

In our previous passage, Paul has shown us that we died to the law so that we might be married to Christ (6:4-5). We are no longer bound by the law or subject to its judgment for Christ fulfilled the law and took our punishment (6:22-23). In Him, our debt was paid, and our righteousness is of Him. Now we serve God in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (7:6). One might conclude that the law was actually evil. Our passage for today refutes that kind of thinking and explains why the law is necessary and that it is absolutely holy and good. **The problem lies in us, not in the law. We need to be delivered and empowered** (6:11-12).

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is 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." Here is our third "by no means". The first two were in the last chapter, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" and "Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" Now Paul presents another false conclusion. Shall we say that the law is sin? By no means! Now he's going to help us understand why we needed the law and the purpose that it serves.

First, it teaches us what acts are sinful. Paul says that if he had not read, "You shall not covet," he would never have known it to be sinful. The nature we are born with says it is perfectly fine. The unredeemed life that is not awakened to the Spirit will justify any and every sin (unless it is committed against us). We need the law to tell us that it is wrong to have any other God than our Creator (Exodus 20:3). We need it to clarify for us that adultery is wrong (Exodus 20:14). We need it to let us know that we shouldn't think of God as an image that we can make with our hands (Exodus 20:4), etc.

Now we know those things are wrong. The effect God intended upon the nation of Israel was to have such blessed lives by walking in the ways of God that the world would desire to know the God they worshiped. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to tell them what had happened. *²³ But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'* *²⁴ But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.* Jeremiah 7:23-24 (ESV) They refused to hear His voice or obey His commands. So instead of going forward into what would have gone well with them, they went backward and became like the nations around them.

So if the law is good and leads us forward, why did we have to die to it? Paul explains, *⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.* It was sin in us that is the problem.

Commented [notes1]: Romans 6:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Commented [notes2]: Romans 6:22-23 (ESV)

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 7:6 (ESV)

⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Commented [notes4]: Romans 6:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Commented [notes5]: Exodus 20:3 (ESV)

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

Commented [notes6]: Exodus 20:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

Commented [notes7]: Exodus 20:4 (ESV)

⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

It seized upon the opportunity of the commandment saying, "You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17)!" Before Paul read that, he did not know it was rebellion toward God to covet. His conscience may have bothered him a bit, but upon reading the command he found himself guilty but proceeding anyway. Before he read the command it was a perfectly normal act. Now it is rebellion toward God.

Commented [notes8]: Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

It is common today to hear the excuse that if it is normal behavior or desire then it can't be wrong. All kinds of evil things are normal desires in the heart of fallen man (Jeremiah 17:9). Some want to kill, while many want to commit adultery, and others get a thrill from stealing. We put people in prison for doing things that are normal desires for them and then argue that having a natural desire makes it OK. The cons that are serving time for investment fraud thought it was a normal desire to rip people off so they could live lavish lifestyles. That contradiction is what we should expect from a fallen world. I find this world's reasoning to be increasingly nonsensical.

Commented [notes9]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

You will often hear that it is impossible to legislate morality. All laws are an attempt to legislate morality. Our problem is finding the line between protecting the public from immoral behavior while letting people have the freedom to choose to sin in ways that does not harm the public. Our society is struggling to find that fine line, and at the same time saying ridiculous things like normal desires are healthy and you can't legislate morality. *Apart from the law sin lies dead.* They will never find the line they are looking for because many of the law makers are fallen sinners.

⁹ *I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.* The very law that Paul had held so highly and thought he kept to the letter (Philippians 3:6) showed him he was a sinner. Applied by the Spirit to Paul's heart it killed him. While striving to be Mr. Perfect, Paul knew in his heart that he was a sinner. It reminds me of Luther's hours long confessions. The more you understand God's law, the more you realize how sinful you are.

Commented [notes10]: Philippians 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

¹⁰ *The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.* The law says that if we will meditate upon it that we will have life and flourish, but when we look into our heart while doing so we find sin. Meditate on any law of God and you'll see the ungodly detours your thought life can take. The law says that the soul that sins shall die. If I think about not coveting, I'm reminded that in my heart there are those things I covet. Since I know it is rebellion against God to do so, I try to stop, but in my own power I can't. Paul is shocked to find the commandments he thought he kept revealed his heart to be sinful. He was not perfect, so he tried harder.

¹¹ *For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* It wasn't the commandment's fault. Sin seized upon the opportunity the commandment provided and deceived me. It commands me to obey. My pride says I can (3:10). I will. If I am determined enough, I will prevail. But then my next failure is

Commented [notes11]: Romans 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;

like being killed by the law. Failure after failure in attempts to keep the law begins to convince me something is wrong with me. That is the main purpose of the law, for that leads us to the One who was perfect. That recognition of sin causes us to seek a Savior (Galatians 3:24).

¹² *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* It wasn't the fault of the law that shined a spotlight on my sinful soul. That is a good spotlight (John 16:7-9). It is consistent with the nature of God, holy and righteous. It is a good thing to know that sin is not just actions but is also the evil desires and attitudes of the heart. God wants us to know how hopeless we are without the life of Christ in us.

Paul never tells us to get rid of the law or lose respect for it. The believer loves the law, but is married to Christ, the living Word (John 1:14). The believer values the law, but is led of the Spirit as to its application (8:14). In an intimate relationship with him we avoid the cold application of the law void of the Spirit (2Corinthians 3:6).

¹³ *Did 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 beyond measure.* Here is "by no means!" number four. The purpose of the law isn't to slay us. The death in me is the result of sin in my heart, not the law. The law just exposes my sin which is killing me. Sin used the law, it used the fact that my heart is aware of the law and yet doesn't keep it to really make me guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt. I imagine the increasing turmoil in Paul's heart leading up to the encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5). He longed to obey the commands, but the life of these Christians was so much more vibrant a relationship with God than his own (10:19). How could that be?

You see, if I was in that ignorant state of not knowing what God commanded, sin would still be sin, but simply a part of the old nature inherited from Adam. But if I read the Bible and know God's will and still rebel; that is sinful beyond measure. Even when I try to meditate on the good law of God, my heart will desire that which is contrary to the law. Paul felt he was alive before knowing the law, but once he knew the law, it was always condemning him to death (6:23).

In regards to the following verses, Hughes tells us that "This section of Romans seven has known centuries of controversy: who is their subject? There are basically three views. The first is that this passage describes a *non-Christian* Pharisee under the Law (this was the view of the Greek Fathers). The second view is that it describes a *normal Christian* (the view of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin). The third position is that it describes a *carnal Christian*."¹⁴ Hughes took the second view. I differ from him because of the language Paul uses. Hughes argues that this is all in the first person, Paul's account of his journey in Christ. I would argue along with the Greek Fathers that when he talks about sin in his members, he has already written of yielding his members to

Commented [notes12]: Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Commented [notes13]: John 16:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;

Commented [notes14]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [notes15]: Romans 8:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Commented [notes16]: 2 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Commented [notes17]: Acts 9:3-5 (ESV)

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Commented [notes18]: Romans 10:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

Commented [notes19]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [notes20]: Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word - Romans: Righteousness from Heaven.

God (6:13). How can he say he is sold under sin when he has argued for the purchased redemption through the blood of Christ (5:21)? But most importantly, chapter eight is a complete contrast with this chapter. Hughes and MacArthur see both at the same time, a continual battle with our old nature and the Spirit, sometimes getting the victory and at other times defeated. But Paul's antidote to the power of the flesh is crucifying it with Christ (6:6). He tells us to always consider it dead (6:11). He tells us in chapter eight that we are more than conquerors (8:37). With that in mind let us continue.

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. This is the verse that convinces me that this is about the Pharisee Paul who loved the law but knew in his heart he couldn't obey it. In striving to uphold the law he ended up killing Christians (Acts 22:4). If the law is spiritual and I am fleshly, the two will never meet. The law will never change, so I must become spiritual or I will never avoid the penalty of the law.

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Saul/Paul could see that sin lived in him as a power that he was unable to stop. It was his master (6:14). As a good Jew he hated breaking the law. What could he do?

I can certainly understand why many believers would see this as the normal Christian life. They live in Romans seven instead of moving on to Romans eight. They are like the Pharisee Saul. They know the do's and don'ts but have never moved on to a relationship with Jesus, walking in the Spirit, listening to His leading, and letting go and letting Him reign in them. Call it full surrender, the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 1:5), sanctification (1Thessalonians 5:23), or whatever you wish, it is letting Jesus be the Master of your life and surrendering control to Him. But I'm getting ahead of our passage.

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Once again, I can't see the Apostle Paul who was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit tell us he is unable to do what is right. Verse 20 is just like verse 17. When we are convicted of sin and want to stop, but can't, we know we are a slave of sin. It has mastered us. Paul said in 6:14 that sin shall not be your master. Some would argue that Paul would not say he had the desire to do what was right unless he was born-again. Many unsaved people want to do what is right. Religious people that don't know the Lord want to help the poor. They can desire to obey the commandments to earn their way to heaven. They can desire to be free from addictions. All that is good, but they don't have the power to do it without

Commented [notes21]: Romans 6:13 (ESV)

¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Commented [notes22]: Romans 5:21 (ESV)

²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Commented [notes23]: Romans 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Commented [notes24]: Romans 6:11 (ESV)

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Commented [notes25]: Romans 8:37 (ESV)

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Commented [notes26]: Acts 22:4 (ESV)

⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,

Commented [notes27]: Romans 6:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Commented [notes28]: Acts 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Commented [notes29]: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

a new Master taking over (Acts 1:8). The repeated frustration of inability drives us to surrender to Him.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. As a Pharisee, Paul loved the Scriptures. He just couldn't live them in his heart. There was this master within him that he could not break free from. He wrote about it in chapter six (6:16). It's the very nature we inherited from Adam. It permeates our being. It's in our blood (Leviticus 17:11). This is life without the Lordship of Christ and applying the power of the Holy Spirit! Unfortunately it tends to be true in many Christians' lives.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. All this leads up to this climactic question. How can I escape the sin in my very being? Paul is torn by this conflict. He is crying out for the answer. Until we find it, we are a wretch! You can't say that after you have come to Christ you are a wretched person waiting to be delivered! Waiting to be free from the body of corruption, yes! But that is not what Paul is asking. He is asking who will deliver him from the body that is sold as a slave to sin. Thanks be to God that He sent Jesus to deliver you and me! He is now "our Lord" our new Master who gives us the power of the Spirit to hear and yield to His leading.

The tag line of serving God with the mind but with the flesh the law of sin is a summary of what he experienced before Jesus, not the result of being in Jesus.² Otherwise it would not be deliverance. And he isn't talking about when you die. That is the ultimate deliverance from the constraints of this body (Philippians 3:21). He's talking about now! We'll see that clearly as we study chapter eight.

Certainly believers who love the Lord can differ on this interpretation as I have already pointed out regarding commentators that I respect. However, consider what we are saying if we take this as the normal Christian life, with our mind we serve the law of God but with our flesh we serve the law of sin. That is saying the normal Christian life is to be a hypocrite. That is saying the power of the Holy Spirit is inadequate to transform and sanctify us (8:29). Paul contradicts that interpretation in every one of his letters and in the next few verses of Romans. Of course we can stumble and ignore the Spirit, but that should not be our normal state. Be sure to be here in the coming weeks to find out how we are enabled to walk in continual victory.

Questions

- 1 What are 3 ways the chapter is interpreted?
- 2 What is the purpose of the law?

Commented [notes30]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Commented [notes31]: Romans 6:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Commented [notes32]: Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Commented [notes33]: Wuest's Romans in the Greek New Testament agrees.

Commented [notes34]: Philippians 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Commented [notes35]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- 3 What is going forward?
- 4 Is "normal" OK?
- 5 What is the struggle in making laws?
- 6 Where does failure to be good lead us?
- 7 How does the commandment bring death?
- 8 What was Saul's dilemma?
- 9 What does it take to break free from sin's enslavement?
- 10 To what does the final sentence refer?