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# Romans

**What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." Romans 7:7**

Again, as he has done several times already, Paul asks a rhetorical question to help us think an issue through. This is possibly asked in response to someone who was trying to defend the law as still being in force, even after Christ's work was accomplished. His question begins with, "What shall we say then?" It is certainly asked as a result of his statement in verse 5 - "For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death."

"Ok Paul, if what you said is true and the law arouses these sinful pleasures in us, then 'is the law sin?' Is the law insufficient to justify us or allow us to grow in sanctification? Is its design to make those under it worse people than before it was introduced?"

And his answer is the same as it has been five times already to such similar questions, "Certainly not!" If the law is sin, then God, who authored the law, authored sin! The issue is one of misunderstanding where the evil lies. It is in man, not in the law. To show that this is true, he states, "On the contrary..." This demonstrates that the thought which is presented is actually the opposite of what is correct. "The law isn't sin, the opposite is true. And in support of this, I present that 'I would not have known sin except through the law.'"

Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. There were, let's say, 100 types of trees around them. If God has said nothing about the trees, then what they did with the trees wouldn't matter. If He said, "You can climb any tree you want, but you cannot cut any down," then that would have been the law. They would sin only if they cut a tree down. But this wasn't a law that was given and so no sin could result if they did. The law was that they couldn't eat of a particular tree's fruit. If he hadn't given that law, then there would be no sin for eating the fruit. Introducing a just law isn't sinful. It simply demonstrates what sin is (or will be if the law is broken).

However an unjust law could be the cause of sin. God created Adam and Eve as beings needing food and water. If He told them they were not allowed to eat or drink, then the law would be unjust. How could sin be imputed in this instance? The law would, in fact, cause sin. But this isn't the case. The law is good, reasonable, and correct. The same is true with the Law of Moses as Paul will now demonstrate when he says, "I would not have known sin except through the law." This is exactly what was demonstrated concerning Adam and Eve. The law given to them wasn't sin, but the sin was in them, waiting to be aroused. Paul continues, "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Although the principle applies to any part of the law, whether of the Ten Commandments, or some other precept found throughout it, Paul chooses the last of the big ten. And, he only cites the basic premise of the commandment, not the entire commandment as was given in Exodus 20. The rest of it mentions things that can be coveted, such as "your neighbor's house." His citing of the opening portion is intended to include all coveting, something that wouldn't be a sin unless we were told that to covet was sinful. Only when coveting is identified as coveting, and that it is wrong, can we know that coveting is sin.

Life application: When God gives a law, it is always just, righteous, and attainable. Nothing that we are asked to do by Him is sinful. Instead, sin is brought about by our knowledge of and failure to obey His law. Therefore, it is imperative to know what God expects and then to adhere to that.

**But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. Romans 7:8**

The words in today's verse hit at the heart of the depravity of man and at the immense glory of what must surely be realized in the work of Christ. In the previous verse we were shown that we would not have known sin except through the law. Using coveting as an example, it was demonstrated that we wouldn't even know what it meant to covet unless we were told to not do it.

"But sin" - the excitation of this act; the wicked principle in the heart - takes its "opportunity by the commandment." Once the commandment was given, the heart was stirred into an act of rebellion by presuming it could do the very thing it was instructed to not do. In the Garden of Eden there was no sin; all was holy. There existed a state which never was before and which could never be again. There was free will, but there was no commandment which could excite sin into being.

However, the commandment was given, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16, 17

Once the words were spoken, it produced in man an evil desire, to do the very thing he was instructed to not do. Edgar Allen Poe would call it "the imp of the perverse." The very thing that shouldn't be done suddenly springs to life and wants to do that thing. When a new law is introduced in a land, the first thing that happens is for people to think about breaking that law or devising ways to get around it. But before the law was introduced, there was no impetus for doing the very thing which they are now intent on doing. In other words, "apart from the law sin was dead."

To now look at this from the other side of the cross, we can see the immense glory of our state in Christ. A corporate body of law was given to Israel, a law based on God's standards of righteousness and holiness. With the introduction of

this law, sin took the opportunity and produced all manner of evil desire. The only way to be relieved from this was by grace through faith that God's provisions for the sins committed would remove the sin. These included sacrifices and a Day of Atonement.

Even the sacrifices became sinful though when they were made without the faith which necessitated them in the first place. However, in a beautiful demonstration of God's righteousness, mercy, love, justice, truth, holiness, and grace, a promise was made throughout the time of this law that God would provide a final Sacrifice which would, once and for all, handle the sin-debt which was excited into being through the law. Jesus came and lived His life under this body of law without sinning and then He gave His life as an offering and an exchange for those of us who cannot do so.

As He fulfilled the law, when He died, the law died with Him for those who trust in Him (through faith in His work). Because we are dead to the law, we are dead to sin. This is what Paul was speaking about in Romans 6:14, 15. The law has no power over us. Therefore, let us not sin because we are not under law, but under grace.

Life application: There is a struggle going on in each of us. The laws which exist around us are given and when they are introduced, we now have a standard by which we will be judged and a premise by which we are to conduct ourselves. But the law, when given, can also incite us to wrongdoing by the giving of the law. Does this make the law the cause of sin? No, it only shows us that we are prone to sin. In our weak and fallen state, we need a release from life's temptations and it is found in Jesus. Let each of us look to Him for strength against this war which wages in our lives.

**I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.** Romans 7:9

Today's verse has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some insist that Paul is speaking of himself in the first person - at a time when he felt secure in himself concerning his spiritual nature. However, when he realized the true weight and purpose of the law, "sin revived and I died." It was at this moment that he realized his fallen state, when before this he felt assured in his own righteousness. This is not likely because he wasn't saved until he was saved. He wasn't spiritually alive as a Pharisee persecuting God's people and then suddenly spiritually dead when he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Both testaments show that it is faith in God and His promises by which one lives, not adherence to the law. As Paul lived under the law, he should have known that "the just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4).

Others look at him speaking of an "age of innocence" or "accountability." Paul was spiritually alive until he came to a point in life where he mentally grasped the law and thus went from "spiritual life" to "spiritual death." This is incorrect and is based on an emotional interpretation of biblical doctrine. This concept requires inserting incorrect preconceived notions about the nature of man into the text, rather than drawing out what the Bible teaches. The Bible is abundantly clear that we are spiritually dead even from birth. We inherit Adam's sin and thus there is nothing which causes us to spiritually die; it is a part of our nature from birth.

Some scholars believe that he is speaking of the people who received the law; Israel. They were alive apart from the law, but when the law came, sin revived and they died. In essence, Paul is speaking in the first person, but relating it to his heritage - Israel. This is also unlikely for the same reason as the previous two cases. The people were already born spiritually dead and each needed to be made alive individually, just as their father Abraham was. The introduction of the law merely magnified the truth of this.

A fourth option, which will be substantiated in the coming verses, is that he is writing about the introduction of any law, the knowledge of which revives sin and through that sin we die. In essence, it would take us all the way back to Adam and his original sin. Thus Paul is speaking in the first person of his humanity. This is certainly the case. He has been speaking about one commandment, coveting, as the basis for his analysis. However, coveting doesn't cover the entire Law of

Moses, it is merely one aspect of it. Further, he speaks of "law" not "the law." There is no definite article in the original Greek. Therefore, it is whatever law is given. In other words, he is using coveting as an example of any law. All will have the same effect.

This fourth option is certainly what he is speaking about and this will be seen in what he states as he progresses. He will speak in plural terms, "we," and then in the singular, "I." By merely looking at his statements and comparing them to Adam's transgression, we can see what occurred in humanity. The use of coveting is simply demonstrating that whatever law is given will have the same effect. Through law is the knowledge of sin and apart from law, sin is dead.

Life application: Faith... this is what God looks for in each of us. When we trust in our own righteousness, it is saying that we can do it all without God. The introduction of law is intended to show us this isn't so. It is faith in Jesus and His work which delivers us from death to life. Thank God for Jesus!

**And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.**

Romans 7:10

When God gave Adam his one and only commandment in the Garden of Eden, it was intended as a means of life. Returning to the Genesis account again, we can see this -

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 2:16, 17

Although a promise of death came with disobedience, it is thus inferred that the commandment was meant to bring life if obeyed. This is the nature of obedience. When a law is adhered to, one is fulfilling the intent of the law. However, as is noted, "the commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death." This wasn't the commandment's fault, nor the fault of the One who gave it. Instead, it

was the fault of the person who didn't follow suit in obedience. The same is found true under the Mosaic law -

"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Leviticus 18:5

Although stated in the positive, rather than in the negative as in Eden, the result is the same - "If you do these things, you shall live." It wasn't the fault of the law that one disobeyed. The law was good. It was also suited to produce good, not evil. However, evil ensued through disobedience of it, resulting in death.

Life application: When we look at the evil around us, or when we see calamity occur, we want to lash out at God. But this attitude fails to consider that He gave us free will and we have exercised it to our own detriment. The fact that evil exists isn't God's fault, nor does it mean He isn't competent to end it. That evil isn't ended yet has no bearing on what will someday be. His plan is greater than our temporary perceptions of the world around us. Have faith that He will bring all things to a satisfactory conclusion.