

Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

What the Law Does, It Does Very Well...¹

Romans 7:1-13

Now the last time we met, we used our time looking at Romans 6 and though I don't want to take the time this morning to do anything like a comprehensive review, I do want to remind you of what we discovered there. What we discovered there was that our **"union with Christ"** is of paramount importance in rightly understanding the Christian life. Our **"union with Christ"** is the basis of all of the blessings we have received and will receive in Christ. It is also the basis of the overthrow of all that we lost in Adam. Because we are **"united to Christ"** we are at peace with God. We are no longer at enmity with God; we are no longer God's enemies. He now views us in light of our **"union with Christ"** and because He does, He has poured out on us, and by us I mean all who are attached to Christ by faith, an abundant provision of His justifying grace. That is, He has lavished upon us His wonderful, matchless kindness in Christ and the end result of that is that we stand before God in Christ's imputed righteousness, holy and wholly acceptable before God. We are no longer desperate to gain His approval. In fact, we don't have to do one blessed thing to gain His approval. We have it and He wants us to live in light of that great truth. In fact, the central verse of Romans 6 has to be verse 11 where Paul says:

^{NIV} **Romans 6:11**...In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

And the reason that is such an important verse is because Paul wants us to come to a realization of all that we have as a result of our **“union to Christ.”** Of course, in Paul’s day this notion of being **“in union with Christ”** and being out from under law led to a number of questions. Questions like these:

- **“Does that mean we can live however we want?”**
- **“Does that mean we ought to sin even more, so that God’s grace will be even more gracious?”**
- **“Does that mean that we just keep on with unchanged lives since we are under grace and not under law?”**

And those questions, or at least those kinds of questions, are still around today. You still hear people from time to time say, **“Well, if ‘free grace’ is all that you say it is, isn’t the logical implication that I can do whatever I want to do and still be saved?”** Of course, the answer to that question is an emphatic, **“No!”** The fact is that the very thing that assures our forgiveness before God, **“our union with Christ,”** is also the thing that militates against our doing whatever we choose. You see, we have been bought with the **“blood of Christ”** and His purchase of our lives out of bondage means that our loyalties must be different now than in the past. We are free from the guilt and penalty of sin and because we are free from sin we are His slaves and we are His slaves joyfully. Now, of course, that means that we are not free to do whatever we choose. Instead, we are free to obey Him.

Now in chapter six, Paul tries to make that point emphatically clear by illustrating our **“union to Christ”** three different ways. First, Paul uses our baptism as an illustration of our union with Christ this is how he puts it, **“Our**

baptism is a perpetual reminder and a continual illustration of that glorious truth that we are united to Christ. We are identified with Christ in His death and we are identified with Christ in His life.” We saw that in Romans 6:4-5.

But thinking perhaps that the idea of our **“spiritual union with Christ”** was still unclear, Paul uses a second illustration in Romans 6:14-23 to further explain the nature of our **“union with Christ.”** In his second illustration, Paul compares our **“union to Christ”** to being freed from the domain of a wicked, cruel slave master and placed under a kind, benevolent slave master. Now in Paul’s illustration the wicked slave master is **“sin”** and the kind, benevolent slave master is God Himself and Paul’s principle point is that when we were united with Christ in our justification we were rescued out from under the cruel reign of sin and transferred to the wise reign of grace of Christ our King.

And thinking that two illustrations were still perhaps not enough, Paul uses a third illustration in Romans 7:1-6 to finish off this section and in this third illustration he compares our **“union to Christ”** to the freedom that a woman gains when her husband dies. Now in the illustration, the husband can be viewed as cruel, abusive and harsh but that is not Paul’s principle point. His point is that the man has authority over his wife only as long as he lives. At death, that union is broken and the woman is free to marry again and to bear fruit with another man and in a wonderful stroke of genius Paul drives home that point by that the **“we”** are just like that husband that died. What he says is that the believer has died to the **“dominion of the law”** as a means of being justified before God and is now united to a new husband, Christ. And though I am going to pass over doing an exposition of Romans 7:1-6, you can see Paul’s point, I think, just by looking at one verse, Romans 7:4.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:4...** So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Now, the one thing I think I should point out is that it is “we” who died and not the law. I have to watch how I say it or I can misstate it every time. But it is an important point. The law did not die. We died. The law remains but we died to it and are made alive to another. Look at Romans 7:1 and you can see that clearly.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:1...**Do you not know, brothers-- for I am speaking to men who know the law-- that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

Now what I want to do during the rest of our time is focus on the rest of Romans 7. It is a tremendously complex chapter and unit and it is also quite controversial. The major issue in the chapter, the major issue that every commentator must answer can be put simply, **“Is Paul describing his own experience here in Romans 7 or is he describing someone else’s experience and if he is describing his own experience, is he describing his experience as an unbeliever or as a believer?”**

Of course, the fact that the issue can be stated simply does not mean that the issue can be simply resolved. In fact, you will find that people have tremendously bold opinions about the proper answers to these two simple questions. I have seen people fight and even sometimes break fellowship over this very simple issue. I am hoping that we will have none of that sort of thing. I don’t really even mind where you come down on the question. I have my own opinion but the fact that it is my opinion and as a result best accords with the biblical evidence, with the overall thrust of the Bible and with the opinion of

every important major Reformed theologian since the beginning of time is no reason for you to hold my opinion. In fact, you ought to try to come to an opinion yourself after you have weighed the evidence carefully. You ought to hold something like the opinion of the famous preacher Dr. Alexander Whyte, who once said this in a lecture:

“As often as my attentive bookseller sends me on approval another new commentary on Romans, I immediately turn to the seventh chapter. And if the commentator sets up a man of straw in the seventh chapter, I immediately shut the book. I at once send the book back and say ‘No, thank you. That is not the man for my hard-earned money.’”²

You see the issue is not just your opinion but is your opinion reasoned and does it fit within the overall argument of the book. Now because that is an important issue in making a decision in this case, I want us to back up a little bit and focus on one particular issue that is important in understanding the broader structure of the book. If you will remember, the book had its thesis statement in 1:16-17.

THESIS STATEMENT: 1:16-17...THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD...IS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL:

MAN'S NEED FOR A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD: 1:18-3:20...

318 NOW WE KNOW THAT WHATEVER THE LAW SAYS, IT SAYS TO THOSE WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW, SO THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE SILENCED. 319 THEREFORE NO ONE WILL BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS IN HIS SIGHT BY OBSERVING THE LAW; RATHER, THROUGH THE LAW WE BECOME CONSCIOUS OF SIN... THE LAW CONFIRMS WE ARE UNDER SIN & CONDEMNED

GOD'S PROVISION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS...IN JUSTIFICATION: 3:21-4:25...

320 BUT NOW A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD, APART FROM LAW, HAS BEEN MADE KNOWN... 321 FOR WE MAINTAIN THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH APART FROM THE LAW. 322 DO WE THEN NULLIFY THE LAW BY THIS FAITH? NOT AT ALL! RATHER, WE UPHOLD THE LAW... OUR JUSTIFICATION IS APART FROM THE LAW BUT ESTABLISHES THE LAW

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION: 5:1-8:39...

323 FOR WHEN WE WERE CONTROLLED BY THE SINFUL NATURE, THE SINFUL PASSIONS AROUSED BY THE LAW WERE AT WORK IN OUR BODIES, SO THAT WE BORE FRUIT FOR DEATH. 324 BUT NOW, BY DYING TO WHAT ONCE BOUND US, WE HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM THE LAW SO THAT WE SERVE IN THE NEW WAY OF THE SPIRIT, AND NOT IN THE OLD WAY OF THE WRITTEN CODE. IN THE PAST THE LAW POINTED OUT SIN BUT COULDN'T JUSTIFY; IN THE PRESENT IT POINTS OUT SIN BUT CAN'T SANCTIFY

NIV Romans 1:16...I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Now after Paul lays out his thesis statement in 1:16-17, the first issue he tackles is man's unrighteousness before God. Another way to say that is to say that the first thing he covers is man's problem (which is a lack of righteousness) before God. That occurs in Romans 1:18-3:20.

The section after that is Romans 3:21-4:25 and it focuses on God's gracious provision for man's problem before God. In other words, it concerns God's providing a righteousness for unrighteous mankind. You'll remember I hope what that provision was. It was the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus, which God provided through the sinner's justification by faith...that is, in fact what the gospel does. That is why it is the power of God unto salvation.

Then a few weeks ago, we moved into the third section of the book. Now this third section starts in chapter five and goes all the way to the end of chapter eight. In this third section, Paul deals with the implications of the righteousness God has provided. That is, it deals with the implication of the doctrine of justification by faith. Now if you have been coming regularly, you know that that is what Romans has been about so far. Now what I want you to see this morning, what I have been holding back thus far is the fact that there is another recurring theme underneath those three main themes and it is the same through all three sections. Now if you don't mind I want you to get your Bibles ready to look at some verses so you can see just what I mean.

Now I don't want to be coy about any of this. I am not trying to be suspenseful or anything like that so let me just tell you what that recurring theme is. All the way through each of these sections there has been a steady reoccurring theme related to the issue of the "law." **Now don't misunderstand what I am saying. This**

recurring theme is certainly not the principal point in each section but it is there just the same.

It was there in the very first section when we talked about the principal theme of man's sinfulness or better man's lack of a righteous standing before God. You see what really happens under each of the major sections is that Paul winds up answering the same question and here is the question, **"Well if your point is true what is the relationship of the law to these things?"** Now the reason we know that that is the case is because the law is mentioned a number of times at the end of each of these sections and where it is mentioned Paul launches into a discussion of how the law relates to that section. Let's me show you what I mean by looking first at Romans 3:10-20. Now what I want you to notice is that Paul refers to the law three different times at the end of the section. Those three references to the law occur in 3:19 and 3:20a and 3:20b. Now obviously in this section, the principal issue is man's problem of unrighteousness but the secondary issue, the issue underneath, concerns the relationship of the law to man's problem. That's the issue and as we look at these two verses we'll see what Paul tells us about the law.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:19**...Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Now Paul mentions the law here in these verses three times. So let me ask you what is it that he says about the law in relationship to man's problem of sin before God. In other words, what does the law tell us about the problem of humanity? Now I think you can summarize what the law says about man's

problem this way. It confirms man's problem. The law confirms that we are all under sin and that we are all condemned. That is what Paul says every time he mentions the law in this section. The law can't do anything to solve man's problem but it can sure point it out. It just stands there and points at our sin and says, **"Well, would you look at that?"** In that sense, the law is like a faithful wife. It can't do anything to make you a better man but it can sure point out your eccentricities and foibles. And I think Paul's analysis of the job the law does in this regard can be summarized this way, **"What the law can do, it does very well."**

Now in the next unit, 3:21-4:25 the law is also mentioned several times. Now, the law is not the principal point of the section. No, the principal point of 3:21-4:25 is that God has provided a solution for mankind's problem and that solution is the justifying righteousness of Christ imputed to sinners through faith. But underneath, there is a steady undercurrent asking, **"O.K. since God has provided a solution to man's problem what is the relationship of the law to God's solution?"** And if you look carefully, you can see what Paul's answer is in Romans 3:21,28 and 31. Follow along as I read these three verses.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:21**...But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:28**...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:31**...Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

So as we look at those three verses, here's the question. What is the relationship of the law of God to the provision of God? That is, how does the law of God

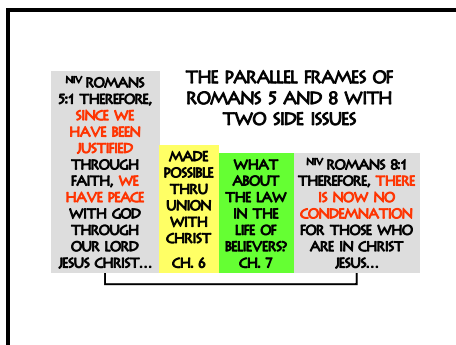
relate to justification by faith? Well, obviously the answer is that the law is completely disconnected from God's provision. In fact, God's provision is totally apart from the law. Do you what Paul says? He says, **"It's apart from the law."** In other words, it wasn't revealed in the law. Oh, it was revealed in the Old Testament but not in the Ten Commandments themselves. But Paul adds to that that this righteousness from God is obtained apart from observing the law. You see that in verse 28.

^{NIV} **Romans 3:28**...For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Now it seems to me that Paul seemed to fear that someone might conclude that the law was useless. I think he must have feared someone saying, **"Well if that is true then the law isn't really much good for anything is it?"**³ I think he feared that and as a result added verse 31 to make it clear that the law was not nullified by the provision of a righteousness from God apart from the law. In fact, God's provision of justification by faith establishes the law. I think Paul's analysis of the job the law does in this regard to our justification would be, **"What the law cannot do well, it can't do at all but that doesn't mean it gets thrown out."**

So what have we seen that the law does? Well in relationship to the problem of humanity, the law of God confirmed we are all under sin. In regard, to the provision of God for sinners the law was not connected to it but is established by it. Let me say it a different way. The provision of God's righteousness doesn't rest on the law but the law is rests on the provision of God's righteousness. Justification by faith does not rest on the law; justification by faith establishes the role of the law.

Now finally, in the third section, the section that includes chapter seven we see that Paul is discussing the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith. But underneath, just as with the other sections, lays this recurring theme of God's law. It is a secondary issue but it is there and I will show what I mean in just a minute. But first let me talk about the structure of Romans 5-8.



Now the simplest way to divide this unit is to break it into a couple of very large sections. It really has two frames or two bookends. The first bookend is Romans 5:1-21 and the second is Romans 8:1-39 and between those two bookends is this middle section, made up of chapters 6-7. Each of these two outer bookends focus on a benefit that believers enjoy in the “**now.**” You can see that right off in Romans 5:1.

NIV **Romans 5:1**...Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Do you see what I mean? Paul is focusing on the now, the here and now and that continues till the end of chapter 5. You see exactly the same thing in chapter 8. In fact, if you flip over to Romans 8:1 you'll notice that 5:1 and 8:1 are almost exactly parallel.

NIV **Romans 8:1**...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Now of course, the problem before us is not contained in chapter 5 or in chapter 8 but in chapters 6 and 7. Now in both of those chapters and especially in chapter 7, Paul is going to raise the very knotty problem of the relationship of the law to these implications of justification.

Still, before we talk about that we ought to remind ourselves of what some of the implications of our being justified by faith are. One implication is that we have peace with God. We have already talked about that, of course. We have a right standing before God. We have all sorts of benefits and all these benefits that have come to us are good things. And it the same kind of thing as we close the section in chapter 8...

^{NIV} **Romans 8:1**...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

This is good news, wonderful good news. This is the best news that ever was. But there are still those two chapters between? Well, we have already seen part of what is being discussed there. We have certainly seen chapter six's emphasis on our "**union with Christ.**" But there is an undercurrent issue there and that undercurrent issue extends right on through chapter 7 and guess what that undercurrent issue is. That underlying issue is the issue of the relationship of the law and of sin to these wonderful implications of justification. What about sin and the law in the life of the believer? What about that issue? Now that is the issue in Romans 7 so let's look at it together.

We are going to do that by looking at two pivotal verses, Romans 7:5-6 and then we are going to look at two major paragraphs that follow. Now I am going to tell you upfront what we are going see and I am going to tell you up front that this

my interpretation, which of course, means it is the right one. But there are plenty of people with wrong interpretations whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. So, keep that in mind.

Now in 7:5-6 we are going to see Paul deal with the issue, **“What about sin and the law in the life of the believer?”** What about that issue? Now remarkably, just as in the other sections that means that Paul is going to touch on the issue of law. Now one way you can tell that the issue of the **“law”** is central to what Paul is really wrestling with is by counting how many times the word law is used in chapter seven. You see he mentions the **“law”** in verses 1, 2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,12,14,16,21,22,23 and 25. In three of the verses where he fails to mention the law, he mentions the commandments. He does that in verses 10, 11 and 13. All together in chapter seven he mentions the law or the commandments 29 times, or 30 times if you count **“written code”** as another use. In fact there are two words used more than the word **“law”** in chapter 7. The first word is the word **“the”** and the other word is **“I.”**

Obviously then, the law is very important. It is central to what Paul is trying to get across and here’s what I think he is going to say. In the past the law could not justify the believing sinner. In the present it cannot sanctify the believing sinner. Now let me show you how I came to that conclusion. If you will look at 7:5 you will see that it deals with sin in the believer’s past.⁴ Verse 6 deals with sin in the believer’s present. Besides that, these two verses make up what is called a hinge unit. That is, they close out the previous section and introduce the next section. Now watch what happens. In verse 5, Paul is dealing with sin in the believer’s past and verse 6 with sin in the believer’s present.⁵

^{NIV} **Romans 7:5**...For when we were controlled by the sinful nature...

Do you see that? That is the past. It is an imperfect tense verb referring to continual action in the past.

NIV Romans 7:5...For when we were controlled by the sinful nature the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

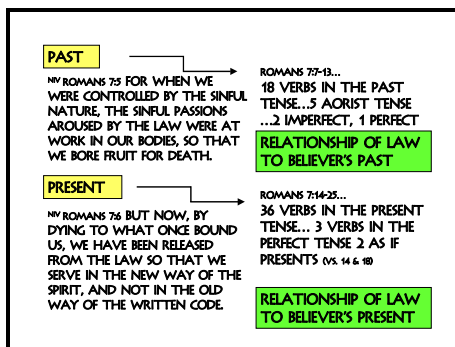
Now look at verse 6.

NIV Romans 7:6...But now...

You see the shift. He is talking about the present. Verse 5 is in the past. Verse 6 is in the present.

NIV Romans 7:6...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Now here is what happens. Having given you his introduction in verses 5 and 6, that is, that he is going to deal with the issue of what about the believer and his past sin especially in relationship to the law and he expands that answer in verses 7:7-13. Now how do I know that it is the past? Well you can look at the tense of the verbs in verses 7:7-13, you will find that all of the verbs (18 of them) there are past tense verbs.



In 7:7-13, Paul is dealing with the past. Then all of a sudden when you come to verse 14, guess what happens, you have a shift in the verb tense. He doesn't use any past tense verbs. He focuses on present tense verbs (36 of them unless you count the perfect tense verbs used as presents and that would make 38) all the way through the end of chapter seven.⁶ Now here is what he is going to say and I am telling you now what I am going to tell you later in case I don't get to it later so you will know the point. Here is what Paul is going to say, "**What is the relationship of the law to the believer and his past sin?**" The law pointed out sin but it could not save. That is what you see when you read through 7:7-13. Do you know what it tells us? It tells us we are dead...I am dead. Sin killed me and the law simply pointed out that I am a dead man walking. That is all I am. I am dead. I'm dead. So what is the role of the law in relationship to the believer's sin in his past? **It pointed out sin but could not save.**

Well obviously, that raises the next question. What is the relationship of the law to the present sin in the life of the believer in 7:14-25? Here is what Paul is going to say. **It points out sin but it cannot sanctify.** The law doesn't have the power to sanctify the believer. The law does not allow the believer to overcome his sin. What does it do? It points it out. That's what it does.

Now let's read through this first unit here and make some considerations together. Let's pick up in verse 5 again and work our way through the unit.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:5**...For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Now that Paul has made his transition he picks up the relationship of the law to the believer's past.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:7**...What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.⁷ For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "**Do not covet.**"

Now what Paul is saying there is something like this, "**That doesn't mean that the law was sinful. It doesn't mean that at all. What it means is that I never understood that sin actually was sin until the law came along and pointed it out for what it was. I wanted things before. But once I heard the law and heard the word 'covet' I realized that what I wanted was in fact 'coveting.'**" So in that sense, the law here is just like a mirror that points out imperfections. A mirror is not bad because it points out that which is bad. My wife has this mirror that she uses to makeup her face and absolutely refuse to look into that mirror because it magnifies things and exposes them for what they are. But that is not all the law does. In a sense, it even stirs up desires. There is a sense in which the law is like gasoline and is used by sin to make our passions increase all the more. Look at verse 8, that is, whether we like it or not, exactly what Paul says.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:8**...But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the **commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.** For apart from law, sin is dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ **I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.**

Don't you think that is particularly true? I can't tell how surprised and delighted I was to find this little quote by Origin who is usually famous for saying only wrong things. Listen to what he says:

I do not know why it is, but things which forbidden are desired all the more. Thus it happened that although the commandment is and just and good, since because it forbids evil it must be good, yet in forbidding covetousness it provoked and inflamed it all the more, with the result that something good wrought death in me.⁸

Now I don't know how many of you have read Augustine's **Confessions** but it really is a wonderful little spiritual biography of a great man and one of the shorter segments in the book involves a story about Augustine and some of his young hooligan friends stealing some pears off a neighbor's tree. Now what is telling about the story is that Augustine says his own pear tree had better pears on it than those he stole. In fact, Augustine goes on to say that when he was finally alone with his pears, he threw them away because they weren't worth eating and here's the thing. That is not why he took them in the first place.⁹

^{NIV} **Romans 7:11**...For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, **deceived me**, and through the commandment put me to death.

Now before we press on, I do need to tell you that not all commentators agree that Paul is speaking biographically here or perhaps I should say strictly biographically. In fact, Charles Cranfield lists six different possibilities by what Paul may have meant when he used the word "**I**" here in Romans 7:7-13.¹⁰

- (i) **that the passage is strictly autobiographical;**
- (ii) that Paul is using the first person singular to depict the experience of the typical Jewish individual;
- (iii) **that he is speaking in the name of Adam;**¹¹

- (iv) that he is presenting the experience of the Jewish people as a whole;
- (v) that he speaks in the name of mankind as a whole;
- (vi) that Paul is using the first person singular in a generalizing way without intending a specific reference to any particular individual or clearly defined group, in order to depict vividly the situation of man in the absence of the law and in its presence.

Still, I am really only interested in two or three of these possibilities. I believe that the passage is autobiographical but I want you see why many commentators over many, many years have also tended to see this section as Adam's autobiography as well.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:8**...But sin, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:9**...Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:10**...I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:11**...For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, **deceived me**, and through the commandment put me to death.

You can see how each of those verses can be seen in light of Adam's temptation and fall.

^{NIV} **Romans 7:12**...So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. ¹³Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Now what is the relationship of the law to the life of the believer in the past? It pointed out sin. All it could do, all the law could do was to say, "**You are guilty.**" Was it therefore an evil thing? Paul's answer is, "**No the law did not cause death. Sin caused death. The law just pointed out sin.**" The law just pointed out

the sin and perhaps even inflamed sin. But the law was not sin. To think that the law was sinful would be akin to having an illness and going to the doctor and the doctor doing an examination and then saying, **“You are sick.”** Now would it be fair to get mad at the doctor over that? Was the doctor the cause of the illness? No, of course not. The illness was already there. His examination just pointed out what was already there. That is what Paul is saying the law did in relationship to the believer. It simply says, **“You are going to die. You’re a sinner. You are sinful.”** Still, the law itself is a good thing; it’s not a bad thing. Now, what we are going to see next week is that not only could the law not justify us in the past but also that it cannot sanctify us in the present.

¹ Most of the logic of this lesson came from my beloved brother, Larry Danner. He, really more than any one commentator helped me to notice the pattern of 5:5-6 and how the thoughts contained there are expanded in the following two sections.

² F.F. Bruce, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 151.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 2: Reign of Grace, Romans 5-8* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 740. “Someone might say: Paul, you have shown that the law cannot justify or sanctify a person; it cannot declare him to be upright, and it cannot help him to become upright if he is not. If that is so, what is the value of the law? Doesn’t that mean that the law actually has no worth and should just be thrown out entirely?” Or again: “You have said that sin is aroused by law so that those who hear the law actually do bad things they would not otherwise do. If that is the case, aren’t you making the law of God sinful since it leads to evil?”

Since the law is from God, and God cannot do evil or produce anything that is evil, the gospel Paul teaches seems to collapse by this extension of it. However, these are faulty objections. The verses to which we come now show emphatically why the law is not sinful. In particular they speak of three of good things the law does, even though it is powerless either to justify or sanctify a person.”

⁴ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 418. Moo notes the distinctive temporal aspects of vs. 5 and 6, although he does not extend their connection logically to the two following sections. He writes: “With his now-familiar when now” (vv. 5-6) contrast between the pre-Christian and Christian situations, Paul explains why it is necessary that believers be freed from the domain of the law. In describing the person outside of Christ as being “in the flesh [*sarx*],” Paul means, in effect, that the non-Christian is “enveloped in, and hence controlled by, narrowly human, this-worldly principles and values. We must again understand Paul’s language

against the background of his salvation-historical framework. Paul pictures *sarx* as another “power” of the old age, set in opposition to the Spirit with which *sarx* is always contrasted in chaps. 7-8. As both Rom. 8:9 and the “when” in this verse make clear, this situation is an objective one in which all non-Christians find themselves and from which all Christians are delivered in Christ.”

⁵ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News For the World*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 196-7. I particularly like the way Stott puts this: “We are now in a position to sum up the contrast contained in verses 5–6. It is an antithesis between the two ages, the two covenants or the two dispensations, and so, since we have been personally transferred from the old to the new, between our pre- and post-conversion lives. In our old life we were dominated by that terrible quartet — flesh, law, sin and death (5). But in our new life, having been released from the law, we are slaves of God through the power of the Spirit (6). The contrasts are striking. We were ‘in the flesh, but are now ‘in the Spirit’. We were aroused by the law, but are now released from it. We bore fruit for death (5), but now bear fruit for God (4). And what has caused this release from the old life and this introduction to the new? Answer: it is that radical double event called death and resurrection. We *died to the law* through the death of Christ (4a); now we belong to Christ, having been *raised from the dead* with him (4b).”

⁶ C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 146.

⁷ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans: Volume 1, Introduction and Commentary on Romans 1-8* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975; reprint, 1992), 341. Cranfield's explanation about what Paul meant when he used the “I” in Romans 7:7-25 is very good. He introduces the topic this way: “Throughout this sub-section the first person singular is used. In the present summary we assume that Paul is not just speaking about his own experience, but is taking himself as representative first (in vv. 7–13) of mankind generally, and then (in vv. 14-25) of Christians. We shall discuss the matter fully below. In vv. 8–11, Paul goes on to explain that, while the law certainly is not sin, it is true that sin has been able to exploit it for its own evil purpose to deadly effect. Paul seems to have in mind here the narrative of Genesis 3, in which the divine commandment which is God's good and gracious gift for man's preservation is seen to be also an opportunity which the serpent can exploit in order to ruin man. Sin has wrought man's death through the commandment. So a true understanding of the situation with regard to the law must include the recognition of the fact that it has been effectively exploited by sin for sin's purpose, but must never lose sight of the fundamental truth, which is affirmed with emphasis in v. 12, that in itself the law is God's law, holy, righteous and good.”

⁸ Gerald Bray ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament Volume VI: Romans*, gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 183.

⁹ Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions* Book 2. 4-6. “For I pilfered that of which I had already sufficient, and much better. Nor did I desire to enjoy what I pilfered, but the theft and sin itself. There was a pear-tree close to our vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was tempting neither for its color nor its flavor. To shake and rob this some of us wanton young fellows went, late one night (having, according to our disgraceful habit, prolonged our games in the streets until then),

and carried away great loads, not to eat ourselves, but to fling to the very swine, having only eaten some of them; and to do this pleased us all the more because it was not permitted. Behold my heart, O my God; behold my heart, which Thou hadst pity upon when in the bottomless pit. Behold, now, let my heart tell Thee what it was seeking there, that I should be gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved to perish. I loved my own error — not that for which I erred, but the error itself.”

¹⁰ Ibid, 342.

¹¹ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the Moffatt NT Commentary Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932; reprinted 1947), 106. Dodd writes: “Translated into terms of individual experience, the story runs I lived at one time without law myself, but when the command came home to me, sin sprang to life and died the command that meant life proved death for me. The command gave an impulse to sin, sin beguiled me, and used the command to kill me. It fits like a glove; and there are enough verbal echoes of the Greek translation of Gen. iii. to make it likely that Paul actually had the passage in mind. Such an exposition of the story of the Fall, as a parable of individual experience, is a commonplace in modern preaching. It is not always realized that Paul interpreted it so; but such is probably the case. Are we, then, to conclude that in the passage before us the account of the fall into sin is nothing more than an allegorized version of an Old Testament story? And that the whole passage is not autobiography, but an ideal construction? Probably not. First of all, we may observe that when a man sets out to allegorize the Old Testament, he finds there what he puts in. Philo found one thing, the author of *Poimandres* another, according to theft several prepossessions. The reason why Paul found there a story of how an individual fell into the power of sin and death was that he had had experience of it, and the old story fitted his experience.” Dodd has insights into Paul, Paul may not have even had.