect and complete righteousness and holiness.

He gives you shelter from the enemy in the inn of His Church,

where you can find rest from your guilt through the absolution of your sins.

He nurses you to health with His own body and blood to give you renewed strength to take up the daily struggles against your own covetousness and self-centeredness.

And as if this weren't enough, He guarantees you by His own resurrection a resurrection to life to your heavenly inheritance after you have put off this body of death in death,

where sin's corruption will haunt you no more,

where you will not only have the perfect knowledge of what is good,

and the unfettered desire to do it, but even the full and free ability to do it.

Thanks be to God, indeed, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria