

Romans 7:7-13

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[0 : 00] We'll continue our study today of Romans, in Romans chapter 7, beginning in verse 7, and we'll study today through verse 13.! Please join me in reading that. What then shall we say that the law of sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin, for I would not have known what it is to covet.

If the law had not said, you shall not covet. But sin, seizing opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death for me. For sin, seizing opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good. That which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means.

It was sin producing death in me, through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment, might become sinful. God measure. Let's pray together.

Father God, we praise you for your great work amongst us. I thank you, Father, that I can look out over this group of people who have just sang, on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground shifting sand, and that my heart can be moved to praise you for your redemptive work in the lives of so many here this morning.

[1 : 29] I pray, Father, now as we study your word, we will take knowledge and combine it with understanding, so that we might have wisdom. That that wisdom will yield in our life appropriate fruit for your glory and our good.

We pray this in the precious name of Christ. Amen. Well, Paul, to this point, is certainly being thematic in his writing, and his theme throughout Romans has been the theme of Scripture.

That the salvation of man from the wrath of God, justly due him because of his sin, that salvation only comes by grace, through faith in Christ.

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And he's talked about the law quite a bit up until this point. He's told us a lot about what the law cannot do.

The law cannot save us, he tells us in chapters 3 through 5. The law can't sanctify or perfect us, he tells us in chapter 6.

[2 : 40] And the law can no longer condemn those who have placed their faith in Christ, he tells us in the first six verses of chapter 7. And Paul then, coming to verse 7 of chapter 7, anticipates a question from his readers.

And it is this. If we have been delivered from the law to live by the Spirit, was the law then evil? If we've been delivered from it in order to live righteously, was the law itself evil?

He says it this way. What then shall we say? That the law is sin? And he answers it emphatically. By no means.

By no means. And the remainder of our verses are the explanation of what he means by that. By no means. In Greek, *me genoito*. It's the strongest negative phrase in the Greek language.

So I want you to think of the strongest negative phrase in the English language. Get it in your mind. We're going to go with, of course not.

[3 : 47] Not really the strongest negative phrase in the English language. But that's what he was using. Absolutely. No way is that what is true.

But then he goes on to explain that. And this morning I want to show four things that the law does do. The law is not sin.

Emphatically, no, the law is not sin. What does the law then accomplish on our behalf? And I want to show you four things from these next seven verses. And they are the law exposes sin.

It arouses sin. It ruins the sinner. And it reveals the sinfulness of sin. The magnitude of our sin. Those are our four things. And Paul tells us this from his own experience. And in order to teach these universal truths, he uses his own conversion experience in these next verses that are going to come.

[4 : 46] And look at all the personal pronouns. I'm not going to point them all out. But look at all the I's and me's throughout these seven verses. So he's speaking from his own personal experience, which helps us understand a bit what he means as he's saying all this.

So number one, the law exposes sin. We find that in the second half, second two-thirds of verse seven. Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet. Now, Paul is not saying that he was unaware of evil in his life apart from the law.

All right. On the surface, it seems to be saying that. But if you flip back and look at Romans chapter two, verse 12, it says, For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. And in chapter one, we learn that the law of God is written on men's hearts. They know right from wrong. So what does he mean then when he says, If it hadn't been for the law, I wouldn't have known sin.

[5 : 54] What he means is that he wouldn't have known the magnitude of his sin. He wouldn't have really understood just how wretched and evil he was.

By New Testament times, Jewish rabbis had summed up scriptural law in 613 commandments, comprised of 248 mandates, which related things such as worship, the temple, sacrifices, vows, social issues, etc.

And 365 prohibitions, things like idolatry and blasphemy, the priesthood of diets, loans, business arrangements, etc.

And they had become absolutely consumed with trying to keep the law. The point of the law, though, the major point of it was to show us how incapable we are of living up to the standard of God.

That's why it existed. God said, I desire for you to be holy. This is what it looks like. Watch yourselves fail. Be aware of your need of a Savior.

[7 : 08] That was the purpose that the law came to serve. The law shows us our inability to live to the standard of God. Why does Paul use that commandment?

Exodus 20, 17 is where that's found. Thou shalt not covet. Why of all the laws he could have chosen to show us our frailty, show us how incapable we are of living to the standard of God, why that one?

The last of the Ten Commandments. Both the Hebrew and the Greek word for covet is the word, could also be rendered desire. Desire.

That which motivates us. That which we love. So, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house gets to the root of who you are and what you're satisfied in.

If you desire anything other than God, it's evidence in your life that you are not satisfied with Him. It's a very piercing decision that he made here.

[8 : 20] Is it not? Thou shalt not covet. Thou shalt not desire things other than your God. It exposes then our motivation.

It exposes our sin nature. Not just that we sin, but that we are utterly sinful apart from Christ.

Many illnesses carry with them symptoms. I've never had appendicitis, but I hear that appendicitis is incredibly painful. That your appendix hurts.

And why does it hurt? Your body is telling you something is wrong. You need a surgery desperately. Before I burst. As your appendix is telling you. In the same way, the law is the exposure.

It brings to light how really ill we are. Last night, I was awoken quite drastically when Sam elbowed me in the eye.

[9 : 25] and I was asleep when it happened, but I imagine it was like this kind of an elbow.

Because I woke up like this and my eye flashed like bright white flashes of light and the first thought that went through my head was, I'm not going to be able to see out of my left eye tomorrow.

There's no way. I'm going to have to preach like this and I don't know that I can do that because I don't have great vision in my right eye either. But the pain, the pain wasn't the evil was it?

It was the symptom of some greater evil. Not my wife, but that my eye had been struck. Right? But that my eye had been hit was the greater evil there and it was damaged and that pain that woke me

up was my eye.

Sam, I love you even when you sucker punch me when I'm sleeping. I still love you just the same.

So the law then serves to expose our sin to show us just how sinful we actually are.

You are now aware. None of you get out of this this morning. If you desire anything more than God, shame on you.

[10:33] Not only does it expose our sin, it also arouses our sin. So number two, the law arouses our sin. Verse eight, Paul writes, but sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

For apart from the law, sin lies dead. Let's deal with the last part of that first. Sin lies dead. That's an interesting question in my mind.

Sin lies dead apart from the law. And I've just already touched on this, but it exists, but it is in a sense dormant. We don't really understand. We don't really get that we've betrayed God to the degree that we have apart from the law.

But we see in here kind of an interesting turn of phrase, but sin, seizing opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness, which is sin, right? So he seems to be saying, sin produced sin.

Yeah? It kind of looks that way, doesn't it? He seems to give sin a personality, right? As if what he's referring to is another person, right?

[11:49] So this thing called sin produced something called sin, or we could say sins, produced in him covetousness. Again, Paul is getting to our nature.

We move on through chapter 7, Paul's going to talk a lot about the battle that goes on within him, his new desires and his old desires, his new self and his old self.

So his sin nature produced sins within him. And it's so important for us to understand that about ourselves, both pre-Christ, pre-regeneration, that we were utterly spoiled.

Absolutely. We were created in the image of God, God, but sin destroyed that evil completely before Christ. Now that we're found in Christ, we still carry around the baggage of our old selves.

It's important that you get this to its extremity. He says that sin seized an opportunity, the Greek for opportunity here is a *formé*, and it's also used to speak of a base of operations.

[13:08] So it's as if you say our sin nature uses the law as a command center from which to launch its evil campaign into the world. You see that? So the law then gives our sinful nature something to pick at.

Your parents say to you, don't do this thing. What did you do growing up? The very thing you weren't supposed to do. Our house is incredibly childproof, but there's typically something sitting out that Cade cannot touch.

I'll leave my laptop sitting on the couch, for example. The one thing in the entire room I don't want him to touch, and I tell him, Cade, don't touch the computer. What does he go straight to?

The computer. The law does the same thing in sinful man. It says to us, don't do or do do these things, and our nature repels against it. He uses it to exacerbate sin in our life.

John Bunyan's allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, after the main character of Christian becomes a Christian, he goes to a man's house called the interpreter, and one of the rooms the interpreter takes him to is a dusty room.

[14:20] It's got furniture in it covered with cloths, and there's just this thick layer of dust laid down in the room. And the interpreter tells Christian that this is his life.

And a man comes in with a broom, and it looks like he's coming in to clean up, but he begins to just stir the dust. And soon the room is so filled with dust that Christian can barely breathe any longer.

And in the allegory, the man with the broom is the law. And he stirs up, he exacerbates the level of sin in Christian's life. So Christian is coming to an understanding of what it is he's being delivered from.

I didn't read it in detail, I don't remember the exact details, but I believe two characters come in after that with water and they sprinkle down all the dust and they clean it all up.

And that's the grace of God in our lives. So the law exposes our sin, it arouses our sin, and the law also ruins sinners.

[15:26] Number three, the law ruins sinners. Read with me verses 9-11. Paul says, I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death for me, for sin seizing an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me. Now Paul says, I was once alive apart from the law.

And this is where the fact that this is his personal story needs to be taken into account. Paul was a Pharisee, an incredibly zealous Pharisee.

Paul was trained up in the law. So was there ever a time in Paul's life where he didn't know the law? No. So what in the world does he mean, I was alive apart from the law?

And then he says, when it came, sin came alive and I died. It's confusing language, isn't it? What I firmly believe Paul is saying is that when he came to a proper understanding of the law, when he saw the law for what it was meant to accomplish, not that he could keep the law, but when he saw that the law was a standard he could not live to, when the law came alive, when he understood what it was for, he died.

[16:52] All of his religious activity, all the things he thought he was doing to earn favor with God, were destroyed. He absolutely died.

Chris this morning as we were praying downstairs, thanked God that there is nothing we can do to make him love us more. There's also nothing we can do to make him love us less.

That's the point, I believe, being made here. The very commandment that promised this life proved to be death for him.

All of his activity, all those things he had strained forward for. Some of us are that way. In our Christianity, now that we have been delivered from the law, we strive to be found in good favor with God, and it becomes our idol.

That becomes who we are. Paul says in Philippians 3, 7, and 8 that he counted all of his religious activity upon encountering Christ.

[18:05] Everything, all of his, not thinking of the right words, all the credit that was due him for all of his religious activity.

He counted it as loss. And he goes so far as to say he counted it as rubbish. Another great English word would fit in there, but we're not going to say it.

Counted it as rubbish. And he uses this phrase again in verse 11, again, seizing an opportunity.

The law, the sin in his life, seized an opportunity through the law to deceive him and kill him.

And that is the subtle deception of our sin nature. The subtle deception of our sin nature is that we can, in fact, do good on our own.

That we can, in fact, apart from the grace of God, please God at all. Number four. The law exposes sin, it arouses sin, it ruins sinners.

[19:11] Number four, the law reveals the sinfulness of sin. The magnitude of sin. So Paul says, so the law is holy.

I'm now establishing that once again. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and it's righteous, and it's good. Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means.

It was sin producing death in me, through that which is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Turn with me to Psalm 19. Let's read together what David says of the law starting in verse 7.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

[20:17] The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward. The law is good and righteous and holy.

It's not the fault of the law. It's the fault of us. It's the fault of our sin, birthing through the law more sin to make sin sinful beyond measure.

Our sin is infinitely vile in the eyes of God. Our sin nature has produced it to that measure.

So, the law exposes sin, it arouses sin, it ruins sinners, and it reveals the sinfulness of sin. But, so what? Why does this matter?

[21:24] Why did Paul write this? Why am I spending this time telling you this and possibly having you take notes on it? Right? Three things.

Number one, the law brings us the necessary humility for salvation. The law brings to us the necessary humility for salvation.

The law serves as a mirror. Before we know Christ, we hold the law up to us as a mirror, and we see how ugly our sin is.

If you claim to know Christ this morning, but you've never been broken over your sinfulness, if you've never compared yourself to God's holy perfect law and found yourself coming so short of it, then in your own mind, you have no need of God's grace.

You don't need Christ. You don't need His sacrifice because you're already perfect. perfect. But if, as a Christian, you've honestly held your life up to the law, filtered it through it, and seen how wretched and miserable you are, then great is your Savior.

[22 : 48] Which brings us to number two. It causes us to praise our great Savior. If your sin is great, your Savior will also be great.

And if we know God's law, if we study it, we'll know our sin is great. Both before I was saved and even now that I am, my sin is great.

Which makes my Savior all the much greater. God's grace to us is immense. Just as our sin is sinful beyond measure, God's grace goes beyond measure.

It is infinite toward us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Deuteronomy 27-26, Moses says, Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.

And then in the next chapter, he goes on to talk about what will happen to those people who don't keep God's law. Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 28.

[24 : 03] We won't read all of this, but I just want you to get the point. Deuteronomy 28, starting in verse 15.

But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God, or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Curse shall you be in the city, and curse shall you be in the field.

Curse shall you be your basket and your kneading bowl. Curse shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Curse shall you be when you come in, and curse shall you be when you go out.

The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration, and all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. The Lord will make the pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land, and you are entering to take possession of it.

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, and with fever, inflammation, and fiery heat, and with drought, and with blight, and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron.

[25 : 14] The Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven, dust shall come down on you, until you are destroyed. You get the weight of God's wrath towards sin, and we've been delivered from that, not because we kept the law.

This curse lies with us, because we've transgressed the law. But because of Christ, we're seen as righteous in Him.

We are delivered because we have the righteousness of Christ. It's as if we kept the law because of our faith in the one who did. Isn't our Savior great?

Certainly He is, if our sin is great. And it is. Number three, the law is a tool used to bring others to Christ.

The law is a tool used to bring others to Christ. A great example of this, from the ministry of Jesus in Matthew chapter 19, the rich young ruler comes to Him and says, Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?

[26 : 34] Remember Jesus' response to him? Keep the commandments. And the new ruler says, which ones? And he lists off some of them for him. He says, all of these I have kept.

I am righteous. I am doing well. What does Jesus then do? He gives him a command that he knows he cannot keep.

He tells the rich young ruler to take all that he has, sell it, and give it to the poor. And what does the rich young ruler do? He goes away sad because his riches, his wealth was great.

And what the text literally means is to him, it was great. He valued it. He desired it. His sin nature worshipped it over God.

So the law is brought in to humble the sinner. In other cases in scripture, Jesus does the same thing, and the person repents and believes.

[27 : 34] The person who is not humble doesn't need the grace of God. They need the law to bring to them humility. So that they can receive the grace of God.

Use the law in your gospel presentations. Point out to people how sinful they are at their very core. And then give them the grace of God.

Tell them of what a great Savior we have. Somebody comes to you already humble, don't beat them up with the law. Then it's time for grace.

Some people get through step one on their own and don't need your help. They just need step two. The law was given to us as a tool to expose our sin.

It arouses it. It ruins us when we realize how self-righteously we have tried to live. And it reveals just how sinful we actually are.

[28 : 41] Oh, what a Savior.