

Title: Finger Wag – Romans 7 1-12

Read:

¹⁻³ You shouldn't have any trouble understanding this, friends, for you know all the ins and outs of the law—how it works and how its power touches only the living. For instance, a wife is legally tied to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she's free. If she lives with another man while her husband is living, she's obviously an adulteress. But if he dies, she is quite free to marry another man in good conscience, with no one's disapproval. ⁴⁻⁶ So, my friends, this is something like what has taken place with you. When Christ died he took that entire rule-dominated way of life down with him and left it in the tomb, leaving you free to "marry" a resurrection life and bear "offspring" of faith for God. For as long as we lived that old way of life, doing whatever we felt we could get away with, sin was calling most of the shots as the old law code hemmed us in. And this made us all the more rebellious. In the end, all we had to show for it was miscarriages and stillbirths. But now that we're no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin, and out from under all those oppressive regulations and fine print, we're free to live a new life in the freedom of God. ⁷ But I can hear you say, "If the law code was as bad as all that, it's no better than sin itself." That's certainly not true. The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behaviour would be mostly guesswork. Apart from the succinct, surgical command, "You shall not covet," I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it. ⁸⁻¹² Don't you remember how it was? I do, perfectly well. The law code started out as an excellent piece of work. What happened, though, was that sin found a way to pervert the command into a temptation, making a piece of "forbidden fruit" out of it. The law code, instead of being used to guide me, was used to seduce me. Without all the paraphernalia of the law code, sin looked pretty dull and lifeless, and I went along without paying much attention to it. But once sin got its hands on the law code and decked itself out in all that finery, I was fooled, and fell for it. The very command that was supposed to guide me into life was cleverly used to trip me up, throwing me headlong. So sin was plenty alive, and I was stone dead. But the law code itself is God's good and common sense, each command sane and holy counsel.

Think:

We have an incredible ability to take what God intends for our good and twist it so that it becomes bad. God gives us marriage as a gift and says that we should save the extra gift of sex for marriage. What do we do? We twist what sex is and say that God is being a spoil-sport, telling us to wait until we are married. We take God's gift of the Bible and the exciting message that it is and make it as boring and mundane as possible. We take the guidance that God gives us in the Bible and use it to beat people over the head with saying that they are sinners, conveniently forgetting that God did not make us the judge. That's what Paul is on about here, these guys have taken God's instruction book, otherwise known as the Bible, and created so many rules around it that no one could possibly live up to them. So what happens? People feel guilty when they fail and eventually stop trying. That's not what God wants; God wants us to understand that he loves us so much he sent Jesus to die for us. When we look at people at school or college who are doing things that we know aren't what God wants for them, what do we do? Do we say things like you should do that; you will go to hell if you do that? Or do we pray for that they might just receive a little of God's love today? Judging isn't down to us, that is done by someone else later. Our job is to stretch out a helping hand and help people do the right thing next time. So when you next see that boy or girl that you judged in the past, maybe you can be the answer to your own prayer and stretch out the hand of friendship, not the wagging finger of Judgment.

Pray:

Father we know that whatever we intend you can use all things for good. Please take some of the times where we have judged people in the past and use them for good in the future. Amen.

Action:

So to action. You know if you have judged people in the past. I know I have. Well there is only one person who can put that right, so if you have of you go to sought it out. Bye.