

THE RELATION OF LAW TO SIN

TEXT: ROMANS 7:12-14

INTRODUCTION:

1. In Romans 7, we have been considering the relation of law to sin.
2. Sadly, many Christians mistakenly believe they are saved by grace and sanctified by the law. But the Bible teaches we are saved by grace and sanctified by grace (Romans 6:14).
3. The law does not save from the penalty of sin or the power of sin. The law reveals sin (7:7).
4. Romans 7:7 says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."
5. Warren Wiersbe said, "Instead of being a dynamo that gives us power to overcome, the law is a magnet that draws out of us all kinds of sin and corruption."
6. The law shows sin to be what it is, something exceeding powerful and dangerous -- something "exceeding sinful" (7:13).
7. Spurgeon said, "Why didn't he say... 'exceeding horrible' or 'exceeding deadly'? Because there is nothing in the world so bad as sin. When he wanted to use the very worst word he could find to call sin by, he called it by its own name, and reiterated it: 'Sin...exceeding sinful.'"
8. The law shows sin to be something that has greater strength than our willpower and a force that causes us to do things which we are resolved not to do (7:14-17).
9. The apostle Paul says in I Timothy 1:8, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (cf. Romans 7:12).

I. THE LAW IS JUST, BUT IT CANNOT MAKE A MAN JUST

II. THE LAW IS HOLY, BUT IT CANNOT MAKE A MAN HOLY

III. THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL, BUT IT CANNOT MAKE A MAN SPIRITUAL

I. THE LAW IS JUST, BUT IT CANNOT MAKE A MAN JUST

1. This has been emphasized repeatedly in Paul's epistle to the Romans.
2. Romans 1:17 says, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (cf. 3:23-31; 5:9-11).
3. Being "justified by his blood" (5:9) refers to our Lord's substitutionary death.

4. Being "saved by his life" (5:10) refers to our Lord's resurrection.
5. Our justification is based upon faith in our Lord's death and resurrection. It has nothing to do with the law.
6. Galatians 2:21 says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."
7. It is frustrating to depend on the law for justification or sanctification.
8. "Frustrate" in Galatians 2:21 means, "to do away with, to set aside, to disregard, to thwart the efficacy of, to nullify, to make void, to reject, to refuse, to slight."
9. People who claim they are righteous and just because they are keeping the law are guilty of frustrating the grace of God, and disregarding the grace of God, and nullifying the grace of God, and making void the grace of God, and rejecting the grace of God, etc.
10. Galatians 2:21 says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

II. THE LAW IS HOLY, BUT THE LAW CANNOT MAKE A MAN HOLY (7:12, 13).

1. The law is holy because it exposes sin. Furthermore, it is "just" because it condemns sin (7:12, 13).
2. Three times in verses 12 and 13, Paul says that the law is "good." Everything God does is good.
3. The Bible is often referred to as "the Good Book."
4. The law is holy, just, and good because it reflects the character of God, who is holy, just, and good.
5. Again Paul anticipates an objection and asks, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" (7:13). His answer: "God forbid" (7:13; cf. 7:7).
6. The law does not provoke sin; it draws out sin (7:13). Or as one preacher put it: "Law does not solicit sin, it only elicits it" (W.H. Griffith Thomas).
7. You may recall the testimony of Harry Ironside's Indian friend. As he stood at the train station he saw a big sign saying, "DO NOT SPIT" but many people were spitting and the Indian admitted he even spat himself.
8. Was it the sign that made them spit? No it was sin already in their hearts (7:8, 9).
9. The law is holy (7:12) but the law cannot make a man holy. One preacher said, "Legality is the great enemy to sanctification" (J. Brown, cited by W.H. Griffith Thomas).
10. The law is intended to reveal sin. It convicts the sinner (and I am using the word here to describe both the lost sinner and the sinning Christian) that a certain thing is wrong.

11. For example, a man may not understand that covetousness is wrong. But the tenth commandment says, “Thou shalt not covet.” Now the man is convicted of his covetousness, materialism, gambling, not tithing, etc. (cf. Rom. 7:7).
12. The law cannot make a man holy. The law reveals to him that he is unholy. And giving up certain vices do not make a man holy. It is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that makes a man holy (cf. Romans 8:1-4).
13. When a carpenter is hanging a door or installing a window, he will use his level to make sure the door or window is level.
14. The level reveals whether or not the door or window is installed correctly. The law is like a level. It shows us that we are not right, but it cannot make us right.
15. The law is like a plumb-line, a ruler, or a standard. The law is holy and good and it reveals to us what is “exceeding sinful” (7:13).
16. Again it must be emphasized that the law cannot save nor can it sanctify. The law condemns us. The law shows us our inability to obey the law. The law shows us our need for grace (Rom. 6:14), and grace is a gift from God (6:23).

III. THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL, BUT THE LAW CANNOT MAKE A MAN SPIRITUAL (7:14).

1. Romans 7:14—25 deals with the weakness of the flesh (cf. 7:18). Then in chapter 8, Paul teaches that the solution is the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (8:1-4).
2. I do not want us to get too far ahead of ourselves, so for now we will concentrate on Romans 7:14.
3. Romans 7 depicts the struggle of a man who is trying to be holy and spiritual by his own efforts, but he is defeated by the power of indwelling sin (7:14, 15).
4. It is interesting to note that in Romans 7 the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned once, but in chapter 8 He is mentioned 18 times.
5. Chapter 7 teaches us what the law can and cannot do. Chapter 8 teaches us that our victory over sin comes through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
6. I mentioned earlier the repetitive use of the first person pronouns – “I, me, mine, etc.” (7:7-25). This reveals the frustration and powerlessness of trying to please God in the flesh. It is all about me and my efforts, etc.

CONCLUSION:

1. There has been a big debate over whether or not these verses represent the apostle Paul's own experience. They undoubtedly do -- note the frequent personal pronouns (I, me, my, etc. -- 7:9-25).
2. Another question -- was this before Paul's conversion, back when he was a religious Jew, or does this describe his struggles as a believer?
3. It is hard to see how a believer could say, "but I am carnal, sold under sin" (7:14), after stating many times that the believer is dead to sin.
4. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (6:14).
5. The point of this passage is that "it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).
6. In other words, it can apply to both saved and lost.
7. It should be emphasized that Romans 7:15 and 16 are not describing the normal Christian life. Let me close with a very helpful quote from H.A. Ironside's commentary on Romans.
8. "And as to this being the normal experience of one already saved, I shall attempt to show as we go on with the study of chapters 7 and 8 that there is an orderly progression from the bewilderment of chapter 7 to the intelligence and walk in the Spirit of chapter 8. All Christians doubtless know something of the state depicted in verses 14-25 of chapter 7, but once out of it no one need ever go through it again. It is not merely the conflict between the two natures. If it were, one might indeed be back in the same unhappy experience again and again. It gives us the exercises of a quickened soul under law who has not yet learned the way of deliverance. This once learned, one is free from the law forever. I have said earlier in the address that primarily here we have a believing Jew struggling to obtain holiness by using the law as a rule of life and resolutely attempting to compel his old nature to be subject to it. In Christendom now the average Gentile believer goes through the same experience, for legality is commonly taught almost everywhere. Therefore, when one is converted it is but natural to reason that now one has been born of God it is only a matter of determination and persistent endeavor to subject oneself to the law, and one will achieve a life of holiness. And God Himself permits the test to be made in order that His people may learn experimentally that the flesh in the believer is no better than the flesh in an unbeliever. When he ceases from self-effort he finds deliverance through the Spirit by occupation with the risen Christ. Paul writes in the first person singular, not necessarily as depicting a lengthy experience of his own (though he may have gone through it), but in order

that each reader may enter into it sympathetically and understandingly for himself."