

Series: Romans
Title: Is the Law Sin?
Text: Romans 7: 7-13
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Paul has been declaring how the believer is free from sin and free from the law. He even illustrated our freedom from the law portraying the law as a husband, contrasted with Christ as a Husband. This brings to mind the picture of the law as a strict husband: always examining his wife and finding fault, giving her no strength, no love, no forgiveness, no mercy, always declaring her guilty. So the Holy Spirit of God makes Paul ask the question he knows people may think.

Romans 7: 7: What shall we say then? *Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8: But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, [But sin]...wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. [desire which the law forbid] For without the law sin was dead. 9: For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10: And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. 11: For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. 12: Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. 13: Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.*

Proposition: Is the law sin? God forbid.

THE LAW REVEALS SIN

Romans 7: 7: What shall we say then? *Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

The law is not sin; the law makes known our sin. God gave the law to sinners for this one reason—to make us know our sin—*"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."*

The law was not given as a code of moral ethics: to be the believer's rule of life. Believers *"walk by faith"* (2 Cor 5: 17) *"We wait for the hope of righteousness by faith"* (Gal 5:5) *"The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. (Gal 3: 11)* God did not give the law to motivate believers to serve him—*"for the love of Christ constraineth us"* (2 Cor 5: 14) God did not give the law as a measure of sanctification, Christ is our sanctification. (1 Cor 1: 30) The only purpose of God's law is to identify, expose, and condemn our sin, shutting us up to Christ alone for acceptance with God—*"I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."*

Romans 3: 19: Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20: Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5: 20: Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.

USING THE LAW UNLAWFULLY

Romans 7: 8: But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin *was* dead. 9: For I was alive without the law once:...

Due to our being born the first time dead in sin, until God gives spiritual discernment to make us hear the law, our sin makes us use the law unlawfully. It was not the law that made Paul desire what the law forbid. Paul says "*But sin...wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.*" It was Paul's own sin working in him all manner of covetousness. Sin made him covet the very things the law forbid, mainly to make himself his idol god.

When a sinner tries to justify and sanctify himself by the law he is breaking every law because he breaks the last command by coveting the very thing the first commandment forbids, which is to have no other gods but God alone! He is making himself god by attempting to save himself and have the glory that belongs to God alone.

Paul's sin "*took occasion by the commandment.*" Paul's sin made him use the law unlawfully. It made him attempt to save himself by obeying the law.

Even worse, Paul's sin made him think he had done so—"For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once:" "*Without the law*" does not mean that Paul did not have the law. It means he could not hear the law. When he says "*I was alive without the law once*" it means there was a time when Paul thought he was alive. The problem was that he simply could not hear the law pronounce him guilty. At that time, he thought the law only demanded external obedience. All his confidence was in external obedience and deeds:

Philippians 3: 4: Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

In New Orleans once I took my family through a graveyard to see a whited sepulcher. Outside it was freshly painted. When looking through the crack in the door you could see inside it was dirty. That was Paul's problem while he was Saul of Tarsus. The Lord Jesus said, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*" (Mt 23:27-28)

John Gill said, "Like the rest of the Pharisees, [Paul] thought the law only regarded the outward actions, and did not reach to the spirits or souls of men, the inward thoughts and affections of the mind."

All of us are born dead in trespasses and in sins. A man can become religious without being born of God. But while dead, sinners attempt to come to God by the works of the law because they cannot hear the law. It is in that sense that Paul speaks of being "*without the law.*" He could not hear it. Therefore,

Romans 8: 5: They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh.

They desire to hear the law, to hear what they must and must not do, because their mind is set on their fleshly doing, not on Christ and what he has done. For that reason

Romans 8: 6. For to be carnally minded is death...7: For the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The law declares “*every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts are only evil continually.*” (Gen 6: 5) The law declares we are guilty in thought, in the heart, even if we do not commit the act. This inability to hear the law is what causes men to be self-righteous, exalting themselves and looking down on others—clearing themselves and condemning others. So the problem is not in the law, the problem is man by nature is a dead sinner who cannot hear the law therefore he uses the law unlawfully.

1 Timothy 1: 8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10: For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

WHEN THE COMMANDMENT COMES

Romans 7: 11...but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10: And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. 11: For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. 12: Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

When God makes us hear the law then we see our sin and all our righteousnesses become filthy rags.

“*When the commandment came*”—when the Spirit of God entered in and gave Paul spiritual understanding then he heard the law for the first time.

1 Corinthians 2: 15: But he that is spiritual judgeth [discerneth] all things,...

When God gives us discernment to hear the law “*sin revived, and I died.*” Before he heard the law the “big I” that was alive was that big, proud self-righteous Pharisee. Ask a will-worshipper what his hope is and he will begin “I”! “Big I” has got to be killed by the law!

At that time, in Paul’s estimation—“*his sin was dead and I was alive*”. But when God made him hear the law “*sin became alive, and I died.*” When God gives spiritual discernment, for the first time, we behold our sin alive and thriving. Then everything we thought was righteousness becomes filthy rags. We see ourselves guilty and our mouths are shut before God!

Then we find out what the true purpose of the law is. While dead in sin Paul thought the law was ordained to give him life. When given spiritual discernment, he found the law was given to be a ministration of death—“*And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, [taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by [my sin] slew me.*”

Galatians 3: 21...for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. 22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Listen to Paul describe what the law was given to minister unto us, to reveal unto us and do unto us:

2 Corinthians 3: 6: Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. 7: But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: 8 How shall not

the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? 9: For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

So again, Paul says, the fault was not in the law—*sin deceived me and slew me*—causing me to use the law unlawfully. So here is Paul's conclusion concerning the law—"*Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*" There is nothing wrong with God's law. God's law is like God who gave it: Holy, Just and Good! God's chief attribute is he is Holy!

THE LAW WAS NOT MADE DEATH UNTO ME

Romans 7: 13: Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Nothing about the law changes. Before I heard it, the law was holy just and good; after I heard it, the law was holy, just and good. But "*by that which is good*", my sin was made to appear sin. "*By that which was good*", I saw my sin had worked death in me. "*By the commandment*", my sin became exceeding sinful.

THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE

Has God used the law to shut your mouth? When God makes us behold ourselves to be the sinner then God reveals that the law is established for God's people by the obedience of one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5: 19...by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20: Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

For his people, the Son of God was made of a woman, made under the law that he might redeem us from the curse of the law. Do you want to see one who is as holy, just and good as the law? Look to Christ Jesus the Son of God.

The Holy One took the sin of his people and drank the dregs of the cup of God's fury dry, bearing every stripe of divine wrath that his people deserved, so that we might enjoy the peace of free forgiveness with God! To everyone who casts their care on him, God say that we are dead to sin by Christ's work on the cross. We also are dead to the law by Christ.

Romans 7: 4: Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Have you been slain by the law? Do you see yourself exceedingly sinful? Do you say with Paul, "*O wretched man that I am, who shall save me from the body of this death?*" Then I have good news, Christ came to save sinners.

Luke 5: 31: And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 32: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Has God made all your self-righteous works dung unto you so that all you want is Christ and his righteousness? That is what God did for Paul.

Philippians 3: 7: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ,

The law's purpose is to be a schoolmaster to make us see we are exceedingly sinful. Through the gospel of Christ we are made to flee to Christ to be justified of Christ by faith.

Galatians 3: 24: Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25: But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Dear sinner, if the law has slain all your vain thoughts that you are righteous by your own obedience then flee to Christ. If God has shown you Christ, who established the law for his people, then cast all your care on him and you shall be saved.

Amen!