

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

◆Intro: There once was a fish that had great ability and dexterity in the water. You might say he was “in his element”. No shark could catch him. No depth could scare him. But he became restless, for peering up out of the water he could see creatures of all shapes moving along the shore, jumping through the air, and climbing up in trees! Oh, imagine being able to climb a tree! As it turned out it hadn’t been very long since this little fish’s girlfriend dumped him for a bigger fish in the sea. His parents tried to comfort him in his loneliness, by assuring him, “Don’t worry son, there are plenty of other people on the land”. Still something fishy was forming in his mind. He determined he had had enough. He would leave this prison called the sea. He would experience adventure up there, where there was sky and land! Working up his speed he headed for the shore and leapt out of the water landing securely on dry sand. And there he began to gasp, the words: “I’m free. I’m free!”

◆Poor little fish. Perhaps his parents hadn’t told him about the laws of nature. Maybe he hadn’t learned about them in the schools of fish he once attended. Or maybe it was those lobbyist fish chanting that laws were limitations on personal freedom, and discrimination against fish who didn’t feel like being fish. As for the law enforcement fish, they were only the Man, or should I say, the Fish, trying to push their superiority on the backs of the poor. Whatever the flaw in his underwater environment, at least he stood up for his right to be what he wanted to be. Of course there was that one problem... He was made by his Creator as a fish. The law of the Creator said he needed to be in water to live.

◆I tell this story to illustrate the truth that

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

◆ **1. God's law is good for me.** At this point in the book of Romans you might be getting a bad taste in your mouth for the law. You might think that Paul is saying, "Hey throw away all rules and just love Jesus and be yourself! No creed by Christ. Don't bother reading the Old Testament. We are free from the law, oh blessed condition!" Paul has sounded negative about the Old Testament laws and rulings of God. Lets reflect...

◆ In Romans 3:20 Paul said "through the law comes knowledge of sin."

◆ In 3:28 Paul wrote that man is justified before God apart from works of the law.

◆ In chapter 4 he showed that father of fish, sorry, Israel (Abraham) was justified by his faith, not by through the law. So the law can't get you right before God.

◆ In Romans 5 we read that the law actually turns out increasing sin.

◆ In chapter 6 Paul told us that we are no longer under the law because of Christ.

◆ In chapter 7 he said we were made to "die to the law" and that the law actually "aroused" sinful passions.

◆ One could get the impression that law is bad for me. Maybe that's why in verse 7 he finally asks the question, "Is the law bad for me?" We might put it this way. Is the water bad for the fish? No not really, unless there's something else polluting it.

◆ "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good." Romans 7:12, NIV.

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

◆ **B.** When God made tuna, and placed them in the sea, it was for good. When God gave birds wings and lions legs, you will recall that Genesis 1 says “And it was good.” It was not discrimination that the lions didn’t get wings. The laws of God’s nature show us that males have 1X chromosome and 1Y chromosome in the DNA of every cell in their bodies. That’s part of being a male human being. Now you can dress that up in skirt and lipstick and say “Good for you for being yourself” but it will never be good for you, and it won’t make you into a woman who has 2Y chromosomes and no X chromosome in every cell of her body.

◆ We need to be especially conscious of this today as it has become popular to affirm unscientific realities in the name of equal rights. Last week California passed a bill making it illegal to try to help a person with homosexual struggles to overcome them and live as the sex they are physically (called conversion therapy). Understand then that it is legal to encourage a straight person to be gay, while it is illegal to encourage a gay person to be straight. In a sinful and fallen world we are constantly being urged to see the laws of the Creator as evil and limiting and discriminatory against our personal desires. So you and I need to stop and be reminded that the Law of God is in fact for our good. The Law of God itself is not evil, but blessed and brings blessing.

◆ Let me take us back to when God gave the children of Israel the law. In Deuteronomy Moses writes:

◆ *“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD*

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess... This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” Deuteronomy 30:15-16,19, NIV.

◆ The Psalm writers speak the same way...

◆ “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” Psalms 119:97, NIV.

◆ “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” Psalms 1:2, NIV.

◆ C. This is the truth about the law. When Paul says (v12) that the Law is holy, righteous and good, he’s saying a lot. What are some of the things that are good about law?

◆ 1) God’s Law shows me my sin and guilt.

◆ v7 “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.””

◆ Why are **doctors** coats white? Why are **mechanics** uniforms blue? White shows the dirt. Doctors want no dirt. The hospital must be clean, free of disease or dirt. Mechanics work in grease and oil, it is normal and usual, but they don’t want to appear dirty all the time, which is not best, so they often wore darker colors. Now imagine a mechanic in a white coat, white jeans, and white shoes! And one who keeps them clean! This is what it means that the law is holy. It is better than the norm. To a Hebrew there were three categories in the life: the unclean, the clean, and the holy. Unclean is a distortion of normal/clean. Holy is an improvement on the normal/natural. The

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

law then shows the highest degree of cleanliness. Paul says, the law falls into the “holy” category.

◆ It’s like a doctor saying “I didn’t know I sat in peanut butter in the cafeteria until I saw it on my lab coat. It’s like a valedictorian of a small school going to Purdue and discovering it’s very hard work and he’s only an average genius. The best, or the cleanest (law of God) shows me where I need to get better. Do you want to go on with a disease and not know it? Do you want to have cancer and not address it until it’s woven it’s way among all your organs? Of course not. It is good to know when you are sick! It is good to know that you don’t know many things. And God’s word is a doctor’s diagnosis of your life.

◆ Now some folks actually don’t care if they know about their sin. Sin doesn’t bother them. They actually like committing it, and approve of having done so without any emotional pain, and they are honestly blind to the consequences.

◆ *“Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” Romans 1:32, NIV.*

◆ Understand this folks, just because you don’t feel bad in your body doesn’t mean there isn’t anything wrong. And just because you don’t feel bad in your spirit, doesn’t mean there isn’t anything wrong there either. And just because you don’t feel bad about your own moral state, doesn’t mean you’re not on the road to eternal death. **Andy Stanley and Louie Giglio** went flying down a closed off highway

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

having a grand ol' time until another car they had passed parked on the side came racing past them, stopped and blocked the road. Turns out the highway was closed because the highway was unfinished and ended at one side of a bridge just a little further on! They didn't know and it didn't bother them! People find out every day that they have **late stage cancer** and only months to live, who before knew nothing. They didn't know and it didn't bother them. One of the first steps to spiritual health is deciding that you care about knowing your own sin! It is rarely the couple who says, "we want to attend something that helps us have a better marriage" –that ends up having a lousy one. It is often the fellow who says, "I'm fine. I don't need any counsel, or learning. Maybe when I was a kid, but not anymore." -this is the one who usually undergoes great hardships. Listen, contrary to what the world will tell you, *it's not bad to feel bad about something that is bad!* Do you hear me. We ought to grieve evil. We ought to mourn death, physical as well as relational or any other kind. We ought to care about our sins as well as those around us.

◆*) Let me say one more thing about this. Do you ever feel guilt or conviction about things you know you've done wrong, or shouldn't have said, or thought. Does wrong bother you? When you hear the horrible reports of what people have done, or when ugliness is displayed in graphic reality on film in your living room –does it pain you, disturb you? I hope so. If it does it is actually a good sign. It is likely God is calling to you!

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

◆“And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.”

Romans 7:16, NIV.

◆A part of him agrees with God! That is not possible apart from God. Further, it is part of the identity of God-followers to be more and more bothered by badness both in themselves and in the world. A true Christian is married to Christ (v1-6)! When you're married you choose to care about what you spouse cares about. Guess what. God cares about sin and God is concerned about evil. He hates it because he cares about people! And it is God at work in humans that causes them to care about this too. Not everyone feels the struggle Paul personifies in v14-23!

◆“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.” Romans 7:15-19, NIV.

◆This is an inner conflict characteristic of the true Christian, one possible only in the man or woman in whom the Holy Spirit is active (Cranfield, p.341). Lots of people can live by the letter of the law but the Christian serves in the new way of the Spirit (v6). What is that new way?

◆“*“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though*

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Jeremiah 31:31-33, NIV.

◆ Know what happens when God’s law is starting to be written on your heart? You will inevitably be in conflict with yourself and at war in a fallen world. You are no longer able to be satisfied with “That’s just the way it is.” You will long for it to be better! You will long to BE better. A struggle as serious as Paul depicts here can only take place where the Spirit is working, calling to you. There is then a new battle going on your inside because in Adam you are fallen, sinful creature, but in Christ and by his Spirit you are a new and forgiven creature with a heart with God’s writing on it. Both these realities live in us this side of heaven. Thank God in heaven the former will be eradicated for good! (v22-25)

◆ 2) One more good thing about the law: the law also raises our sights. Law does only show me my sin and what doesn’t work. Law shows me what works and what life without sin would be. God’s law shows me life as it is supposed to be and how good life could be. This is also part of what Paul is saying when he says it’s holy and righteous and good. Just as man learns the principles of gravity, of flight, lift, displacement, etc –the way things are, showing him he cannot step off the roof and expect to float, –so the laws can then teach him to cooperate with the way things are in flight though he has

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

no wings of his own. Natural law then shows us man cannot fly, but also that man can fly. Ironic isn't it.

◆ This also works conversely. For example (Paul's), it is best to not covet (7c). That is, life is better when we are not sullen at the gifts and success of others, and wanting them for ourselves. That is the life of God's law. But in a sinful man, on a sinful planet, the law also seems a deathly hallows, because after all we cannot seem to keep from coveting or wanting what everyone else has. So the laws of God are both life and death, but not because God's ways are evil. But because we are evil.

◆ "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death." Romans 7:10-11, NIV.

◆ What's he saying? The Law was supposed to show me real life, but because I'm sinful, it's killing me instead!

◆ **Conclusion:** How about another fish story? Recently my wife and I went fly-fishing for the first time. Our guides told us that "to catch a fish you have to think like a fish." They said that to a fish life is about the maximum gratification of appetite at the minimum expenditure of energy. To a fish, life is "see a fly, want a fly, eat a fly." A rainbow trout never really reflects on where his life is headed. A girl carp rarely says to a boy carp, *I don't feel you're as committed to our relationship as I am. I wonder, do you love me for me or just for my body?* The fish are just a collection of appetites. A fish is a stomach, a mouth, and a pair of eyes.

SHOULD I CARE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS?, ROMANS 7:7-25

Pax Romana #15

◆ While we were on the water, I was struck by how dumb the fish are. "Hey, swallow this. It's not the real thing; it's just a lure. You'll think it will feed you, but it won't. It'll trap you. If you were to look closely, fish, you would see the hook. You'd know once you were hooked that it's just a matter of time before the enemy reels you in." You'd think fish would wise up and notice the hook or see the line. You'd think fish would look around at all their fish friends who go for a lure and fly off into space and never return. But they don't. It is ironic. We say fish swim together in a school, but they never learn. Aren't you glad we're smarter? (John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*)

◆ Well, John. I wish we were. Two things to remember friends:

◆ 1) Do not be careless about sin that lures you to take a bite, or about God's commands for that matter. You should care about these things. God cares about these because God cares about you! It is good for you! And paradoxically...

◆ 2) Do not be discouraged about sin. God in his mercy sent his Son to die your death to solve your sin. He knows you're never gonna solve it yourself. That's why he came. And he's not going to leave you because you're still fighting the battle. The very fact that in your heart you want to obey him is a sign that he is in your heart.