

Caught in the Act (Part 3)
Romans 7:7-13
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Several years ago, I received a summons for jury duty, yes that both joy and dread. It was for a criminal court in Fort Worth. I, as it turned out, from the general pool that was assembled, I was selected as one of the final potential jurors, a smaller group out of which then the final 12 would be selected. The defendant was accused of driving under the influence of alcohol. When it was the defense attorney's time to question the pool of jurors, he began not by asking questions but rather by explaining the Texas legal code on the issue of drunk driving. When he had finished explaining the code as it currently is written, he then began to openly question the law, and, in fact, he went on to suggest that it desperately needed to be changed because of what he saw as ambiguities and inequities in the law itself.

Now, once he had finished his diatribe against the law, he started asking jurors one by one if they shared his perspective. Of course, it was obvious what he was doing, trying to select those jurors that would be most likely to respond to his pleas on behalf of his client, but eventually as he asked juror after juror, he came to juror number 14, me. And he asked if I agreed with him that the law was unfair and should be changed. Now, let me first of all say in my defense that I did not craft my response to get out of jury duty. I just want you to know that. But I did suspect that my response would, in fact, have that result, because when he asked me if I thought the law was fair or if it should be changed, this is what I said, and I didn't say it in a sarcastic way, I said it as best I could as graciously and humbly as I could, "Sir, it's my understanding that as jurors we are not here to sit in judgment on the law, but to decide whether your client broke the law as it currently is written." That's when I was told that my service would not be needed. And I can't say that I left sad of heart about that.

Now clearly, that defense attorney's defense of his client was going, in part, to sit in judgment on the law. And that's not uncommon. It's not uncommon for people caught in the act, in the act of a criminal act, to blame everything but themselves. And sometimes they even blame the law. There have been times when an inmate who's been proven guilty and sentenced to death, just before his execution, has blamed others or even the legal system for his impending death; he refuses to acknowledge that his own crime brought the sentence of death.

Now, it is exactly that kind of blame shifting that Paul refuses to let sinners do in the passage that we are studying together. In Romans 7 Paul is addressing the issue of God's law and that's because back in chapter 6, you remember, and verse 14, he made this statement, "you are not under law but under grace," and he knew that passing comment was going to invite a number of serious questions. So, in chapter 7 he returns to the issue of God's moral law, God's timeless

law that reflects His own character, that is summarized in what we call the Ten Commandments. He begins in chapter 7 verses 1 through 6 by explaining our death to the law. As believers, we have died to the law, that is, as a way of earning our way into God's favor and to the condemnation and sentence that the law demands of us. We looked at those verses in detail.

In verses 7 through 13 Paul defends the law. Here we have Paul's defense of the law. He says, the law is not the problem. That's the paragraph we're studying together. Let me read it to you again to remind you of the flow of its context. Romans 7 beginning in verse 7,

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Now, before Christmas, we studied the first objection that Paul anticipates and answers in this text. You can see the structure of the passage is very clear. In verse 7 there's an objection he anticipates at the beginning of the verse, "Is the Law sin?" And then he responds, "May it never be!" And then he answers it. Down in verse 13 there is a second objection. The same basic form, he repeats the objection, "did that which is good become a cause of death for me?" He responds, "May it never be!" And then in the rest of verse the 13 he answers it.

Now, before Christmas, we studied that first objection that Paul anticipated and answered. Let me just briefly remind you of it. His overarching point in verses 7 through 12 is that God's moral law doesn't cause you to sin. The objection is in verse 7 and it's essentially this, Paul, your teaching leads to the logical conclusion that God's law is actually evil and causes people to sin. Paul says, absolutely not! His answer comes in verses 7 to 12 and he says, no, the truth is, our inherent sinfulness causes our sin, our sin nature, our sinful heart, is what causes our sin. Now, as he unfolds that he begins by talking about the real purpose of the law for unbelievers. And he says there are two basic purposes, one, to identify what is sin and two, to prove to me that I am a sinner. So, both to show me those acts that are sinful, thoughts, words, that are sinful,

but then to show me that I have sinned in those ways, that's the real purpose of the law for unbelievers.

And then he goes on to describe the real cause of our sin. In verse 8 he makes a, sort of, summary statement of this cause. Verse 8 says, "But sin," meaning not the acts of sin we commit but our inherent sinfulness, our sin nature, "taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind." There's a summary statement. He goes on then to describe the process, the middle of verse 8 down through verse 11. He talks about before the commandment came, before Paul understood the tenth commandment about coveting, he says, sin was dead. He means simply that he was unaware of it. He was not conscious of his sin. He thought he was doing just fine with God. And he was alive, he thought that he was spiritually alive, that he and God were good.

You hear a lot of people talk that way, you know, God and I are good, we're fine. This is what Paul thought too, "but when the commandment came," verse 9, that is, when the tenth commandment against coveting came in full force in its understanding and conviction in his conscience, "when the commandment came," notice, two things happened. After the commandment came, first of all, "sin became alive," he says in verse 9. Before he really understood the command not to covet he had never fully sensed the power of sin in him, but when the law said don't covet, he became aware of the sin that was already in his heart. And not only did he become aware of the sin that was already there, but he suddenly, because of his sin nature, had an overwhelming desire to covet all kinds of things. He could no longer ignore sin in his life, it "became alive," it came to life and he says, "I died," verse 9. In other words, all of his self-confidence, all of his self-righteousness, all of his spiritual pride when he thought he and God were good, that's not true anymore, he died.

Now, in verse 12 then, having explained the process sin took in his life, he comes to the real character of God's law. "So then," verse 12, "the Law," the overall law of God, the moral law of God, "is holy," it's without any taint of sin, it's not the problem, "and the commandment," that is, the commandment against coveting he's been talking about, "is holy and righteous and good." So, Paul's answer to the first objection was, God's moral law didn't cause my sin, my own inherent sinfulness did. And that's true of you as well. God's law was not the problem in your life.

Now today, we come to verse 13 and to a second objection to Paul's teaching on the law, which he anticipates and which he feels he needs to address as he defends God's law. And this second objection, this second response, could be summarized this way, God's moral law doesn't cause your death either, doesn't cause your sin and it doesn't cause your death. Verse 13, "Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin," again, the idea behind that word sin is his sin nature, your sin nature, "in order that it might be

shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.”

Now, just as we did with the first objection, I want you to see, first of all, the objection itself. And essentially the objection is this, Paul your teaching about the law, when you say we’re no longer under the law, when you say that we’ve been freed from the law, we’re under grace, and that that the law brought our death, you’re saying that God’s law is the problem, it caused death. Verse 13, “Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me?” “That which is good,” of course, refers back to verse 12, where we just heard that the commandment about coveting was good. So, “did that which is good,” God’s moral law, is that what caused my death? Now, what kind of death is Paul talking about here? So far in Romans he’s talked about spiritual death, he’s talked about physical death, he’s talked about eternal death. What death did the law cause here? Or at least his opponents are saying that’s what he’s teaching.

Well, in context, Paul has to be referring to the death of his spiritual self-confidence, his spiritual self-reliance, his self-righteousness as a Pharisee, because that’s the death he’s been talking about. Notice back in verse 9, “when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died.” Remember? We studied that. Verse 10, the commandment “proved to result in death for me.” Verse 11, “sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, killed me.” He’s still talking about the same kind of death. So, Paul is asking this question, listen carefully, he’s saying, is the accusation against me and my teaching true? Am I really teaching, as some say I do, that it’s legitimate to blame God’s law for my spiritual problems and especially for the reality that I’m not right with God? Is that really the law’s fault?

And that brings us to Paul’s answer in the second half of verse 13. He begins, as he did before, “May it never be!” God forbid, of course the law isn’t the problem. “Rather it was sin.” He says, our sin nature is revealed in its true nature and its deadly character is demonstrated, in how it produces sin through God’s good law. Now, let’s break that down and look at it. Paul answers, really, in two specific ways. The first part of his answer is this, God’s moral law reveals the true nature of our inheritance sinfulness, God’s moral law reveals the true nature of our inherent sinfulness. He says in verse 13, it wasn’t the law that was the cause of my death to my confidence, my self-righteousness, “Rather it was sin,” that was behind this process, “in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good.”

He says, the bottom line is this, it was sin. The fault lies with my inherent sinfulness. Paul says, your spiritual problems trace back, just as with me, to your own sin nature, your fallenness. So, what did our fallenness do? Verse 13, “it effected my death through that which is good.” My sin nature used the law to completely destroy my self-reliance, my self-righteousness, my self-confidence that God and I were okay. But this is what God intended, this is how God designed the law to function. Notice the purpose clauses in verse 13, “in order that,” and later in the verse,

“so that.” These purpose clauses identify God’s purpose in allowing sin, your sin nature, to use God’s law in this way, just like with Paul.

Notice the first purpose clause, verse 13, “in order that it might be shown to be sin.” God’s moral law shows us what attitudes and actions are sin. In other words, you know when you read the Ten Commandments what you should and shouldn’t do. It shows you what sin is, but it does so much more. It also shows you, just like with Paul, your sinfulness. When you really come to understand God’s requirements, it shows you how sinful you really are; the law is like a mirror.

You know, this morning, most of us, as we were getting ready, and if you didn’t, you know, maybe you should have, but most of us, as we were getting ready, stood in front of a mirror and we looked at ourselves. And we looked at ourselves up close to make sure there wasn’t something that needed to be addressed. That’s what God’s moral law does. It’s like a mirror. And when you really see it, when you really get it, you see yourself. God’s moral law does for my soul what shining a black light in a supposedly clean bathroom does. Try that little experiment. It reveals all that is disgusting in my soul and life when I thought I was clean. That’s what God’s moral law does. I’m thinking I’m looking pretty good, but then I look at the moral law and it’s like a black light that reveals everything.

The law functions like glasses. Some of us are, you know, can see fairly well without our glasses, others of you couldn’t find your way to the alarm clock without your glasses. Glasses enable us to see things as they really are. The law of God is like that, it enables us to focus clearly on ourselves and our hearts and our sin and to see it clearly.

Another illustration I would say, excuse me, the moral law of God is like turning up the light in a dimly lit room. I kind of like, in the evening, you know, the lights down and kind of subdued. My wife, on the other hand, likes them like bright, like the midday sun. And the benefit of my way is you just don’t see, I don’t see the dust on my desk when the lights are lower. When I turn the lights up, it’s there; I don’t know how it appeared at that moment, but it did. That’s what God’s moral law is like, it’s like turning on the light in full force onto your soul and it allows you to see the dirt that was there in your soul before, but was invisible. For Paul, the light came on in his soul through the tenth commandment against covetousness, as we saw in verses 7 through 12.

Covetousness, it doesn’t seem like such a serious sin, does it? This past week Sheila and I were talking about the fact that most people today so lack an understanding of God’s law that covetousness isn’t even considered a sin. In fact, there are entire social media platforms where you can list and post pictures of everything you don’t have, but desperately covet. And listen, okay, don’t hear me going farther than I’m going here, there’s nothing wrong with having a bucket list, you know a list of experiences that you want to get around to if God in His providence allows. But let’s just be honest, there are many people who will not be content with their life unless they get to check everything off their bucket list. Covetousness isn’t even a sin in our culture.

But it was understanding that, and that it was a sin, that opened up Paul's eyes to his self-righteous Pharisaical heart; he saw the reality of his sin. For Paul, sometime before the Damascus road, he really came to see his inherent sinfulness when he came to understand the tenth commandment and the sin of coveting. And he saw how that commandment, when he understood it, it not only showed him coveting was already in his heart, but it awakened all kinds of additional coveting, just like the law always does to our sinful hearts, because we see our autonomy threatened.

This is how fallenness always works. Let me give you a couple of examples. The law says worship God and God only. How does our sinfulness respond? Our sinfulness uses that command to encourage the relentless pursuit of idolatry. That's why John Calvin called the human heart "an idol factory." We can make an idol out of anything. God commands us to pursue His glory above all things, our fallenness uses that command to prompt us not to pursue God's glory but instead to join the relentless pursuit of our own glory. God gave us, as human beings, the wonderful gift of sexuality and He regulated it's use solely in marriage for our good. But man's fallenness uses that good law to awaken the desire for all kinds of sexual sins and aberrations, including, frankly, the gross displays of sexual intimidation and harassment that have been uncovered in recent months. This is what the law does combined with our sinfulness. It's not really the law, it's our sinfulness using the law.

God created human authority, the principle of people being in places of authority over other people, and he placed man as the leader of his family, leadership that's supposed to be loving and sacrificial, Christ-like leadership. But for many men their inherent sinfulness converts that command into a domineering harsh dictatorship. God commands wives to submit to their husband's leadership in the home, but for many their sinfulness plays off of that command and, in some cases, their husband's abdication of leadership, and encourages them to usurp the role God assigned to their husband and to take it for themselves.

Those are just a few of the countless examples we could give about how our sinfulness warps and twists the law of God and leads us into sin. When our fallenness responds like that, when it manages to turn God's moral law into more sin in our lives, that's when, Paul's point is, we begin to see just how bad our true spiritual condition is, how bad am I if my sinfulness can take what is good and holy and right, God's law, and use it to drive me to sin? How bad must my heart be? But we come to see it, when this happens. It's what happened to Paul. And if you're a Christian, this happened to you.

Let me ask you a question? How do you respond to your sin? If you're honest with yourself, you know you sin. How do you respond to your sin? Do you treat it as an aberration? Well, yes, I know I sin, but I'm not a bad person, it's not really me. Do you console yourself that you do more good things than you do bad and, you know, it kind of outweighs it? Do you blame God? Do you blame others? Do you even blame God's law? If you've truly come to

understand God's moral law and what it demands of you, perfect love of God, perfect love of others, you understand your true sinfulness, and if you don't, you're not a Christian. If this sounds foreign to you, if your own heart says, well, I'm not that bad, then I promise you, based on the authority of Scripture itself, you are not a believer, whatever your profession may be, because true believers have come to this place just as Paul did.

If you've truly come to understand God's moral law, you understand, not just the fact that you sin, every unbeliever will admit that, or most of them will admit that they sin, no, you have come to see that you are a sinner through and through. As David put it in Psalm 51:5, as he was confessing his own sin of adultery and murder, you remember what he said? He took full responsibility. He said, you know what God, this isn't an aberration, I'm not saying, well, that just wasn't me, I just don't do those kinds of things. No, he says, "I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." "I was brought forth," I was born, "in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me." You hear what he is saying? Is this what you say? Before I ever committed my first sin as a human being, I was a sinner. That's what David was saying. God's moral law reveals the true nature of our inherent sinfulness, that's the first part of his answer.

Now, the second part of Paul's answer here in verse 13 is this, God's moral law reveals the deadly character of our inherent sinfulness, not only its true nature, that it is sin, but its deadly character. Notice verse 13, "so that," here's another purpose clause, "so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful." The Greek word translated utterly is a word that Paul likes and uses often. It's often translated as surpassing. The word means exceeding, extraordinary, extreme. Now do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying, God's moral law shows the extreme, extraordinary, sinfulness of our sin nature. How? How does it show how bad it really is? By defining what God demands of me, the law awakens my sin nature, and my sin nature turns my sin into conscious willful rebellion against God and His law. In other words, it gets even worse.

Go back to chapter 4. You remember? Chapter 4 verse 15, Paul says, "the Law brings about wrath," and then he adds this, "but where there is no law, there is no violation." He doesn't mean that if you don't have a written copy of God's law you're not really sinning, he's already made that clear in the early chapters, that even pagans who don't have the law sin. No, what he's saying is, it's not the same level of sin when you don't know the law, as when you come to know the law, then it becomes rebellion.

Let me give you an example. A few months ago, it became illegal to text while driving in Texas. Now, some of you may still not know that, but that's true. At least I think there are people who don't know that, if I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing on the roads as I drive. But what if, shortly after the law took effect, a police officer pulled you over for texting, and at that point you could honestly say, "Officer, I'm sorry, I didn't know about that law," and imagine for a moment

that he let you off with a warning, he says, “Well, listen, that’s a law, it just came into effect yesterday and you need not to text again.” He warned you and sends you off.

Now, if that officer caught you the very next day texting again, understand, you would be no guiltier of breaking the law than you were the previous day. You broke the law then, you’re breaking the law that day. But it’s worse. Why is it worse? It’s worse because the second time you were in rebellious defiance of the law that you now knew. That’s what knowing God’s law does in our case, it shows the deadly character of sinfulness. Our sin, before, now becomes defiant rebellion against God our Creator. Douglas Moo writes, “Sin is always bad, but it becomes worse, even more sinful, when it involves deliberate violation of God’s good will.” The law helps us to see just how utterly sinful sin is.

Turn over to 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy 1. Paul begins this letter by addressing a problem with false teaching that was there at the church in Ephesus where Timothy pastored. There apparently were Judaizers, those who taught that in order to be saved you need to keep the law, the Law of Moses, and you needed to be circumcised. And he says, verse 7, “they want to be teachers of the Law, even though they don’t understand either what they’re saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.” They’re all wrong about the law. Verse 8, so let me tell you about the law, “we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully.” How do you use it lawfully? Well, verse 9,

realizing the fact that the law wasn’t created, [*God didn’t give the law,*] for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, immoral men, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

He says, listen, the law was given to show people their sin, that’s the proper use of the law.

Now, this passage goes on to explain how the proper use of the law devastated Paul, not just brought him to see his coveting, as we see in Romans 7, but on the Damascus road it brought him to understand that he had broken all of God’s commandments. Look at verse 13, he says, “I was a formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.” When he met Jesus Christ on the Damascus road he realized, first of all, that he had broken the essence of the first four commandments dictating our responsibility toward God, because he was a blasphemer of God, because he blasphemed His Son, saying that he was, in fact, not His Son.

And he came to realize that he had broken the last six of the Ten Commandments that have to do with our responsibility toward others because, notice in verse 13, he says, “I was a persecutor and a violent aggressor.” You see, it was the law that showed Paul, before the Damascus road, that he was a sinner because of his coveting, and it was the law at the moment of his conversion, as he’s confronted with Jesus Christ, that showed him he’d broken it all, because he had broken

the commands about God, he had broken the commands about others, through his behavior toward the church.

God's moral law shows us the deadly character of our inherent sinfulness, how utterly short we fall of God's standard and just how bad sin really is, because now we know when we sin it's not just that we do some bad things, it's that we know what God our Creator demands and we do it anyway; it is defiant rebellion. This is what Romans 7 is teaching us.

Now go back to Romans 7 and I want to briefly summarize for you the key points that Paul has made in the first half of Romans 7. I want to bring it all together, everything we've learned in the first 13 verses. Lord willing, next Sunday we will begin in verse 14 in that amazing passage that so many of us find joy and comfort in, but I want to finish up today by, sort of, drawing together what we've learned in the first half of Romans 7. And I'll do so in four basic principles.

Number one, God's law is good and is not the cause of your spiritual problems. God's law is good and is not the cause of your spiritual problems. Remember, Paul is defending God's moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments. He says, it's holy and it's fair, it's just, and it's for our benefit, it's good. The reason God's law doesn't and can't save us is not the law but our own sin nature. Our real problem is never God's law, but rather our own inherent sinfulness. So, don't try to blame the law or anyone or anything else for your own sinful conduct, for your own criminal behavior. This is the message that we learn.

This is so common. This past week I read an interesting article. After Ohio resumed executions in 1999, the state began documenting prisoners' last days, documenting them down to every minute and second. The article says, "prison employees, who volunteer for the job and are not identified, compile a log, with occasional spelling or grammatical errors, at a computer. They sit at a desk directly across from the 12 foot by 14 foot holding cell where condemned inmates spend their last day, 17 steps from the death chamber. Some of the logs," the article goes on to say, "show inmates accepting responsibility for their crimes," and it details some of that. "Other logs indicate little remorse," and it gives an example. "A guard asked inmate Adremy Dennis if he needed anything. He replied, 'A chopper out of here.' Convicted of shooting an Akron man in 1994, Dennis," ready for this, "blamed the victim for disobeying his order not to move during the robbery." So, to the very point of death itself, he died blaming not himself for breaking the law and robbery, not himself for having a weapon, not himself for shooting an unarmed man, but the victim for moving when he told him not to move.

Blame shifting started in the garden with Eve and it is now a pervasive cancer in the human soul. Let me ask you to ask yourself this question, do you blame anyone or anything but yourself for your sins? In God's courtroom, don't even think about blaming anyone but yourself. And certainly, don't try to blame God's law. No, the opposite is true, to have any hope at all you must completely accept the blame for your sins. That's what Paul wants us to learn in the first half of chapter 7.

A second key point in the first half of this chapter is this, attempting to keep God's law will never make you or anyone else right with God. It will never justify you. It will never set you right with God. It will never produce righteousness in you. You will never earn your way into God's holy presence by keeping the law. Sadly, this is what the cults teach. This is what false forms of Christianity teach. This is what false religion teaches. They all teach exactly that. Everything but the Scripture teaches, you need to be good, you need to try to do good, you need to earn your acceptance with God.

But when you understand what God requires of you, just like Paul, he was taught his whole life, he had imbibed his whole life, yes, it's keeping the law, that's what will make me right with God, but when he came to really understand God's law, and to measure himself and his conduct against that law, he and you will eventually come to the realization that your best efforts will never earn heaven. As one author says, "Our real problem is not the law, but sin. The law cannot save us because we cannot keep it. And we cannot keep it because of indwelling sin." Paul wants us to understand, listen, don't you dare put your hope of heaven in keeping God's law, you'll never ever make it.

Number three, the third way to summarize the first half of this chapter, although God's law can't save, cannot save, it is a crucial part of the gospel message. Paul did that, right? He included the law, he included sin, he included judgment, as a large part of the gospel he preached. You see that in chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 20. Paul says, I'm going to tell you about the gospel I preach, and then he spends three chapters talking about sin and law and judgment.

Why is the law important to the gospel? Because God's moral law serves several vital functions in preparing us and preparing others to receive the gospel. Let me give them to you. Here are the functions it serves. Number one, it identifies not only the words and actions that are sin, but even the thoughts and attitudes that are sin. It identifies sin. Number two, it makes our guilt, as we saw just a moment ago, even worse by turning our sin into overt rebellion against God. Number three, it legally condemns us. We're not talking now about a feeling of guilt, we're talking about legal guilt. It legally condemns us as violators of God's law and sentences us to the only appropriate punishment, eternal hell. This is what the law does. It condemns us, number four, as sinners in our own conscience and convinces us that we have no hope of being right with God by our own merit or efforts. And a fifth and final purpose that the law serves in the gospel message is, it points us to Jesus Christ as the only one who can rescue us from sin and guilt and death and hell. And this is what God intended.

Turn over to Galatians 3, Galatians 3. He's talking about the promise of the gospel that was made to Abraham; the gospel was preached Abraham in that promise that God will bless all the nations through him, that is, through his descendant, the Messiah. How is that going to happen? Well, the gospel explains that, but why then was the law? Why was the law added? Verse 19,

“Why the Law then?” If God made a gospel promise to Abraham, why was the law added? Well,

It was added because of transgressions, [*as we’ve been seeing in Romans,*] having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed, [*that is, the Messiah, Jesus Himself,*] would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the law contrary then to the gospel promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, [*if that could ever happen*] then righteousness would indeed have been based on the law [*God gave*].

Nothing wrong with the law. But that wasn’t its purpose. Verse 22, here was its purpose,

the Scripture [*that is, the moral law of God,*] has shut up every one under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Verse 24, here it is, not only did the law show us our sin, we’ve seen that, but here was another purpose of the law, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor,” our teacher, our instructor, “to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.” This is what the law does, it shows us our sin, it leaves us hopeless. Well then, if I can’t earn my way into God’s favor, if I can’t earn my way into heaven, what do I do? And the answer is, I believe in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, lived, died, in my place. This is why the law is an important part of the gospel, because it does all of those things.

Can I just say, parents, just give you a little warning here, teach your kids the law of God, but please don’t teach them the law of God as an external set of rules that they can keep just like the Pharisees did, just like Paul did. Instead, teach them the law, but teach God’s law as the devastating comprehensive demands for perfect love and perfect holiness, and point them then to the gospel. Say, you can’t keep that, I can’t keep that, our only hope is the gospel, turn to Christ and be saved.

If you’re not a follower of Jesus Christ but you think you’re pretty good, you think you’ll do okay, that you and God are good, let me just challenge you to go back and listen to the two other messages I taught on this passage. Go listen to the messages, read and think about Romans 3:10-20, Ephesians 2:1-3, and when you do that you will discover that you haven’t kept a single one of the Ten Commandments. You have broken them all, like me and everybody else around you. You have never met God’s standard, not a single moment of your entire life.

God’s moral law, properly understood, will either leave you devastated enough that you will come to Jesus Christ or, if you remain in your rebellion, it will leave you condemned, and it will

leave you deserving of the punishment that is coming, and it will leave you without excuse on the day of judgment – because you know and you live in defiant rebellion against God your Creator. I plead with you even today, recognize the truth about your spiritual condition and let that drive you, be a tutor to lead you to Jesus Christ.

There's one other key point in the first half of Romans 7, fourth and final point he makes, and that is, true followers of Jesus Christ have died to the law. That's the point of the first six verses. The law, God's moral law, no longer has jurisdiction over us. Why? Because our great Representative kept it for us and then He died in our place to completely satisfy the punishment that it demanded of us. Christian, don't ever forget the wonderful message of Romans 7:4. Look at it again, Romans 7:4, "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die," that is, God made you to die, "to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." Do you understand Christian? You died, in the death of Jesus Christ, to the law.

What does that mean? It means that you no longer seek to be made right with God by keeping the law. And it means that you are no longer under the condemnation of the law, that is, the guilty verdict of the law, and the punishment that the law prescribes, eternal hell. That's why verse 1 of chapter 8 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," because you died to the law in Jesus Christ. You were made to die to the law, notice verse 4, "through the body of Christ." You died with Him, your representative, and the law's demands were met in Him, the law's sentence was satisfied in Him, and you, Christian, are free. Don't ever get over the wonder of the gospel. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are amazed by Your grace, we who are so deserving of the worst from You, instead got Your Son and with Him all things. Father, we thank You that You made us to die to the law, to Your righteous, holy, good moral requirements. We died to it in the sense that we no longer have to try to keep it to earn our way into Your favor because Jesus kept it for us. We are no longer under its sentence of eternal death in hell because He suffered it for us.

Father, thank You that we are now joined to another, we are united to Jesus Christ, the One who was raised from death and who is at Your right hand, and now we are able to bear fruit unto good works. Father, we love You and we are astounded by grace. Keep us there. Help us to live in that awareness, in that knowledge. Help us to celebrate that we have died to the law in these ways, and help us to share that message with others.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ. Lord, my mind goes to several that I know of and have prayed for so often. Lord, I pray that You would bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear on their souls, first the law, that they would see their hopelessness if they have to stand before You some day without Jesus Christ. And Father, may their knowledge of their sin, help them to see it, even now, even this week that lies before us, help them to see their sin and the judgment that's coming on that sin, and may that drive them, by Your Spirit's work,

to the grace of Jesus Christ. Lord, bring them to a knowledge of Yourself. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.