

Caught in the Act (Part 2)
Romans 7:7-13
December 3, 2017
Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church

You know, next to the birth of Jesus Christ, that we celebrate in this season, and next to His life and His death, the second most extraordinary event in the history of the church is the conversion of the Apostle Paul. On the Damascus Road, think about this, Paul went from being the chief enemy of the Christian church to being its chief proponent. The most extraordinary thing, I think, about his conversion was the change in his view about Jesus Christ. In Galatians 1 he writes,

I was unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing this, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.”

Or there is 2 Corinthians 4:5 where Paul, remember now his background, where Paul says, “we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Jesus as Lord.” Or there’s Romans 1:1, “Paul, a slave of Messiah Jesus, called to serve as His apostle,” His sent one.

Paul’s view of Christ changed dramatically, but Paul’s view of himself changed as well. In fact, Philippians 3 describes this radical change in his thinking. Keep your finger here in Romans 7, but turn over to Philippians 3 and you can see this radical change that happened in his thinking, both about Christ and himself. In verses 4 through 6 we get a glimpse of Paul before Christ, of Paul the Pharisee, the persecutor of Jesus Christ. He says, “If anyone might have confidence in the flesh,” before my conversion, “I had far more.” This is where Paul’s confidence was, this is how Paul thought about himself before his conversion,

I was circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, [*one of the two faithful tribes,*] a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found [*externally*] blameless.

This was Paul’s view of himself before, but notice verses 7 through 11 show us Paul the Christian, Paul the follower of Jesus Christ,

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Messiah Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, [*the*

Christos, the Messiah,] and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

What a remarkable change in his mindset, his view of himself and his view of Christ.

Now, here's the question I have for you this morning, was there any spiritual work of the Spirit in Paul's heart, preparing him for the gospel, prior to the events that happened on the Damascus Road? In Romans 7 Paul's answer is absolutely yes. And that's what we're studying together. There was a work of the Spirit of God in Paul's heart preparing him for the event that happened in his dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road.

Now, just to remind you of what we're doing here in chapter 7, really the groundwork, the foundation, the need for chapter 7 is back in chapter 6 verse 14, where Paul says, "you are not under law but under grace." Paul knew that that comment, as important as it was, would invite a number of questions, particularly from his Jewish opponents, and so in chapter 7 he focuses entirely on the law. So far, we've looked at the first six verses, which detail our death to the law, as believers we have died to the law, and we studied that together. And then in verses 7 through 13 we're seeing Paul's defense of the law as he defends it against those who would claim that he's teaching that the law itself is somehow flawed. Let's read this paragraph again together, 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, this paragraph breaks into two objections that Paul anticipated and answered. Last week we began to study the first objection and Paul's answer. His overarching point in verses 7 through 12, as he answers this first objection, is this, God's moral law doesn't cause you to sin. In verse 7 we have the objection itself and the objection is that Paul, your teaching leads to the conclusion that God's law is the problem, that it's evil, it's the cause of my sin. Verse 7, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!" And then beginning in the middle of verse

7 and down through verse 12 we have Paul's answer to this objection. And his answer can be summarized this way, it's not the law, our inherent sinfulness is what causes our sin.

He begins his answer to this objection by pointing out the real purpose of the law for unbelievers. And we noted there are two of them here in verse 7. First of all, the law identifies those things that are sinful. The law teaches us what God regards as sinful, but more than that, and this is where Paul is really going, the law showed him and it shows us, that we are sinners, not just what is sin but that we are sinners, that we have violated that law. That's the real purpose of the law, we looked at that at length last week.

Now today, Paul continues his answer by explaining the real cause of our sin, the real cause of our sin. It's not the law, the law serves its purpose. In verses 8 through 11 he explains the real cause of our sin. How did the law show Paul he was a sinner? Specifically, how did the tenth commandment bring Paul to that place, a proud self-righteous Pharisee? Well, verses 8 through 11 show the process that the law followed in using the tenth commandment to prove to Paul that he was a sinner.

Now, he begins here with a summary statement of the cause of our sin, in verse 8. Notice what he says, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind." Notice, Paul says the problem is not the law, the problem is what? Sin. Now, the word sin here doesn't refer to our acts of sin; don't think sins plural. Here he's talking about sin as a controlling power in our lives. He's really talking about the inherent state of sinfulness in which we were all born. He's talking about your fallen sin nature that dominated your life before Christ. He says that's what it was, it was that fallen sinful nature.

Verse 8, "But sin, taking opportunity." The Greek word translated "opportunity" is an interesting word. It was used in secular Greek of a starting point or, when it came to military actions, it was used of a base of operation from which a military launched its attack. That's the idea here. Paul says, his inherent sinfulness, before he was a Christian, his inherent sinfulness, his sin nature, and this is true of you as well, established a base of operation in his life.

And what was that base of operation? Verse 8 says, "through the commandment," "through the commandment." He's still talking here about the tenth commandment, he's talking about the command, "you shall not covet," that he mentioned in verse 7. He says, "But sin," my inherent sinfulness, my sin nature prior to Christ, took a base of operations "through the commandment" itself and "produced in me coveting of every kind." Now, the word produced is a very strong word. It's a word that refers to my sin nature and yours being active and powerful and effective. It didn't just sit there, no, it was at work powerfully in our lives, and notice, to produce in Paul "coveting of every kind," that is, every possible category of coveting.

Paul says, the law came and sin, my sin nature, used that very command, "'You shall not covet,'" as a base of operation to produce in me every imaginable kind of coveting. From coveting of

material possessions and the desire for wealth, to sexual lust, to a craving for power and position and prominence, and on and on and on. Every kind of coveting.

By the way, here we learn something very important about people that are externally religious but have never truly been converted. You see them in the newspaper or read about them on a news site, you know, the Pope or others in false religious systems, maybe the Mormon who lives next door, the Jehovah's Witness that you know, they have this external righteousness. But understand this, like Paul, they may look externally like they keep the law, but there is no good or rightness or holy person who has not been changed by the power of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Inside they are still sinners through and through, that was even true of Pharisees like Paul.

In fact, turn over to Matthew, Matthew 23, these familiar words of our Lord, Matthew 23 and notice verse 25, Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you're hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside," in your heart, "you are full of robbery and self-indulgence." Listen, if you had seen a Pharisee in the first century, that is the last thing you would have thought. You would have thought, there's a pretty good guy, he's righteous, he's holy, he's spiritual. Verse 26,

"You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men."

We all know people like this, right, who have not embraced the true gospel and yet look to us righteous. Jesus says, "inwardly they are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Now, back in Romans 7, the question comes, how exactly does our sin nature use God's law as a base of operations to produce more sin in the us? How did that happen with Paul? How did it happen with us before our conversion? Well, the answer is this, sin, our sin nature, uses God's law, here it is, to stoke our rebellion. How? By persuading us that in God's law our autonomy is threatened, our self-rule. That's the real issue.

In fact, look at chapter 8 of Romans and verse 7. He says, "The mind set on the flesh," an unbelieving mind that is set on the things pertaining to man's fallenness, so this is all unbelievers, "The mind set on the flesh," watch this, "is hostile toward God," hostile, "for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." Here's how it works. The law comes and says, you shall not or you shall, and my sin nature rebels against that. I want to live my own life. I want to do what I want. I don't want anyone telling me what to do.

By the way, that's the primary reason that people who hear the gospel don't come to Christ, it's because they want to be Lord of their own life. Occasionally I'll have someone tell me, well,

I'm just struggling with whether or not Jesus is who He claimed and the truth of the gospel. I think there are occasions when people do genuinely struggle working out the details of that, but most of the time it's not an intellectual problem they have with Jesus in the gospel, it's a moral problem. It's like the crowd that day at the crucifixion who said, "We will not have this man to rule over us." That's the real issue, it stokes our rebellion and it makes what is forbidden attractive. Paul says, my sin nature uses the law itself as a base of operation to excite more sin in me by stoking my rebellious heart and by making what is forbidden more attractive.

Now, in chapter 7, the middle of verse 8 down through verse 11, he lays out the process that this took. These verses are really Paul's spiritual autobiography. They describe his spiritual journey before the Damascus road. But they're not just Paul's spiritual autobiography. If you're in Christ these verses are your spiritual biography as well. This is how the Spirit used the law in your life to bring you to the end of yourself and to drive you to Jesus Christ. Look at it again, verse 8,

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.

Now, I want you to notice, in those verses I just read to you, how Paul divides his spiritual autobiography. Notice, there was a time before the commandment came, then there was the time when the commandment came, and then there was the time after the commandment came. So notice, first of all, before the commandment came, verse 8, "for apart from the Law." Now, Paul doesn't mean here that there are people who don't have God's law. He's already argued in chapters 1 and 2 that pagans have the substance of God's law written on the heart. He's argued in chapter 2 that the Jews have the written law. So, there has never been anyone on this planet who was apart from the law in the sense that they didn't know essentially what God expected and commanded.

So, what does Paul mean when he talks about being apart from the law? Well, he's talking about before the commandment came. He's talking about before a person comes to a full understanding of God's law, that's the point, before he came to a complete understanding of the tenth commandment. Now, before Paul came, before anyone comes to a complete understanding of what God requires, notice verse 8, "apart from the Law," apart from that understanding, "sin is dead." That doesn't mean sin is nonexistent in the life of an unbeliever, it means it's dormant. I'll say more about that in a moment.

Paul says this is exactly what was true of him. Notice verse 9, "I," he begins very personally, "I was once alive apart from the Law." Once means this was true in his past but it's no longer true. Now, when was Paul alive apart from the law? If you know anything about Paul's life you know that there was never a time when, as the son of a Pharisee, he was apart from the law in the sense

that he didn't know God's law. He would have been taught the law of God from the time he was born, educated in God's law. No, Paul is talking here about before he came to a complete understanding of the tenth commandment, that's his point in context.

Before he really understood the depth and the implications of the command, the tenth commandment, two things were true of Paul. Notice what he says before the commandment came. First of all, verse 8 says, "sin was dead." Paul was still a sinner, that's the whole point of this passage, that before Christ he was a sinner and came to understand that, so he's not saying he wasn't a sinner. What he's saying is, that in that condition, before the law came, before he really understood it, sin was relatively unnoticed and unrecognized in his life. He was, for the most part, unaware of its presence. And so were you. You knew you sinned, but you had no idea of the depth and the profundity and the frequency of your sin, nor did I. And therefore, Paul had no fear of future punishment, sin was dead.

And notice, before the commandment came, he also says, that he was alive, he was alive. He doesn't mean spiritually alive, Paul was born spiritually dead just like the rest of us. In fact, includes himself in Ephesians 2:1-3. What he's saying is, just like he thought sin was dead in his life, he thought he was spiritually alive. Lloyd Jones puts it this way, "Paul was self-satisfied, confident, congratulating himself on the wonderful way in which he was keeping the law. He felt full of life and vigor and confidence and self-assurance and power." It's like what we read in Philippians 3:6, "regarding the righteousness which is in the law," what? "Blameless." Paul was alive, I'm blameless, I'm right with God. He felt secure, there was no conviction of sin, he saw himself, wrongly, as a godly, spiritually-minded man. It's this same problem that allowed the rich young ruler to say to Jesus, "I have kept all the commandments from my youth up." He too thought he was alive. Before Paul understood the tenth commandment, sin was dead for him. In other words, he was unaware of its presence, at least in its utter sinfulness in his life, and he was alive. He thought he was spiritually alive.

Now, that brings us to the second part of Paul's spiritual autobiography. We've seen before the commandment came. Now notice, "when the commandment came," verse 9, "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came." Now, first of all, notice what Paul does not mean. He doesn't mean that the law came somehow in his lifetime. Obviously, the law of God had been given 1,400 years before Paul's birth, at Mount Sinai. And, there was never a time in Paul's life when he would not have known the law, including the tenth commandment. Paul was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. He studied the law. He prided himself on his knowledge of the law. He likely, like many rabbis did, memorized most of the first five books of the Old Testament, the law of God.

What Paul is describing here when he says, when the law came, is that when the law, the tenth commandment about coveting, came to bear with its full force on his conscience, when he really

understood it and he compared himself against it through the work of the Spirit. “When the commandment came,” when I got it, is the idea, when the truth of it came to me, is the idea.

Now, that brings us to the third part of his spiritual autobiography, after the commandment came. After Paul came to this full understanding of God’s Law, notice, verse 9, two things happen. “When the commandment came,” number one, “sin became alive,” and number two, “I died.” First of all, “sin became alive.” He’s already explained what this means back in verse 8. Sin used the law as a starting point, as a base of operations, to stoke his rebellion and to “produce in him coveting of every kind.” Before he understood, fully and completely, the command not to covet, he had never fully sensed the power of sin within him. But when the law commanded him, “you shall not covet,” he suddenly became aware of the sin that was in his heart, he saw himself for who he really was before the law of God. And, in addition to seeing what was already in his heart, he suddenly had an overwhelming desire for all kinds of things that God had forbidden.

You see, what happened was, when the commandment came, when Paul understood the tenth commandment, he could no longer ignore his sin, “sin became alive.” Paul adds, in verse 9, “after the commandment came, I died.” Before the law came, Paul was alive, he thought. He was alive in his self-confidence, in his self-righteousness, in his spiritual pride, but when the commandment came, when he understood all that God demands in the heart, and when the law aroused his sinful passions and produced in him coveting for all kinds of things, Paul died. In other words, all of his self-confidence, all of his self-righteousness, all of his spiritual pride, died.

Leon Morris writes, “To realize that we are not good and decent people in God’s sight, is a death.” Do you remember when that happened to you? Do you remember? If you’re a Christian you remember it. There was a time when your whole view of yourself changed dramatically, when you realized I’m not good, I’m not decent, I’m not acceptable to God. You see, Paul here had become a beggar in spirit. He had come to see himself as weak and poor and naked and helpless and blind. He saw, in the words of Philippians 3, that all of his righteousness was as refuse. We don’t know when all of this unfolded in Paul’s heart, but at some point, before his conversion on the Damascus Road, the Holy Spirit brought the weight of the tenth commandment to bear on his conscience, and that’s what he’s describing here.

Verse 10, “and this commandment, which was to result in life.” Now, that’s an interesting statement, “the commandment was to result in life.” Don’t misunderstand, that doesn’t mean that God intended that we would somehow earn eternal life by keeping the law. Paul’s already said that’s not true back in chapter 3 verse 20, “by the works of the law,” by obedience to God’s law, “no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

So, what is Paul saying there when he says, “this commandment which was to result in life”? He’s saying this, if it were possible to keep God’s law perfectly, of course it’s not, but if it were possible, theoretically, the law could result in life. This is what the Scripture teaches. In

Leviticus 18:5 we read, “you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them.” Romans 10:5 quotes that very passage, “Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.” If you could really do it, it would provide life. Galatians 3:12, “the Law is not of faith; on the contrary,” here’s what the law says, “HE WHO PRACTICES THE COMMANDS SHALL LIVE BY THEM.”

And in case you’re still wondering if this is in fact what the Scriptures teach, turn back to Luke 10. Luke 10 and look at verse 25,

And a lawyer stood up and put Jesus to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [*What can I do to earn eternal life?*] And Jesus said to him, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” And he answered, [*so this is the scribe saying, here’s what I have to do to inherit eternal life*] “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL OF YOUR MIND, AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” And Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.”

If it could be done it would bring life, but of course it can’t be, and of course this guy immediately begins to show that he can’t do it because, verse 29, “wishing to justify himself,” he realizes he hasn’t done this, “and wishing to justify himself,” he says, so let’s define what you mean by neighbor. So, understand this, if there were a commandment that could result in life it would be the law of God. The law of God, theoretically, could result in life if someone could keep it perfectly, but no one except Jesus Christ ever has.

Now, back in Romans 10, I’m sorry Romans 7:10, notice what Paul says, “this commandment, which was to result in life,” if we kept it, “proved to result in death for me.” Since Paul couldn’t keep the tenth commandment, or for that matter any of the rest of God’s law, it didn’t result in his gaining eternal life, it resulted in his death, just as he has already explained in verse 9. The law showed him his sin, it showed him his failure, his evil nature, and it brought him to the point of utter hopelessness and helplessness. How did that happen? Verse 11, “for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”

Again, notice the operating power here is sin, talking about your sin nature, his sin nature before Christ, our sin nature before Christ, he says, “sin,” and here’s that same expression, “taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.” He says, sin, my sin nature, using the tenth commandment as a kind of starting point, completely deceived me, the word deceived here is an emphatic word, completely deceived me and it deceives us as well. Scripture often speaks of the deceptiveness of sin. Folks, here is the problem, isn’t it? The deceptiveness of sin. Why do people keep sinning? Why do you keep sinning? Especially, let’s talk about before Christ, why did you keep sinning when you knew those things were wrong,

when you even saw the negative results in your life, why did you keep doing that? Because of the deceptiveness of sin.

This goes all the way back to the beginning. You remember, in Genesis 3:13, the Lord said to Eve, “‘What is this that you have done?’ And the woman said,” what? “‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’” How does sin’s deception happen? What are some of the ways that sin uses, our sin nature uses, to deceive us? In fact, how does it use the law to deceive us? These aren’t in the notes that are provided, but I encourage you to maybe jot them down because these are key. What are some of the ways sin uses the law to deceive us? Number one, it convinces us, sin, our sin convinces us that we can keep God’s law and earn eternal life. This is what happened with Paul, it’s what happened with his fellow Jews.

Turn over to chapter 9, chapter 9 verse 31, “Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.” In other words, they didn’t arrive at the end, the intention of the law. Verse 32, “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though that righteousness were by works.” They didn’t get it. Our sin nature takes the law of God and says, okay, that’s the standard? I can do that. Sure, I can measure up to that. And it deceives us, convinces us that somehow we can actually do this thing that we can never in a million years do, that no one but Christ has ever done.

There’s a second way that sin uses the law to deceive us. Not only does it convince us that we can keep it and earn eternal life, but secondly, it convinces us that we have kept God’s law as long as we haven’t committed the act itself. This is that external righteousness that Paul lived in and there are so many people who live like this. They think they’re pretty good because they never murdered anyone. Well, okay, but have you ever been angry with anyone? Have you ever used angry words with anyone? Jesus says, in Matthew 5, as we saw last week, you’ve broken the commandment against murder, in your heart. But what sin does, what our sin nature does, is it looks at the law of God and says, you know, you haven’t done those things externally, you’re okay. Deceives.

Number three, sin uses the law to deceive us in telling us that God is denying us something good. This goes all the way back to the beginning, doesn’t it? Satan comes to Eve in the garden and he quotes God’s law, you can’t eat of that tree. Of course, he tweaks it and he distorts it, he emphasizes the prohibition and doesn’t emphasize all the trees they could eat from. But what’s he doing, what’s he doing with the law? What does sin do with the law? It tries to convince us that God isn’t good, that He is denying this what would bring us joy and satisfaction. How many times have you fallen for that lie, only to discover after the fact that what you had thought was sweet left nothing but bitterness in your life? This is what sin does. “Eve saw the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, desirable to make one wise,” and what does she conclude? God is keeping me from something good.

Number four, sin uses the law to deceive us, and this is huge, by downplaying and denying the consequences of sin, by downplaying and even denying the consequences of sin. Again, this goes all the way back to the garden. What does Satan do? He points to God's law, don't eat of that tree, and what does he say? God told you you were going to die, didn't He? "You will surely not die!" There are not going to be consequences. It's going to work out okay. You'll be the exception. This is still what sin does, it does to so many people. There may be people here this morning, you may be one of these people, who have somehow convinced yourself that you will be the exception to God's justice, that you will somehow escape His eternal punishment on your sin. This is what your sin nature is doing, it is lying to you, it is denying the consequences of your sin. And it's the same thing that happened all the way back in the garden. Don't listen, it's a lie.

Sin deceived Paul and what was the result? Look at chapter 7 verse 11, "for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me," and notice this, "and through it killed me." Sin, his sin nature, had promised him life if he would keep the law, you can do it Paul, you can earn your way into God's kingdom. But sin deceived Paul and it produced death instead. This is how sin always works. Do you understand? This is how it worked in your life. This is your spiritual autobiography before you came to Christ. If you are in Christ this happened to you. Maybe it wasn't the tenth commandment, maybe it was some other sin or a variety of sins, but you came to understand the depth of your sin and depravity and you died. You thought you had been okay, but you died.

So, we've seen so far, the real purpose of the law for unbelievers in verse 7, we've seen the real cause of our sin in verses 8 through 11. Paul finishes his answer to this objection by affirming, in verse 12, the real character of God's law. Verse 12, "So then, the Law is holy." The law. Paul's opponents, remember, had objected to his gospel arguing that his teaching led to the conclusion, verse 7, that the law is sin. Here in verse 12, Paul answers that objection once and for all. He says, not only is God's moral law not sin, it's holy. It's a perfect reflection of God's holy character. The essence of God's law is this, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I," the Lord your God, "AM HOLY." God's law is completely without any taint or shadow of sin or evil. Paul adds, in verse 12, "and the commandment," he says, "is holy and righteous and good."

Not only is the entire law holy, but every commandment is holy, including the tenth commandment that aroused Paul's sinful passions and "produced in him coveting of every kind." It's holy. And notice, he says, "the commandment is righteous." Everything God demands of you is just and fair. And when we break God's law, the penalty that the law calls for is also just and fair. And then he finishes by saying, "the commandment is also good." Every single commandment was intended not to keep something good from us, but to benefit us. God our Creator knows what is good and in the commands He's given us what is good. So, when Paul said back in verse 5 that the law aroused our sinful passions, he says, listen, I'm not blaming the

law, “the Law is holy, the commandment is holy and just and good.” The problem is sin, our inherent sinfulness.

Now, there are a couple of critical applications of these verses for us. If you have never died to your self-confidence, if you have never died, like Paul did, to your self-righteousness, if you have never died to your spiritual pride, then let me just tell you bluntly, you’re not a Christian, you’re not a Christian. And it’s because you have never come to truly understand what God demands. Because the only way that anyone, you included, can come to the conclusion that you’re okay with God based on your own efforts, is that you have utterly, completely, tragically misunderstood the law of God. Because it was never intended as a means to your salvation. It was intended, just as it did with Paul, to bring you to the end of yourself, to kill your self-confidence, to kill yourself self-righteousness. In the words of Paul, to kill you, and to drive you to Christ as your only hope of life.

If you’re here this morning and you are weighed down by your guilt and sin, if you have come to despair of yourself, if you have come to despair of any hope that you will ever be right with God by your own efforts, if you are here this morning truly spiritually desperate, then understand, you are in a good place. Because it means that the Spirit of God is using God’s law to bring you slowly, gradually to the end of yourself and to drive you to Jesus Christ and His gospel. I love what Lloyd Jones says, he says, “The first sign of spiritual life is to feel that you are dead.” “The first sign of spiritual life is to feel that you are dead.”

That’s what Jesus said, isn’t it? The first two Beatitudes, “Blessed are the beggars in spirit,” what? “For theirs,” to them belongs, “the kingdom of God.” They’re getting in, those who recognize they are beggars in spirit, those who are spiritually dead before God, have no self-confidence, no self-righteousness, no spiritual pride. And the second beatitude says, “Blessed are those who mourn,” that is, who mourn over their sin, what? “For they shall be comforted.”

If you’re here like that this morning, you need to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, the gospel goes like this, God is a righteous holy Creator. Do you understand, God made you, He owns you, He provides everything good that you have, and He has every right to tell you exactly what to do and how to live. And He’s given you His written law, that you hold in your hands in the Bible, and He has written the substance of His law on your heart. You know what He demands of you. You know what He expects of you. Sadly, man, including you and me, we are rebellious sinners. We were born sinners and we have constantly broken God’s law. Our many sins deserve His just punishment in hell forever.

But Jesus is the sinless Savior. The eternal Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, became man and He lived, for 33 years, a life of perfect obedience to God’s law. And then He who was perfectly obedient, the only one who could be said to earn life by His obedience, He died, not for His own sins, but as a substitute to pay in full the penalty that God’s law demanded for all of those who would ever believe in Him. That’s the gospel.

But there's one more part of the gospel. You have to respond. You have to respond to the gospel. You must be willing to repent of your sin, to turn from everything in your life that you know is wrong and sin against God, and you must believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Son of God, and as your Lord, and you must put your trust in Him alone as the only possible salvation for your soul from the demands of God's law and the penalty of those breaches of God's law that you deserve. That's the gospel. And I plead with you this morning, turn from your guilt to the only Savior.

If you're here this morning and you're already a Christian, there are a couple of applications for you from this text. First of all, this passage should affect how you do evangelism. The way Paul came to see his need for the gospel of Jesus Christ was through a deeper understanding of God's law. What that means practically is that when we set out to share the gospel, we should never start with God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Before a person can rightly come to believe the gospel, he must first come to the end of himself. That only happens through a deep understanding of what God demands through the law. Does that person you're talking to understand, truly understand, not only that they have sinned, but they are a sinner, and they are a sinner to such an extent, like you were, that they are hopeless without Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:24 says, "the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."

If you're a Christian, this passage should also not only affect your evangelism but it should provide you with rich encouragement. You say, really, how does a passage on the law bring encouragement? Listen, there's great encouragement here. If God's law has brought you to the same place that it brought the Apostle Paul, if God's law has brought you to the end of yourself, if your understanding of what God demands of you has reduced you to a beggar before God, then it shows the work of the Spirit in your heart, because self-righteousness of any kind is completely incompatible with a true believer in Jesus Christ. But, if the law of God has killed your pride, if it has killed your self-confidence, if it has brought you as a beggar to God, saying like the publican, "God be merciful to me, the sinner," through your Son Jesus Christ, then this is evidence of a redeemed heart, a heart that while once was alive, thought you were fine, has been brought to see that you're spiritually dead and that your only hope of life is not in you but in Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we're so grateful for Your word, thank You for how clearly it articulates what happened to us, for how it helps us understand what happened. Thank You that for those of us in Christ, like Paul, we once thought we were okay, we were unaware of the depth of our sin, unaware of what it meant in our relationship to You. But Father, we thank You that through Your law, through an understanding of Your demands on us, through the substance of the law written on the heart, our conscience, through the written law, You have brought us to the end of ourselves, where all we could do was look up and cry out like beggars, "God be merciful to me, the sinner."

And thank You, O God, that You always are, that You always hear the cry of the repentant heart. “A contrite heart, O God, You will never despise.” Thank You that You heard us, thank You that You redeemed us, thank You that You brought us to a knowledge of Yourself through Your Son Jesus Christ. Lord, we love You, we’re amazed at Your grace.

We pray as well for those here this morning who are not in Christ, who came into the service still thinking they were spiritually alive, fine with You. Father, I pray, as I prayed all week, that You would use this text to do in their lives what You did in Paul’s life, to bring them to the end of themselves, where they lose all hope in anyone but Jesus Christ, and may they cry out to You for the forgiveness that’s found only in Him, even today, we pray in Jesus’ name, amen.