



## Lesson 12

### Sin & The Law Part 2

#### Romans 7.7-25

*“ I was once alive apart from the **Law**; but when the commandment came, **sin** became alive and I died;”*

*Romans 7.9*

## Intro: No Problem With The Law, But It's Not The Spirit

1. Paul had firmly placed the Law on the side of sin and death (5.20-21; 6.14; etc.). Undoubtedly, some Jewish Christians began to accuse Paul of licensing sinful activity. After all, if we are not under Law, why would sin be wrong? Paul had emphatically stated that we cannot continue in sin because when we were baptized into Christ we died to sin and the epoch of Adam, being raised to life and the new epoch of Christ (6.1-14). Furthermore, since the Law was placed in the old epoch of sin and Adam, we died to it too and are now joined to Christ (7.1-6).
2. But what does this mean for the Law? Paul had just stated that “while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” (7.5). Was the Law at fault? “Is the Law sin?” (7.7)
3. In this passage Paul will endeavor to explain the connection between the Law and sin, placing the blame on flesh while declaring the Law to be holy, righteous and good (7.7-13). He will then relate his personal experience of living under the Law, desiring to do God’s will, but experiencing sin reign in his flesh (7.14-25).
4. All of this prepares us for the Spirit’s introduction in chapter 8. The Law may have been holy, righteous and good, even spiritual in nature, but it was not the Spirit. Significantly, the work of the Spirit and His contrast with the Law was revealed in the prophets:
  - Jeremiah 31:33 (NASB95) 33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”
  - Ezekiel 36:25–27 (NASB95) — 25 “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

## Sin Took Advantage Of The Law (vss. 7-13)

Romans 7:7–13 (NASB95)

7What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.”

8But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every

kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

9I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

10and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

11for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

12So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

13Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

1. "Is the Law sin?" Of course not! Paul will rightfully describe the Law as "holy and righteous and good," (7.12), even referring to it as "spiritual," (7.14). In giving His Law, God declared that "if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God," (Deut. 28.1-2). So, what was the problem?
2. The problem was man! Man when ruled by his flesh (think of the old epoch, the epoch of Adam referred to as "when we were in the flesh," 7.5) is provoked by the Law to sin. David McClister offers this explanation: "The Law of Moses, by its nature as an external law, had a serious problem associated with it in that it mainly addressed our actions, the things we do in the flesh. Even those part of the Law that attempted to transform our inner selves (such as the tenth commandment which prohibited coveting) eventually became issues with the flesh... Like a parent's good instruction to a little child, 'Don't touch the stove,' the process of announcing that good commandment started a process in motion. The child was not thinking about touching the stove until the parent said something about it, then his natural curiosity takes over and drives him to touch the stove. In a similar, but more serious way, that part of us that wants to control itself (our flesh) found itself excited by the Law's prohibition and prompted us to do the very thing God said not to do." (Blessed Be God, Page77)
  - You can see how this was true when Eve sinned in the Garden. God's commandment (Gen. 2.17) made one tree out of bounds. This commandment was for her good, but the commandment also increased her desire for it, a desire that Satan was able to prey upon (Gen. 3).
  - Paul says the same thing occurred with him and coveting. Coveting what others have is a "natural," i.e. fleshly, desire, but the Law declares it sinful. Being declared wrong intensified Paul's fleshly desire, leading to his spiritual death.
3. So, no fault should be found with the Law, but so long as man is governed by flesh the Law will only incite sin in him. What man needs is to be freed from the flesh, to be governed by the Spirit. This is exactly what Paul says happens in Christ, which is the focus of chapter 8.
4. While not the point of the text, this passage does effectively destroy any notion of our inheriting Adam's sin (i.e. original sin). Note Paul's words in vs. 9, "I was once alive apart from

the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died.” The Law’s command to not covet was given ~1500 years before Paul lived (see Exodus 20.17), but Paul was spiritually alive before he came to understand the obligation of this commandment (“when the commandment came”). This is what we mean by speaking of an “age of accountability”. While that phrase is not used in the Scriptures, the point is made in this passage and others (see Ezekiel 18.20; Isaiah 7.16). Paul died when he transgressed God’s Law, not when Adam transgressed.

## **The Struggle Between The Inner Man & The Outer Man (vss. 14-25)**

Romans 7:14–25 (NASB95)

14For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

15For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

16But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.

17So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

18For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

19For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

20But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

21I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

22For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

23but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

24Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

25Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

1. Our understanding of this passage depends on how we answer this question: to which stage in his life was Paul referring? Many hold (and reasonably so) that Paul was referring to his present, Christian life. The main reason for taking this position is that Paul uses the present tense. The other position is that Paul was speaking of his former life, when he was still under the Law. This position seems best for the following reasons:

- Paul speaks of this time as being “sold into the bondage to sin” (7.14). However, as we read in 6.7, “he who has died is freed from sin.” While we recognize and admit that Christians still sin (1John 1.8-10), that is a far cry from the bondage Paul is describing in this passage.
- Paul will contrast this time with living under the Spirit in chapter 8. That existence is typified as being free from condemnation because “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ

Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (8.2) What Paul is describing in 7.14-25 is anything but freedom.

- It is best to treat the entirety of Chapter 7 as Paul’s explanation of the problems of living under Law. While the Law is not at fault, being holy, just and spiritual (7.12,14), the flesh is provoked by the Law to sin. Paul, having been a conscientious Jew, knew all too well the struggle of desiring to follow God, but seeing sin reign in his flesh. That agony is what Paul describes in this passage, but that agony could only be relieved by Christ and the giving of the Spirit (7.25, chapter 8)
  - But what about Paul’s use of the present tense? The best answer to me is that Paul is relating this as a personal story. Such stories, while occurring in the past, are often told in the present tense.
2. Paul’s point is simple, yet emphatic. While the Law may be holy, righteous and good, even described as “spiritual,” man in the flesh (belonging to the epoch of Adam) is sold into the bondage of sin. The Law may reveal the will of God to him, he may even desire to do the will of God in his inner man, yet he will find himself doing the very evil that he did not wish to do.
  3. What did Paul mean by “no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me,” (vs. 17,20)? We can easily rule out one thing: Paul was not refusing to take responsibility for his actions. He has already stated that he was responsible for his own sin and spiritual death (vs. 9). The likely solution is that Paul had personified sin, emphasizing its power contrasted with his own will while in the flesh. This seems to agree with Paul’s words in vss. 18-19, 22-23 and the last portion of vs. 25.
  4. Paul’s purpose had been to show the hopeless condition of a good man under the Law. The flesh is too weak, sin is too powerful. So, Paul exclaims, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (vs. 24) While Paul had applied this to himself, his intent was to convince his fellow Jewish Christians that they were not justified by the Law... they couldn’t be.
  5. Man’s hope? “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (vs. 25). While Paul summarizes his former struggle at the end of vs. 25, he will return to the solution in chapter 8. Christ has freed us from this body of flesh, by giving us the Spirit!
  6. Note: each of us can identify with Paul’s struggle in this passage, but I would ask you to remember that Paul was speaking of his inner conflict under the Law, not in Christ. Christians will continue to have some struggles, even sin, but being in bondage to sin is what happens outside of Christ. If we are in Christ, our spirits should come into conformity with His Spirit, which we will consider in our next lesson.