

Brain Damage – The misery of my Sin. Romans 7:7-25,

Portions adapted from: The Slippery Slope of Sin by Brian Bill @ Sermon Central.Com

We are spending this month of August getting a brief introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism as a study guide that we can use in our homes with our families to gain a deeper understanding of our Christian faith. But since the Catechism has 129 questions divided into 52 weeks of study we're not going to get very far in a month. So we are hoping that like push-starting a car, if we can get you rolling then you'll get fired up and continue on by yourself. There are free copies of the Catechism in the back for you to take home, or an even better version, which includes scripture references, that you can download from our website

So we began last week with **Question 1**, learning that in this changing world of raging nations and falling kingdoms my **only** comfort in life and in death is in knowing that I am not my own but belong body and soul ... to my faithful savior Jesus Christ [who] has fully paid for my sins with hi precious blood [setting] me free from all the power of the Devil ... Then **Question 2** explains that the only way we will ever appreciate, the only way we will find our joy and comfort in belonging to Jesus is if we realize the following three things:

- How great my sins and misery are (apart from Christ)
- How I am delivered from all my sins and misery (by Christ), and
- How I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.

Now, if you missed last week and are wondering what the dickens I am talking about, then let me encourage you to come into the office or go to the Bedford Presbyterian website where you can find either a printed copy of the sermon to read or an audio track to listen to. Because the next four weeks will be somewhat confusing unless you have heard the introduction.

So, this week we move on to questions three through five which teach

3. that our misery in life comes from knowing what God's law requires of us,
4. which no matter how hard we try, we cannot keep,
5. Because we are "brain damaged" and our fallen nature rebels against God.

And this is what Paul's rather convoluted argument in chapter seven of Romans is trying to explain. But perhaps a video is worth an hour's worth of explanation. So let's watch this.

"Don't touch - Sin!" Drama . Florin Marin & Alexand (5 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9DhZSjsglw>

A man approaches a chair set up on stage with a sign on it that says, "Don't touch." he reads the sign and starts to walk away but then comes back to the chair, looks around to see if anyone is watching and touches it. Unfortunately, his hand sticks to the chair. And in the process of trying to free his hand he ends up now with his entire body stuck sitting in the chair. He tries to hide his problem from several friends until one person suggests he pray to God for release. After his friend prays for him, he is released and carefully puts the "don't touch" sign back on the chair.

There's something about a command that make us want to break it, isn't there?

As we learned last week, true release comes from belonging to Jesus, not from following rules. But that leads us to a question. If Jesus has freed us from the Law, does that mean the Law is bad? What purpose do God's Commands still serve for those who now belong to Jesus?

This is what we seek to learn from the catechism today, that the law is not bad, and though we who belong to Jesus are freed from its curse, in fact it is still functioning both in constraining our behavior but also in

1. showing us what sin is,
2. showing us the misery caused by our sin,
3. and that our fallen nature is really the root of our sin.

Let's take these one at a time.

First, the law shows us what sin is.

According to what Paul wrote in verse four, *we have died to the law...so we might belong to Christ And bear fruit to God.* If that is the case, then why do we Christians still need the law? Paul's first answer is that the law teaches us what sin is, so we will recognize that we are sinners. Listen again to verse seven:

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

In other words, like a mirror, the law shows us who we really are. An old Chinese proverb says: "**To an ugly man, every mirror is an enemy.**" The mirror is not the problem; it just shows me my problem. As Paul earlier wrote: "*no one will be declared righteous in [God's] sight by observing the Law; rather, through the Law we become conscious of sin.*" (Romans 3:20). In other words, if it were not for the law showing us our sin, we might never know that we are sinners.

Could you imagine a world without any rules, any laws? There was such a world once, before the flood, and the humans at that time became so evil that God regretted ever making us. So God pushed the restart button with one family. Then, when Noah climbed out of the ark, along with the promise to never again flood the earth, God also gave him laws by which to govern life and punish lawbreakers, thus hopefully somewhat restraining sin so we would never again get that out of control.

But just imagine for a moment what a completely lawless world would look like.

If I liked your home, your car, your spouse, I could take them; there is no law requiring me to respect your property. And if you tried to stop me from taking these things, I can kill you. There is no law to tell me I can't; no one authorized to punish me if I do. And if someone asks me what happened to that nice family that used to live here, I will just make up a story about you moving to Canada. Because there's no law that even defines lying, much less discourages it.

Oh I might feel some internal guilt for doing this because God has designed within me an instinctual morality. But I wouldn't know why I felt bad because there would be no external standard to hold me accountable. As Paul earlier wrote:

When [pagans], who do not possess the law, instinctively do what the law requires, ... They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, ... God ... will judge the secret thoughts of all (Romans 2:14-16)

It's something like in the movie "Analyze This," when psychiatrist Billy Crystal, explains to mobster Robert DeNiro, that his anxiety attacks come naturally out of his ordering people to be bumped off, because bumping people off is bad. So the way DeNiro can get rid of his anxiety attacks is not through counseling but by not bumping people off. However, since this is his line of work, DeNiro says he will have to think on this.

Simply put, the law gives an external explanation for my internal problem. A problem that has always been there, the law just shows me what I already know: that I am a sinner.

You can easily see this process of both learning and instinctively resisting the law, in every growing child. Elisa Morgan, the former president of Mothers of Pre-Schoolers International, shares this insight into how a child views the world. It's called the Toddler's Creed:

If I want it, it's mine.

If I give it to you and change my mind later, it's mine.

If I can take it away from you, it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.

If it's mine, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.

If we are building something together all pieces are mine.

If it looks like mine, it's mine.

But in learning "the rules" and why their actions are bad, children also learn to stop acting this way. Thus the law is good because it both teaches me to suppress my selfish desires, out of fear of punishment, or whatever. But it also helps me recognize that those wrongful desires still live within me and I will always have to resist them; a lesson which some children master better than others. I wonder how many adults still follow "The Toddler's Creed?"

Thus, the first thing the law does is to **define my sin**, so that I know when I am doing wrong; I am without excuse. But the law also shows me that even after Christ has claimed me as his own, even though my legal status may have changed, I am still broken and in need of repair; **I am still a sinner in need of a Savior.**

By its very presence the law tempts us to break it; does this not prove we are essentially brain damaged by sin? If the desire were not already in us, then the law wouldn't tempt us to sin. I have no problem obeying a sign which warns me "do not jump off this cliff." Why then do I have a problem obeying a sign which warns me "Danger, stay away from the edge"?

What is this within us that makes us want "to do" when the sign says "don't"? If the sign were not there, would our stuck man have touched the chair anyway? Probably not. But somehow just seeing the sign birthed within him the desire to do that which was forbidden. So the "Don't Touch" sign was not the problem; it just showed the problem that already existed.

There was a hotel on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Galveston, Texas, that put this notice in each room: "No Fishing from the Balcony." Yet, every day, hotel guests threw in their lines to the water below. The management decided to try a different approach. So they removed all the signs and the fishing stopped immediately. The signs had inspired the sin.

Then there was the woman who objected to her church reciting the 10 Commandments because "they put too many ideas into people's heads." In a sense, she's right. As Paul wrote, *For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do* (vs. 18-19). This is what I meant by titling today's message "Brain Damage."

And I hope as it always does for me, that the words "brain damage" remind you of an old Cosby comedy routine. Talking about teaching his own children to do right, Cosby recounted the time that his son became fascinated by flushing ever larger items down the toilet, even though he knew better. Then, after a previously flushed entire overcoat returned back up the toilet, Cosby asks his son why he would even try to flush an overcoat down the toilet only to get the reply "I DON'T KNOW ??!" This Cosby rightly concluded was proof of his son's, and all children's, **BRAIN DAMAGE!** Now in view of all that Cosby has been accused of, I wonder what his own defense might be. Did the knowledge of the horrible wrong he was doing to others ever discourage Cosby from doing so? If I look within my own twisted heart, I have to conclud....probably not.

You see, sin preys on people and looks for every opportunity to obliterate us. Ray Stedman writes that this evil force "is in every one of us, waiting only for the right circumstance in order to spring into being." How else do you explain the ever increasing violence that has

grown out of the Black Lives Matter movement? How does revenge killing of cops improve racial relations or make the city a safer place to live?

Remember that God warned frustrated Cain to do the right thing before sin devoured him: God said "*sin is lurking at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*" (Genesis 4:7) So the catechism warns us, even we who name ourselves Christian, that sin still lurks at our door and we must either master it or be mastered by it.

Thus, the Law is good in that it teaches us what sin is, and shows us what miserable sinners we are But why does something that is good entice us to do bad?

Because as the fifth question of the catechism unflinchingly replies: *I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.* Or, as Paul wrote in verses 21-23:

I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

In other words balancing the external and internal laws of God, there is also a law created by my fallen self that resists doing the right thing. So doing bad is easy while doing good is always a struggle.

When Jesus was asked, he replied that complete obedience to the entire law could be achieved by simply "*loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and loving your neighbor as yourself.*" Interestingly, while everyone agreed with his answer, the next thing they wanted to know was just who qualified as their neighbor. They certainly didn't want to agree with him that a neighbor was anyone you find in need.

Why? Because back then as it still is, our fallen nature wants first to satisfy our self interests; pushing God and neighbor to second if at all. And it is the law, in this case the Great Commandment, that forces me to acknowledge the sin struggle that continues inside me even as one who belongs to God.

In conclusion: the Catechism would have me understand, that even as one who "*belongs body and soul to Jesus Christ... who has fully paid for all my sins... and has freed me for all the power of the Devil,* that I am still a sinner who needs to recognize the continuing power of sin in my life and the misery that such sin can cause me unless by the power of God's indwelling Holy Spirit I conquer it before it conquers me.

What now should we Christians take from this teaching? How will we apply it tomorrow?

First, it is important that we call sin "sin," wherever I find it but especially within myself. In a recent sermon Andy Stanley made the point that most of us would rather use the word "mistake" instead of "sin" when we mess up. "If everything I do wrong can be dubbed

down to where it's just a mistake, that makes me a mistaker, which means I haven't sinned. And if I haven't sinned then I'm not a sinner. And if I'm not a sinner, I don't need a Savior. If I'm just a "mistaker", then all I need is a coach to train me to do better. Until you embrace the fact that you're a sinner, you're not open to embracing the fact that God sent you a Savior" ("It's No Mistake," as heard on Preaching Today Audio, Issue 286).

Here's an action step: The next time you sin, don't tell God or someone else that you're sorry and hope they just forget about it. Instead say, "I sinned. Please forgive me."

Second when we see a brother or sister struggling with sin, we should gently seek to restore them. Paul writes, *My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* (Galatians 6:1-3). Of course every time I think of this, I am reminded of Saturday Night Live's "Church Lady." Who quite easily saw everyone else's sin, but not her own. When seeking to correct another, our emphasis had better be on the "gentle" way, while keeping a double watch on ourselves.

And third, when you are the one sinned against: forgive! As our Bible teaches, we must return good for evil and defeat hatred by love: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Romans 12:21). And yes, this is a very hard lesson to practice. Just like Peter, who asked Jesus how many times he must forgive. I guess he finally learned what Jesus meant by his answer, "seventy times seven times," because at the end of his life we hear Peter advising us *to above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.* 1 Peter 4:8.

I am sure there are other things we can do. But, we need to realize that as sinners saved by grace, we are still sinners nonetheless. So we need to keep growing in our faith and knowledge, listening to the Holy Spirit, and helping each other stand while remembering that God's love has covered all our sins and it should be His love in us that helps us do the same. Amen?