

Why We Must Be Delivered From the Law

Studies in Romans

By Dr. Alan Cairns

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Bible Text: Romans 7:7-13

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Faith Free Presbyterian Church

1207 Haywood Road

Greenville, SC 29615

Website: www.faithfpc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/faith

Someday I'll have to have printed and get branded as young people when they have all the time in the world to stick it in, the final verse space doesn't really allow us to have it but we'll get it in somehow.

Even treading the valley; the shadow of death,
This watchword shall rally my faltering breath;
For while from life's fever my God sets me free

What do you think is going to happen then? What do you think your death song will be?

Jehovah Tsidkenu my death-song shall be.

That's a wonderful testimony and we've got to sing that maybe next time, but not tonight. That was a great hymn and well sung.

I don't know if you believe in signs. I get people talking about all sorts of signs and they read all sorts of things into them. Many of you will know that trying to span the apparently unbridgeable gap between Presbyterians on the one hand and Baptists on the other, we have admitted in the free church that we can't solve the problems of the last few hundred years and that good men have differed on the issue of sprinkling or immersion or Presbyterian baptism or Baptist baptism. If you all just took my word, you'd be right but everybody doesn't do that.

I was hearing about Ron Bean, who's a Baptist, but at heart he's a Free Presbyterian. He's been at many of our weeks of prayer. As you heard, Hurricane, well, I think they got more than one, but I think it was the last one, Ivan, that did the big damage for him. A lot of his books, some of them were down at the church and they were alright but the ones at home were well and truly baptized. He had a lot of the old books there, I was told. He had the Puritans, he had C. H. Spurgeon and then he had mine. He wanted all the old ones together. Strangely, the Puritans, many of whom would have been sprinklers, their books were only sprinkled. Spurgeon, the Baptist, had his books totally immersed. And mine were half-and-half. So, you can take out of that sign whatever you like. I am interpreting it to mean that we are right.

And I have to tell you that I did not pay Dr. Barrett to advertise the tapes of this morning. If you need a tape and you can't afford it, we've got you a tape. No problem about that. We'll take it out of his salary, not mine. We'll be glad to do that. I was thinking when he was doing all that, I was thinking of a preacher who boasted to his congregation of a worldwide tape ministry and the young man who is in charge of the tape room was very disturbed and distressed about this and wondered what on earth he should do. He said, "I do all the tapes and we do two copies every week. One for the preacher and one for a friend of his who doesn't like to see his feelings get hurt with nobody taking a tape." And I didn't want you to get the impression that I'd got quite there with Dr. Barrett's promo tonight. But, you'll be welcome to a tape if you need one.

Now, as we continue the studies in the Book of Romans, we come to Romans 7 reading from verse 7 through to the end of verse 13. It still sticks in my throat to say, 7 through, that's an Americanism that I find it very difficult to get used to. And I say 7 to 13 and some smart-aleck told me that means you end at the end of verse 12. Why you should jump to the conclusion that "to verse 13" means to the beginning of it and not to the end of it, I have no idea but if I were to say in Ballymoney or Belfast "7 through 13" they would say, "Yeah, he's now a Yank." They don't the difference between a Yankee and a Southerner over there. Now, they do know the difference between Orange and Green but they don't know the difference between a Yankee and a Southerner. So, if you Southerners go over there, they'll quite likely call you a Yankee. Don't think that they mean anything bad by it. But if they tell you you Yankees are Rebels, they will mean something bad by that. Enough of that.

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. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." I'll not get a chance to follow this through, but on that statement "sin revived and I died," John Calvin has a beautiful little aphorism which is "The life of sin is the death of man. The death of sin is the life of man." I think that's a beautiful summary that arises out of that verse but sin revived and I died.

"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 it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. 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."

Amen. The Lord will add his own blessing to the reading of his own precious Word for his names' sake.

It's very difficult to focus people's attention on the real message of Romans 7. And the reason for that, will, quickly I hope, become obvious. Not that I love being able to focus your attention but I hope to be able to explain that pretty quickly. When you read this

chapter, it becomes very, very evident that at verse 7 there is a dramatic change in style. If you go back to verse 4-6 he says, “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,” and then starts a series of “we’s,” “that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”

Now, you come to verse 7. “What shall we say then?” And immediately, Paul launches into a style of writing in which through the end of this chapter, he goes from “we” which appears very seldom now, to “I” and starts speaking in the first person singular. Indeed, in a quick reckoning, over 40 times in the verses between 7 and the end of the chapter, Paul either speaks of “I” or “me” or “mine.” Now, obviously this is not an accident. It is something that is deliberately adopted. And it has caused intense debate as to why he did it and what we are to take from it. Does he really mean to give us his own personal experience here? Or is he using the word “I” really in an impersonal way, that is, something we do quite frequently? When a preacher may use the first personal singular when really he’s not referring to anything particularly personal but he’s referring to something general to all his audience. Is this what Paul is doing? Some commentators and some very eminent scholars have believed that Paul is using the word “I” here in order not to speak of himself but Adam. And if that comes as a shock to you, it came as quite a shock to me, too, I must confess. I have found that when Paul meant to say Adam, he was quite capable of saying so. But, they have taken this to mean Adam because of some peculiarities of expression later in the chapter. Others say that he’s speaking of the Jews, especially as they were gathered at Mount Sinai. Again, I find that difficult to comprehend because when Paul intended to speak of the Jews at Mount Sinai in other Scriptures, he had no difficulty whatsoever in expressing himself in terms that no one could possibly misapprehend.

I think it’s impossible to get around the obvious meaning of the Apostle, that by “I” he meant I. In other words, he was speaking of himself. And yet, that leads to a lot of further speculation. Did he speak of himself exclusively? Or did he speak of himself and his own experience as an illustration of the experience of man generally? I think that it’s clear from the whole context here that he was speaking of his experience as an illustration of what others generally come to experience. If that were not the case, then bringing his experience into this context would have no value and would add nothing to his argument at all.

But, if he’s speaking of himself, the big question is, At what stage of his experience was Paul in his thinking here, what stage of his experience was he describing? Some people come to this passage and say the whole way through from verse 7 right through to the end he’s speaking of himself as an unregenerate man. Then there are others that may come and they say from verse 7 right through to the end, he’s speaking of himself as a regenerate man. Now, it doesn’t take you to be Albert Einstein to have enough logic to

work out that they both cannot be right. In fact, I would go so far as to say that they are both absolutely wrong.

In verse 14, not that we're going to start that section tonight, but in verse 14 there is another critical change in style. You will notice that from verse 7 through 13, Paul is speaking of the past. His verbs are in the past tense: sin revived; I died; I found the commandment that was ordained to life to be unto death; sin took occasion by the commandment; sin deceived me; sin slew me. All in the past tense. Now, when you get to verse 14 right through the end of the chapter, he comes to use the present tense: we know that the law is spiritual but I am carnal; what I do I allow not, what I would that do I not; what I hate, that do I and so on down the chapter. And that again, is more than an accident of style. That is something deliberately adopted for a very particular purpose. In other words, there is a division between the past and the present for Paul.

And that's not just a stylistic division, that division, that mark of demarcation between the past and the present is critical to being a Christian. Understand that. In every Christian's life, there is that critical point that divides the past from the present. That's what Paul is emphasizing so that in the verses before us tonight, he is speaking of his experience in his unregenerate days, not giving us an overview of all his unregenerate days. There are parts of this that would speak of quite a wide space of time and in his unregenerate days, but mostly I think that he's dealing with his experience in that time in his life as he was coming up near to the point where God was going to enter in with saving grace. Verse 14 onwards, he's dealing with himself and his experience as a regenerated man. Now, in other words, looking back, verse 7-13, he's unsaved. Verse 14-25 he speaks of himself as a Christian.

Now, what he has to say about his own experience is crucial for you and me in our experience. So, it's understandable when we come to Romans 7 that we are looking for answers to questions that arise in our experience. It's obvious that Paul is dealing here with sin and it's obvious from verse 14 onward, that he's dealing with sin in the life of the believer. Now, that is a crucial matter for every Christian. And so, knowing the battles that we have, we have questions that arise. We have things that must have answers and so we fasten on to Romans 7 to ask the questions that perplex us in order to drag from this chapter good answers. We are, at the same time, encouraged and surprised when we read what Paul says because we hear him groaning and the devil had always told us, "You're the only people who feel like this. You're the only person that has such a struggle. You're the only one whose show emits such groanings as this." And so, we are both surprised and encouraged when we come and we read that the Apostle Paul, himself, give vent to these great groanings of soul, revealing the inner tensions that he had within his own being.

And yet, you know, if this is all that we get out of this chapter, we have missed the real purpose for Paul writing it; we have missed it's primary objective. You see, Romans 7 is not primarily a piece of autobiography. In other words, Paul is not really setting out here to give us in any detail a description of his own experience and of his own feelings. O, he does that, but these statements, as it were, come in by the side, they are merely

convenient illustrations of the real theme of the chapter. Now, the questions you and I have about the struggle with sin are important questions and, God willing, I will get to deal with those next week. That's my intention. Next week starts our Reformation Month since there are five Sabbaths in the month, I intend to take the first one to try, I'll not say succeed, but to try to finish Romans 7 before we break for the rest of Reformation Month.

And you'll find that the questions we have about the struggle with sin, certainly get an answer here. But what I'm saying is this was not written with the primary objective of supplying that answer. And that answer can only be understood properly if we see it in its proper connection and in its proper context. And the context is to see the central theme of Romans 7 and it is God's law. In some ways, you could argue this is the greatest chapter in the New Testament on the law of God. In some ways, you could argue that this is the greatest exposition in the New Testament concerning the nature of sin. In some ways, you could argue this is the greatest chapter in the New Testament that deals with the law in relation to sin and sin in relation to the law. The theme of the chapter then, is God's law, it's functions and it's limitations. And in expounding this, Paul uses his own experience both before he was saved and after he was saved as illustration and proof of his teaching.

The great Scottish commentator, John Brown of Edinburgh, for you students who will be trying to get books, let me recommend to you. John Brown was not perfect, who is outside of the Lord himself. But when you're gathering your books and you're looking for commentaries that will not only explain the scholarly technicalities of the text but will give you devotional light and will challenge your mind and your heart and your soul, look carefully at anything you can get by John Brown of Edinburgh. I don't get anything for promoting his books but for years I've been told by people, "Why do preachers not recommend to us the books that we should get?" Best book in the writing in the Book of Hebrews, the best commentary beyond a doubt, in my mind, is that of John Brown. On Galatians, just a little commentary, excellent. Dealing with 1 Peter, excellent. This man comes to Romans and I must say his treatment of Romans is a treat to read.

And when he comes to Romans 7, he has a broad analysis which is very attractive. He said it really teaches two things: the law cannot make a bad man good and that'll bring you up to the end of verse 13. The law cannot make a bad man good and then 14 to the end, the law cannot make a good man better. Beautiful summary. But for all its beauty, there is something missing. For, you see, it's focusing solely upon the limitations of the law. But Paul is not focusing solely on the limitations of the law, he is also dealing with the operations of the law, so we're going to need to be a little more precise for certainly Paul is.

In this section before us tonight, Paul deals categorically with an objection, arising out of his point that he made in chapter 6:14, "You are not under law but under grace." And it seemed to his Jewish opponents that that was an attack upon the nature and character of the law. So, Paul in these verses, goes to considerable lengths to explain why we cannot be saved under the law.

So, I want us to think of that tonight and I think that opens up these verses very simply: why we cannot be saved under the law. Put it another way: why, if we're ever to be saved, we must, as Paul has said in verse 6 of this chapter, we must be delivered from the law. First point that he makes and we must make is that the reason for this is not because the law is evil or sinful. "What shall we say then, is the law sin?" That was the objection, that was the slander that the Jews were laying upon Paul. "This doctrine of yours makes the law into a sinful thing." It says that the problem is with the law, not with man. The problem is with the law, the law is a sinful thing.

Now, Paul has made a series of strong comments about the law, spelling out its serious limitations. Just run over them very quickly. Chapter 3:20 he says "that by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." He says, "that by the law is the knowledge of sin." In 3:21 he says that "the righteousness of God is without or apart from the law." In chapter 4:15 he says, "the law worketh wrath." In 6:14, as I have quoted, he says "Sin shall not have dominion over you for or because you are not under the law but you're under grace." In chapter 7:4 he says, "ye were put to death to the law." In chapter 7:5 he makes the statement the passions of sin "were by the law." And then in verse 6 he says, "therefore you were delivered from the law."

Now, that raised the question, What does that say about the law? To the Jew it appeared that Paul was slighting the law. It appeared that he was insulting the law. It appeared that he was making out that the law was something sub-Christian, something evil because we need to be delivered from it.

That was a huge attack upon the gospel. A huge attack. It's one of those focal points in the history of the Christian church that very often goes unnoticed. It's interesting that when Martyn Lloyd Jones was preaching through Romans, I think, way back in the 1950s. He quoted a book by a German scholar, or a Dutch scholar I forget which, that had not yet been translated into English, at least published in its translation, he had got a foresight, first a critique of it and then the first galleys. And the argument there was, that what Paul is writing here in Romans 7 is so critical because this is the reason for the inclusion of the Old Testament in the canon of Christian Scripture. When you stop to think of it, if it was this great outcry against Paul's teaching, "You're insulting the law. If you believe the gospel, the law is such an evil thing. It causes so much trouble." Why, then would this law be included with the Scriptures that the Christians accept?

Well, it's included because Paul gives the answer, "Is the law sin? God forbid." And in verse 12, the second part of our Bible reading. You probably have noticed in some ways it's a reiteration, it's coming full circle to the first part. And so, in verse 12 he says, "the law is holy, the commandment is holy, it is just and it is good." What a statement. It is the law of sin. God forbid. It's the very opposite. "The law," says Paul, "is free from all imputation of sin. God forbid. May it not be. Let the thought perish. There is no sin in God's law." Whatever its connection with sin and death and he's already said, "the law worketh wrath." He's already said that "the passions of sin were by the law." But, whatever its connection with sin and death and wrath, God's law has in it nothing that is unworthy of its Giver. Understand that.

There is nothing in God's law that is unworthy of the God who give it. And in saying that, you know, Paul is establishing not only the purity but the permanence of God's love. Paul is staking out true Christian territory here. There is no room in the Christian church for antinomian thinking. There is no room in the Christian church for anything that denigrates, despises or in any way weakens the purity and the stand of the law of God. Equally, as we shall see, there is no place in Christian thinking or the preaching of the gospel for making the law a way of life, a way of salvation for those already fallen.

But, there's no sin in God's law. Verse 10 says it "was ordained unto life. You'll notice that they ordained and supplied. I think it's a perfectly legitimate word to supply. The law was unto life. The tendency of the law, the purpose of the law, was unto life. That sounds strange given the fact that he has said that "you can't be justified by the law and by the law is the knowledge of sin." But, there's no strangeness here.

When did God first give the law? I'm not talking now about the written form but the very principles of the law, when did he give it? In dealing with the subject of the law a few years back, I think I established that the law was given to our first parents at their creation. It was the law of a covenant of works and it guaranteed and promised life to them upon obedience. You see, here's the essential mark of the law of God: it promises life on condition of perfect obedience. The law was unto life. Verse 10 says more than that, actually. It says that this whole standard that God accepts as an entrance to life, is obedience to the law.

Without a righteousness that satisfies the law, men cannot enter into life. It's the law that is unto life. And I think I dare even make this statement and you must take it in context, of course, that the gateway to heaven is through the law of God. Understand that. Anything that does not satisfy God's law cannot lead to life for the law was unto life. Now, of course, that seems to condemn us and it does. But, you know, that's the very gospel that Paul contended for. That in the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't this what we were dealing with in the earlier part of Romans, especially in that glorious passage in Romans 5 that expounded the righteousness of Christ. Isn't this the genius of the gospel? That God didn't save us by setting aside the law, by abrogating the law, by the lowering the standards of the law, by ignoring the law, by in any way trimming the law. God did not, as I pointed out last Sabbath day, God did not save us by destroying the law, he saved us by fulfilling the law and by satisfying the law.

You see, Paul says the law was ordained unto life. And while we were singing in Martin Luther's great hymn tonight, We must be saved by grace and solely through mercy, it is the covenant of grace that brings us to heaven. But, remember, that for Christ it was a covenant of works. We don't get to heaven without works that satisfy the law of God, we get to heaven by the work of Jesus Christ that fully, finally, perfectly satisfied the law of God. "The law," says Paul, "was not sinful. The law was unto life." As he makes clear in verse 12, the law cannot be sinful because it is a transcript of the very nature of God himself. Notice what it says, "the law is good," for that's the testimony of the Bible concerning God himself. Jesus said, "There is none good but God." He is good and doeth

good. So, the law is good. “The commandment,” he says, “is good and just; it is holy.” Who as God is the high and lofty one who inhabited eternity, whose name is holy. He is the righteous one or the just one.

Here you’ve got terms applied to the law that are proper, names for God in many ways. The law is holy. Is the law sin? No, no. Why do we need to be delivered from the law? Because the law is sin. No, the law is not evil, the law is the very opposite. The law is holy. Let us understand, of course, and I’m not going into this because it’s not Paul’s argument at the moment, but a preacher should never miss the opportunity to apply to his own conscience and to the consciences of those who listen to him, the implication of what he’s saying. If the law is holy, your breach of the law and mine is unholy.

The law is just, that is, it’s fair. It’s right. The Bible knows nothing of the morals of relativity. The Bible knows nothing of this mindset that has even afflicted the church of Jesus Christ that you can hardly say anything is right or anything is wrong, it’s all relative to the situation in which you find yourself. What is right is what the law of God says. What is wrong is what the Bible declares to be wrong. It’s not what’s politically correct, social acceptable or anything else. This law is right. It is just. It is absolutely fair.

And it is good. Good because it reveals God and the standard that God has set for entrance into heaven. Good because it deals with men honestly. It’s good for men because it destroys, as we shall see, their self-righteousness and their self-confidence and it lowers their pride in the dirt before a holy God and brings them to the place where they cry for mercy. So, says Paul, when I say that we need to be saved *from* the law, delivered *from* the law if we’re ever to enter into heaven, it’s not because there’s any fault in the law itself.

But, there are reasons still why we need to be delivered from the law if ever we’re going to be saved. One is, that despite its perfection, all that the law can do with sin is to expose it and condemn it. That’s all the law can do with sin. It can’t do anything else but expose it and condemn it. Now, those are not small or negligible actions of the law, as we’ll see as we proceed tonight. These are vital in the economy of salvation. They are vital for the preaching of the gospel but they are not saving actions. The law can expose sin, the law can condemn sin but that doesn’t save you.

You see, here’s the fundamental limitation to the powers of the law of God in relation to sin, it can just do two things, but now take it in context, in the context of the argument: the fact that the law exposes sin shows that it, itself, is not sin, it’s the light that exposes it. The fact that the law condemns sin shows that the law, itself, is not sinful, it’s not evil. “Without the law,” says Paul, “there’s no knowledge of sin.”

Notice what he says, “I had not known sin but by the law for I had not known lust except or unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” Where, without the law, where there is no law, there is no knowledge of sin for sin is the transgression of the law. Now, this must be understood in its context. In reality, there is not a place in the world and there’s never been a time in history when men have ever been without the law of God. So, when

Paul says that except by the law he had not known sin, he's not implying that there was a time when he really wasn't aware of the law of God. Never have men been without some knowledge of sin. Even the heathens, they have some knowledge of sin, they have some knowledge of right and they have some knowledge of wrong and those who deny it, are liars and they are just playing with words.

I heard of a debate between a Christian apologist and some very brilliant university students and he was challenging them on the existence of right and wrong and, of course, once you accept that, you're on the slippery slope away from atheism, you cannot maintain atheism. And they were not so dumb that they didn't recognize that, so they were not admitting the difference between right and wrong. So, he challenged one of them in particular who was most vociferous and he said, "Right, I come into your home, I murder your father, I rape your sister, I kill your brother, I steal your belongings. Is that right or is it wrong?" He says, "Well, I would have to say I don't like it, but I couldn't say that it was wrong." And I'm saying, he is an absolute liar, that's what I'm saying. He is an absolute liar. He knows that it's wrong. Sure, he knows that it's wrong.

There is this knowledge and Paul has established this. I'm not going to take time tonight to go through it again in Romans 1:18-20. And again in chapter 5:13-14, he has been at pains to prove that throughout history, there has been this realization of the law written on the heart and also, there has been the realization and knowledge of sin. And here in chapter 7:7, he's not contradicting this truth, but what he's doing is speaking of something rather different, he's speaking of the working of the law in the personal experience of the individual. He's describing the action of the law of God in convicting a man of the sinfulness of his sin in the sight of a holy God.

Notice what he says, "I had not known sin unless by the law for I had not known," a different word we'll come to in a moment "lust" or "desire," in this case evil desire, "unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Now, think of the word "know." There are two kinds of knowledge: there is that mere intellectual knowledge, an awareness. All men have the awareness of sin. Even the vilest sinners in the world will tell you there's something wrong with the world, we all know there's something wrong, there's an awareness. But, there's another kind of knowledge and that's a deep personal conviction of the nature of sin, the guilt of sin, the pollution of the sin and the obnoxiousness of sin before a holy God. And it's of this latter kind of knowledge that Paul is speaking here in verse 7.

As I've said, he uses two different verbs in talking about the knowledge of sin. Let me sort of translate/paraphrase what he's saying. He said, I would never have really understood. Perhaps, the way we would put it: I would never really have appreciated sin for what it really was without the convicting work of the law. And then he goes on to say, I would never have perceived, I would never have genuinely realized the true state of affairs in my heart had not the law convicted me of the wickedness of lust and of evil desire. You see, what Paul is talking about here is the working of the law is that it brings an overwhelming realization to a man of his sin.

Now, watch him carefully for here Paul goes to a radical depth that very few preachers are willing to go to and, in fact, most fundamental and evangelical churches vociferously repudiate it. But, they are wrong and Paul is right. Watch him carefully: this conviction of sin is not a conviction simply that what we have done is wrong but it's a conviction of a depravity that lies deep within our very nature. Notice the end of verse 7, "for I had not known," or perceived, "lust." The idea is, I would never have realized that lust was sin. I would never have named my desire as sin. It took the law of God to do that and when the law of God came and exposed my inward being and not only what I was doing to be wrong, not only what I was saying to be wrong, but what I was feeling to be wrong, what I was desiring, to be sin in the sight of God.

You notice that he takes the tenth commandment as the great confirmation of his point. I say confirmation. Most preachers take this second part of verse 7 to be an illustration of the first part. Where he says, "I have not known sin but by the law," for example, I would not of known what lust was except the Bible had said, You shall not covet. And there you've got sin as the general and lust as a particular example of a part of sin. That's not what Paul is saying, these two parts of the verse are equivalent. This is not an illustration, this is a confirmation of what he has just said. You see, the sin and the lust are the same thing. They are describing the inner principle of sin that corrupts a man's nature. Or, you could take it that it flows from that corrupt nature. Paul is saying when the law of God gets to me, when it got to me, it taught me that the mere desire of sin is sin, even if it is never acted out.

You've probably heard preachers, and I certainly have, who limit sin to specific acts of sin. Now, those acts are sinful but nothing shows the depravity of man and his antagonism to a holy God more than this. Man loves to externalize sin, it's only mere acts. And believing this, sinners can actually feel good about themselves. Paul goes on to say this. They may be quite complacent about their sin. He says he was alive. What he meant was he was not at all alarmed. He had not been leveled into the dust, he had not been slain by conviction, he felt alive to God, he felt spiritually well. He was absolutely satisfied with his own state before a holy God. As long as sin only was consisting of acts, Paul didn't do this and he didn't do that and he didn't do the other thing and when he compared himself with other vile and guilty sinners, O he could stand back like the Pharisee was, he could puff out his chest and say, "Concerning the righteousness which is of the law, I am blameless." I was alive says Paul, but then the law came.

But it comes and penetrates much more deeply; it goes beyond the surface and the shallowness of human appearances. And behind the act of sin there lies that evil principle produced from a corrupt nature whose lusts writhe against God's law by which it stands exposed and condemned. But I want you to notice what Paul is saying: without the application of the law of God to the heart, man will never take sin seriously. Their views of sin will be lax. Why? Because they have never really encountered the holy law of God. Have you ever heard people talk like this, "I'm not a bad person. I don't do any harm to anybody." And the whole idea is, "Really, why are you talking to me about needing to be saved? Why are you talking to me as if I were some vile and filthy sinner? I am a good person. Can you not see this?" How do people think that way? They think that way

because they have never encountered the law of God. To them, the desire for sin, that inner revolt of the heart against God's law, the inner lust, the desire that they would never act out, is harmless, it's natural, it's even beneficial.

I have read some of the advice given by psychiatrists/psychologists/Christian counselors and they have dealt with some of these things and they've really said, "You know, they are harmless in themselves because they're only thoughts. In some way, they may even help you to overcome if you're just going through lust and sin." And some of you young people will be finding this day-by-day as you're being bombarded with things that are wicked. And the advice of the world is, "Don't worry. As long as it's all in your head, as long as it's just your imagining, as long as it's just your visualizing, it's harmless. And it may even be helpful." And I'm here to tell you, man, it's damning to the soul. Damning to the soul.

Until the law of God comes, men will never take sin seriously. They externalize it, they trivialize it, they preen themselves in their self-righteousness, they are so complacent about what they are and how good they are when all the time the law of God tears away the mask and it shows behind that mask a heart that's as foul and dark and rebellious and lustful and sinful and wicked as hell itself.

And you know, my friend, that's exactly why in the preaching of the gospel there must be the preaching of the law of God. Now, the law is not the gospel but the law is a preparatory message to show men their need of the gospel. People talk about the easy believism of the days in which we live. And this is a huge, huge scandal in evangelical Christianity. If I understand 1 Corinthians 3 properly, and I believe I do, and I have to confess it makes me tremble as a preacher when I read 1 Corinthians 3. It should make every preacher tremble. Concerning that day when we stand before God and we give account of our ministry and it's dealing particularly with preachers who are admitting to the church of Christ people who are not saved at all. You add them to the numbers, it makes the church roll look good, you clock up the decisions. "We have 5,000 decisions," and what's the use if you've 5,000 baptized candidates for hell? What's the use.

People with decisions that mean nothing. They're all mixed up. Why? Because they have never, never been brought to a conviction of sin. They've never been brought face-to-face with the law of God. Is it any wonder, they have no appreciation for grace when they have never felt the awfulness of guilt? Jesus said that the one who has been forgiven much, will love much. The one who feels guilt in all its depth will feel grace in all its glory. This is a vital part of the presentation of the gospel because though the law cannot save a man, it shows him his need to be saved and it shows him the depravity that is deep-rooted in his heart will bring him down to death in the end. As verse 10 says, "the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." So, why must we be delivered from the law? Because for in the imperfection, all it can do with sin is to expose and condemn it.

But, there's one final reason why we must be free from the law if we're ever to be saved and it's this: that the law affords sin a base of operation to work deception and death in

all who remain under it. Notice the wording of verse 8, and watch the terms carefully, “sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” Sin, that evil corrupt principle within our nature, taking occasion. Without wasting too much time on this, you can take this as sort of a military expression, making a base of operation. Sin makes the commandment the base of its operations and it wrought, the word means it worked effectively, powerfully in me to produce all manner of evil desire. Now, once again, Paul is emphasizing that the desire of evil is sin. Now, the question is, How does the law of God provide sin with a base of operation? The answer is in two ways and you can readily identify with this. See, the psychology and I use that word in a biblical sense, psychology is the science of the soul as revealed in the Word of God. I’m not talking about the pseudoscience that masquerades under the title. Psychology as here exhibited is absolutely perfect.

The law provides sin with a base of operation because it provokes the sinner to rebel. We all know that, we’ve all felt that. You know it in everyday life. Little Johnny has just learned to walk and you go and ooh and ahh and you have your little China ornaments sitting there and you say to Johnny, “Don’t touch it.” And you turn your back. What’s the very first thing that the little rebel goes to touch? No, I know your Johnny is not a little rebel. You think that? You’ve got a long way to go, man. You will learn a whole lot before you’re much older.

I don’t mean to trivialize this but this is true. By nature we are rebels. Rebels against God. Rebels against the law of God and when the law says, “thou shalt not,” it stirs and it provokes the rebellion. “Why am I not allowed to do this?” And the most important, well not the most important I suppose, but the most egregious that we say is, “This is not fair. God is not fair. I should be able to sin with impunity. Why has God...” And Paul writes to Timothy about this, “Why has God ordained things in such a way that you sin. Many kinds of sin. And you find it in your own body and it’s killing you before the time. Why should that be? Why is adultery, for example, as he writes to the Corinthians, a sin against a man’s own body? Why does it produce a stream of disease that’s spreading throughout the world? It’s not fair.” Does it stop people from sinning? No, it doesn’t. It stirs them up to sin because we’re rebels.

It plants in depraved and rebellious minds the idea of the very thing that it forbids. The law mentions things that you’ll not do and it’s as if the switch was flipped and you say, “Man, I hadn’t thought of that. That’s the very thing I’ll do.” Why is that? Paul says in Titus 1:15, “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” So, when the holy law gives a holy commandment that is just and fair and good and upright and beneficial, the rebel turns it into a reason to sin. Lloyd-Jones once said, “The law irritates sin. Disturbs it and by its prohibitions arouses it.”

This is the point that Paul makes so strongly, the end of verse 8 into verse 9, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Without the law sin was dead. The idea here is without the law is simply that it didn’t trouble my conscience. Oh it was there. I mean, the law is in the Bible, you can’t get

away from it. You can deny it, ignore it, do whatever you like but it's still there. But Paul is saying it lay inert, inactive, didn't trouble me and as a result, I was alive, I was complacent about myself, about my standing with God. But when the law did its work, sin revived, sin was aroused and I died and I realized then just how deep and dark was the depravity of my soul and I lost all my self-complacency and was swallowed up by guilt. And the result, verse 10, "the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death."

Now, that brings us full circle. We're back to the question of verse 7 only in different words. Verse 7 says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" Now come to verse 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." Do I blame the law, says Paul, for bringing me to death? No. Verse 11, it was sin that deceived me. It was sin that slew me, not the law of God. Verse 12, the law is not evil but by its very purity it shows, as verse 13 puts it, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Now, you see, this is Paul's real argument but because of the reasons given, we must be saved from the law.

What I want you to get tonight is: if you've never known conviction of sin, if you're at ease with a lax view of sin, if you have that superficial religion that lets the lust of an evil heart flourish and it doesn't bring you down under such a feeling of unworthiness and rebelliousness and guilt, you're not saved. You're not saved. Paul is here describing his experience as vital to his Christian life and as vital to ours as well. Men and women understand we can't be saved by the law but the law must do its work to let you see how vile and filthy, ungodly, unworthy, and needy you really are and shut you up to Jesus Christ.

I hope that tonight, although I have not, I'm skating over this passage pretty quickly, I have not gone into it in the depths that it deserves. I hope you've got some conception of how vile sin is. It's not just outward actions, it's an inward bias of the will that is against God. It's an inward corruption. It's an evil root. How vile sin is. I want you to understand how real sin is. Sin is not a psychological disturbance. Sin is not a complex. Sin is not something of which preachers speak in order to scare you into submission. Sin is real evil.

How real it is. How deceptive it is. A man sitting on the edge of hell feeling good about himself. One heartbeat away from the groans of the damned forever, feeling good about himself. I'm alive! O, I wonder, are you there tonight? I'm alive! This is life! Don't try to get me under guilt. Don't try to make me feel bad. I am having the time of my life! I'm happy with my life, happy with my lot. I'm not worried about my soul. I am not worried about eternity.

How deceptive sin is. Paul says it deceived me. I feel it's through me. Dead in trespasses and sin now and soon to be dead with the second death in an everlasting hell, cut off from God. How impotent the law is to save you from it. How terrible to remain under the law, trying to work your way to heaven. It can't be done.

You know, what I like about Paul here is that he wrote all this, not as a theologian making a point, winning a debate, Paul wrote this as a man who had come to learn it in a deep and personal way, a way that changed his whole life. You see, there was a time when he had no real conviction of sin. The law had never really hit him. You know, I think there are a lot of people just like that. The law has never really hit you. Your religion is all surface, all shallow. "Oh yes, I'm a Christian. Yeah, I'm a Christian. Of course, I live like the devil, I think like the devil, I act like the devil, I go to with the devil's crowd, I find my joy among the devil's crowd. But I'm a Christian. Don't talk to me, I'm alright." Man, I fear for people like that.

The law has never really hit you. Paul was once in that condition but there came a point in his life where the law came down on him as my old master used to say, like a ton of bricks from a high altitude. And, man, did it hit him. There came a point in his life when it led him in the dust and it stripped away his pride and it took away his self-complacency and boasting in his self-righteousness and it made him feel his sin. Do you see how he puts it in verse 10, "I found the commandment that was unto life to be unto death. I found." That, for Paul, was the moment of discovery. It was agonizing moment. It was a heart-rending discovery but it was very necessary because it led him directly to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Men and women, the law can be summed up in this, I know it can be summed up of the law with all your heart, soul, mind, strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Those are the two great commandments of the law, the positives. But all the prohibitions of the law can be summed up in this: thou shalt not covet. That one commandment lays bare the lustfulness of the human heart and by its very statement, stirs the lust of the heart to rise in rebellion against God and his law. But that commandment which shows God to be holy and this his standard to be just, thereby slays you and shows you your total depravity. Brings you face-to-face with the wrath of God. You cannot come face-to-face with God's law and know it to be holy and just without realizing the wages of sin is death and the law brings you face-to-face with hell.

And in doing so, it shuts you up a righteousness that is outside of yourself. If this is the standard I must reach and believe me, no one will ever be in heaven whose righteousness does not fully and completely satisfy everything demanded by the law of God. If that's the standard and I can never reach it, is there no hope? Ah, that's the gospel message. Jesus Christ the righteous one has lived in our place fulfilling the precept of God's law. He has died in our place, paying the penalty of God's law. He lives for our justification. Bless God tonight, he is able to save to the uttermost and to clothe the guilty sinner who believes in him with the robe of his perfect righteousness so that that law is again a law unto life. No longer an agent of our condemnation but now witness for our acceptance with God because of the righteousness of Christ.

O, I trust tonight that the law will really hit you. It may not be a nice experience for the moment, but it's essential to lay your pride low in the dust, to get you beyond the shallow surface religion that gives you just enough religious knowledge to stop the mouths of

those who would dare to witness to you of Christ. Gives you cover from the preacher of the gospel, but leaves you a vile and guilty and unchanged sinner. And in your heart, in your heart, you know that there's neither love for God nor his law nor his gospel.

May God's law hit you tonight and then may it take you by the hand and lift you out of the dust and take you where it took the great John Bunyan, to that place somewhat standing and fix your eye upon that center tree and show you the righteous one, Jesus Christ, the mighty to save.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's all pray.

In a moment, the meeting will be over. We'll have no closing hymn. We've sang Robert Murray M'Cheyne's testimony in that hymn tonight.

I once was a stranger to grace and to God,
I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,
Jehovah Tsidkenu (The Lord my Righteousness) was nothing to me.

I trust tonight, you have come to see your need of Christ as your righteousness and that without him as your righteousness you can never be saved. You need to be delivered from the law as a covenant of works. You need to get Christ and receive him in the terms of the covenant of grace. Dr. Barrett and Mr. Graham and I are here as your servants for Christ's sake, if we can help you to the Savior. We plead with you to whisk away to heaven. May God bless you, bless his Word to your heart and truly bring you to Christ.

Father in heaven, write thy Word upon every heart and, O God, tonight we pray for the entrance of thy Word which giveth light. We pray, Lord, that thou will expose sin for what it really is, depravity in all its depths. Gracious God and Father, we pray tonight that thou will take men and women and young people beyond a shallow surface profession of religion that is an insult to God, a blasphemy to Christ and a delight to the devil. Lord, we pray that the law of God will do its work this evening. That men and women feeling the awfulness and the guilt of sin will see the beauty and the glory in the righteousness of Christ and come and wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Answer prayer, we ask of thee. Part us now with thy blessing. Keep us in thy fear. Be our abiding portion both tonight and evermore. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.