

A STUDY OF ROMANS
ROMANS 7 – PART 2
Taught by Bruce Bickel
October 17, 2012

Well good evening everyone. Nice to be with you. Thank you for coming. I appreciate your faithfulness. Please understand that ministry never is one way. It's always two-sided. You give as much to me as I trust that I'm giving you that's valuable, just by your faithfulness and your attention, so I do thank you very much. You're a great encouragement to me and I do appreciate that.

Let's ask the Lord to teach us as we continue our study of the book of Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. We're in Chapter 7 tonight, some of the more difficult passages of Scripture. Commentarians have been arguing over this and debating this for many, many years. We'll just see what the Holy Spirit is pleased to do tonight. Shall we just pray and ask him to be our teacher.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the perfect Word. We thank you that you've chosen to reveal yourself to us through your Word. We pray, Lord, that you would be our teacher this evening, that your Holy Spirit would define what he wants us to learn, that you would apply it to our lives. Help us remember this, Lord, that learning should not stop at knowledge, but learning should lead to living. May we learn how to live more effectively for your glory through Jesus and for his glory, and may it be so. Amen.

I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 7. We'll be looking at verses 7-14, “⁷What 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.’ ⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹²So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. ¹³Did 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. ¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Audience Members: Thanks be to God.

Amen. As Pastor Tim taught us last week, in my absence, and I greatly appreciate your kindness to him as well, we began to deal with this section of Scripture, Romans 7, that deals with the Christian's relationship to the law and our freedom from being bound by the law. When Paul is referring to the law, he's referring to the moral law of God, not ceremonial law that you read about in the Old Testament. He's referring to the universal law of God that is, in general, applicable to all of society. In other words, he's sharing something that is true of all societies, some degrees more than another, because all societies have some description of what is good and what is bad. It varies per society.

What he's dealing with here is there's a general law that is given to all of mankind, some accept it and some reject it. He's saying basically that we're no longer under that law, which we'll talk about. Our section tonight deals with a couple of different things—our relationship to the law and then our relationship to the Savior. Then you'll see in your handout, the other things we're going to deal with would be the function and limits of the law, and that's verse 7-14.

When Paul says we're no longer under the law, he means we're no longer in a position of trying to save ourselves. He's saying you're no longer in a position of trying to justify yourself. You're no longer in a position of trying to sanctify yourself to make yourself holy and make yourself fit to stand before the Lord in his righteousness by your own personal obedience and by your own keeping of the law. In other words, he's saying you're no longer under that system, you're no longer in that position of having to gain fitness in God's eyes by your own personal obedience. If you were to disobey once, then you would not be fit because God's standard is what?

Audience Members: Perfection.

Perfection. Matthew 5:48 says, "Be perfect because I'm perfect." So you see, that's his standard. What Paul is saying is you've been removed from that system that says you, personally, have to achieve absolute perfection every second and every moment of your life, and that is in bondage. When he says you're not under law, he's saying you're not under that position of that system to have to earn your salvation moment by moment, or justify yourself or sanctify yourself.

We're no longer in that position, he tells us, that the Jews were in when God spoke through Moses, and he said, "Do this and you will live." That was the commandment of the old covenant, "Do this and you will live." That implied that when you don't do that, you will not live, which means do this and you'll be justified, do this you'll be sanctified, and do this and you'll be fit to stand in God's presence and his righteousness, and that God will say, if you and I do all these things in the law, he will say that, "I, God, am satisfied with you now because you have done all these things, and I now am satisfied."

That is what we mean when Paul says you're under the law. Now it means that law is a means, or law is a process, a method of saving ourselves, of justifying ourselves before God. The glory of the Christian Gospel is that we're no longer in that position by grace. We are now under grace as opposed to being under the law. We are no longer trying to justify ourselves by works or conformity to the law. We're no longer in that system. As Paul states in Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believed." Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believed. The word "believed" there does not mean to give mental assent, as you've heard me say over these many, many years. It's the acrostic DART. It means to depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in the person and work of Christ. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all those who depend upon, adhere to, rely upon and trust in his person and his work; therefore, we're no longer under the bondage of the law.

It's in that sense, and that sense alone, that you and I are dead to the law. That's the only sense in which we're dead to it. That does not mean, for a moment in your life or my life, that we should not have any interest in the law of God and its demands. That's not what Paul is saying, and the most dangerous form of antinomianism. Remember antinomianism means anti-law. It basically says this—what I do doesn't make any difference. Legalism says what I do makes the difference. Grace says what I have done for you makes the difference. There's a different understanding between antinomianism, legalism and grace.

The most dangerous form of antinomianism, against the law, as a Christian, is to say this—we now have no interest in what the law says. That's the most rank form of antinomianism one can say, when you say, "Well I'm under grace, therefore, I don't need to have any interest in the law." You see, we must never say farewell or discard the law. Our position is that we thank God that we're no longer under the system of being under the law of God, but that as a means of salvation, but we are to keep the law. We are to honor the law. We're to practice the law in our daily lives, as an expression of our gratitude.

Now in fact, the whole system of salvation really is to enable us to keep God's law. When you ask somebody, "What's the purpose of salvation," nine out of ten people are going to say eternal life. That is

not the purpose of salvation. That is a consequence of your salvation. The purpose, in the big picture of salvation, is this—it puts you in a position to be able to honor God’s law and keep it. You keep it through whom?

Audience Member: Christ.

The person and work of Christ. That’s the only way you can do it. That’s the goal of salvation, to create worshipers that will worship in spirit and truth. Salvation is not just eternal life. That’s a consequence, but it is not the goal. There’s something much bigger, and that is to position you and me, who are now no longer in Adam, where are now in Christ, to be able to fulfill his law. We do that by DART-ing—depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting in the person and work of Christ to keep it. We do that through him. That’s what it means to be in Christ and not in Adam.

That’s because we have a new relationship to the Savior. We used to have a relationship with the law; now we have a relationship with the Savior. As Tim taught us last week, when a woman is married to a man, she is bound to that man until he dies, and then she is free to marry again. Before we met Christ, we were bound by the law and we were condemned by it because we could never achieve it. The law, however, did not die when we were saved. Instead we died in Christ. The law didn’t die; we died in Christ. We are no longer married to that system of being under the law, of regulations, and we are now married, if you would, in this illustration, to the person and work of Christ. The law has no longer any control over us because we are no longer in Adam; we are now in Christ.

Look at verse Romans 7:4, and read this again; let me read it because I want you to think about this, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Notice the consequence of that is the reason that you are now married to Christ in a new relationship is so that you will bear fruit for God. Who are the ones who can bear fruit?

Audience Member: Christians.

Only believers. Now do you understand the difference between a good work and a bad work? Who are the only people who can do good works?

Audience Members: Believers.

Believers. The best that a non-believer can do is good bad work. It’s bad in the eyes of God, but good in the eyes of the world. You see, biblically, a good work is defined by three things. It’s consistent with the Scripture, it’s done with the right motive and it’s done by faith. It’s according to the Scripture, it’s done with the right motive. In other words, it’s not about me. It’s not about my reputation. It’s not about my family legacy. It’s done in faith. I’m trusting that God will use my action however small or large it may be for his glory. You see, that defines a good work. The best thing that a non-believer can do is a good bad work. You can give a million dollars to a hospital to develop a cancer ward. It’s a good thing in the eyes of the world. But if it’s not done by faith, according to the Scripture, and with the right motive, it’s bad work. You don’t get credit for that. You see, that’s what Paul is saying. The only way that a person can really bear fruit is when they’re now no longer in Adam; they’re now in Christ, because you die to the law as a system to earn your salvation, your justification, or your status before God. Now you’re in a position that what you do now, you’re actions, however great however small, can bear fruit. The only people who can really bear fruit are those who are in Christ. Those who are in Adam are still bound by that system. We need to understand that the only people who can really do a good, good work are those who are in Christ, not those who are in Adam.

Continue on...look at verse 4. We have a new relationship through Christ and in Christ. When we were lost, the law, the commandments, triggered the arousing of sin in our nature and this produced death. That's verse 5; notice verse 5, "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." You see, you're going to bear fruit in one of two kinds—fruit for God or fruit for death. It all depends upon your relationship to Christ. The best that a non-believer can do is bear fruit for death. The only people who can bear fruit for life would be those who are in Christ, not those who are in Adam.

But now we are delivered from the law and we can serve Christ in the newness of the spirit, not in the oldness of the letter. Look at verse 6, "But now we are released from the law..." That doesn't mean release from obeying it; it means released from using it as a system to earn status and merit before God, to earn your salvation. "But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive." Now how did it hold us captive? By putting a pressure upon you to be absolutely obedient every time you were, and the times you weren't, God was not pleased. You were in that system again. "So that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:6) That's a very critical summary of this whole chapter would be verses 4, 5 and 6.

With that review of last week, because of our new position in Christ and our new relationship to the Savior, let's look at the function of the law in our life. This is how Paul describes it; by two ways. First of all, he gives an illustration. You'll see that in verses 7-10. But God actually used the law, the commandments, to reveal the sinfulness of the flesh. The key to understanding Chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Romans is to really be clear about Chapter 5 of the book of Romans, which is the fruits of justification. It's Romans 5:20 that gives us the key. If you look in your Bibles at Romans 5:20, Paul has been describing how the believer is in Christ and how he is no longer in Adam any longer. Then he describes what is bound to happen to us as the consequences of our being in Christ and not in Adam.

There will be...people are going to come along and object to that because they don't understand the full fruit of Romans 5:20. Paul deals with the objections that someone may say, that there is no longer a standard for conduct, and there's no longer a standard for behavior because historically, it has always been the law that has guaranteed holiness. If you say that you're no longer bound by the law, how can you be holy? If the law was given to be the guarantee to produce holiness and you remove yourself from bondage of the law, how can you be holy anymore? You see, that's the logic that somebody might object to being under grace. They're basically saying under grace puts the law aside, and therefore, there's nothing to safeguard holiness. In other words, how can you be holy if you don't have a standard anymore? If you don't have a standard of excellence anymore? If you don't have boundaries, how can you be holy? Because you see, they're taking this understanding of being under grace to its farthest limitations and they're objecting to the understanding of that because they don't understand the difference between being in Christ and being in Adam.

In Chapter 7, he teaches us that sanctification, which is holiness, it means living a life of holiness, being set apart for holiness. He now comes to Chapter 7, the passages we're studying, and says that the law is as impossible to earn your sanctification, just as it was to earn your justification. So you're in the same bondage. You can't earn your justification—God declaring you righteous before God—nor can you declare and earn your sanctification. That's Chapter 7.

Verse 1-6 shows us that Christians are in an entirely new relationship to the law, and that is essential if we're going to understand what it means to be serving him in the newness of spirit. Hopefully I'm going to make this a little bit more clear, because this is very, very difficult stuff to understand. Really, the Holy Spirit has to be our teacher. In verses 7-12, if you look at these verses, Paul actually vindicates the law. He says, "No, the problem is not the law," and he proves that the law must never be held

responsible for our failure to keep it. There's something else that we need to hold responsible for our inability to keep the law perfectly.

In verses 13-25, he shows that the law basically leaves us to be in a state of complete hopelessness. You will see that in 13-25. But nevertheless, there is a hope, and that hope is found in verse 25. This is the summary statement of Romans 7. It's the summary statement, and that is this, "Thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." That's the summary.

You see, when you read and understand 13-24, you're going to be left hopeless. What hope do I have? His answer is this, "But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ." You see, there's our hope. That's the summary statement of Chapter 7. Grace is going to be victorious, Paul tells us. Grace will win. Grace will be victorious, and nothing can stop it, and nothing is more important that we should realize this; that our salvation is entirely in and of the Lord Jesus Christ. So our response is this—but thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. That's our response.

What all people have a general knowledge of certain things of good versus evil, of being right versus wrong, there's a general knowledge that people have of all situations of some degree of sin. It varies per society and ethnic groups and all that. I understand. But there's a general understanding that certain things are good and certain things are bad. Paul teaches us that we are not aware of the real nature of sin until the law makes it clear to us. He's talking about not understanding the difference between sin and itself and the nature and character of sin. There's a difference. I realize that's wrong, but what's the cause of that wrong?

Paul is saying he never understood that until he was confronted by the law, which basically began to tell him this is the true nature of the sin, this is the character of the sin, and this is why sin occurs. It is the law that brings us to a right understanding, Paul says, of the essential character and nature and meaning of sin. It's the law of God that gives us a right conception of the true nature/character of sin.

In other words, let me give you an illustration. You don't find out what is wrong, by studying what is wrong. You find out what is wrong by studying that which is good. You don't find out what is evil by studying evil. You find out what is good by studying that which is good. You don't find out what is sinful by studying sin; you find out what is sinful by studying that which is righteous. That's what he's saying about the law, "I understood that this this was wrong, but I never understood the nature of that wrongness, I never understood the character of that wrongness, I never understood the character of that evil, until the law really exposed that to me, and then I began to understand the true nature of sin and why sin is the result."

A friend of mine from the Naval Academy, after we got out of the service, went to work for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He became an FBI counterfeit dollar bill expert. I was talking to him several years ago about how he learned to identify a counterfeit dollar bill. He didn't say, "We studied counterfeit dollar bills." He said, "I spent months studying a perfectly legitimate dollar bill." I said, "What did you do?" He said, "You name it, we did it. We ate it. We put chemicals on it. We put water on it. We ran over it with our car. We put it in a swimming pool. We put it in a vacuum. You name it, we spent six weeks studying this legitimate dollar bill." You could put in front of my friend, Bill, ten dollar bills. One would be counterfeit and the other would be legitimate. He could take that one dollar bill and he would look at that and he would hold it up to the light. I don't know if he'd put it in his mouth again or not. I don't know what he would do. But Bill can identify that which is false, because he spent so long studying that which is true.

You see, that's what Paul is saying about the law. You don't find out the nature of sin by studying sin. You find out the nature of sin by studying that which is perfect. He says that's what the law did. He said

it opened my eyes to the character and the nature of sin because I didn't know that until I was confronted with the law. You see, there's a moment in a person's life when that person begins to understand the true nature and character of sin, and at that moment, they become troubled in their soul, and they begin to look for a solution. They begin to look for a Savior. You see, the problem with today is that we are not looking for a Savior. We're not looking for salvation. That's because people do not understand the true nature, the true character of sin. If they did understand it, the Holy Spirit would prick them and they would understand that they need a Savior because their soul is doomed because they understand when the law exposes them and their true nature of sin, the natural response is to seek something or to long for something, and we look for the Savior.

The reason that people don't really look for Christ is because they don't understand the true nature and character of sin. "It is this peculiar function of the law," Paul says, "to bring such an understanding person's conscience." In other words, what do we need to preach in the church? You preach the...law. You've got to preach the law. You've got to give them the standard and help them recognize you can't do that. You see, if they don't understand what sin is, its nature and this character, they're never going to look for a Savior because they have no reason to. They're going to think that I can do good, good works. The best thing they can do is a good, bad work, because they're not doing it by faith, it's not consistent with the Scripture, and it's not done with the right motive. You see, that's what the law does. The law exposes them. That's why people don't like to read books on the law, because they're exposed. Paul says that's its purpose. Until you're exposed to the true nature of sin, you're never going to seek the Savior.

Turn with me to John 16. I want you to see the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this. Jesus is describing the coming Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who will come along side and be our counselor. He gives for us his job description in John 16:7-14. Would you follow along, "⁷Nevertheless, 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. ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹²I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

What is the role of the Holy Spirit? It is to guide you into all truth and identify you with the person and work of Christ, not call attention to himself. I'm not saying that we don't talk about the Holy Spirit. If you're going to talk about the Holy Spirit, you've got to be consistent with his job description. It's not to talk about him; it's to talk about that to whom he represents, and that is the person and work of Christ.

John 16:15, "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The role of the Holy Spirit, folks, is to guide you into all truth and introduce you to the person and to the work of Christ. It's not to cause excitement. That may be a response. I would be hopeful that you would be excited when you are exposed to the person and work of Christ. But so many times I've been in churches and people come up to me afterwards and say, "Boy, the Holy Spirit was really there." I say, "Based upon what?" "Look how excited the people were." Well, great. You can get that at a Steeler prep rally. That doesn't indicate the Holy Spirit. The real issue is was truth proclaimed? Did he guide us to the person and work of Christ? That's his role; not to call attention to himself.

Now notice, here's what he does. Four things—he convicts us of our sin, he convinces us of our sin. First of all, he's got to convict us. Then he convinces us. Yes, I am sinful. Yes, I am an enemy of God. Yes, I'm an abject failure. Yes, I'm godless. He convicts us of our sin, he convinces us of our sins, then

he converts us from our sin through regeneration and then he comforts us in our new way of life. You see, that's the role of the Holy Spirit. That comes about when somebody is exposed to the standard of excellence known as the law, and they're convicted, they're convinced, they're converted, and they're comforted.

Now in my study of the Puritans, the world's greatest evangelists, they always engaged what they referred to as law work. Law work. In their preaching—I read over 3,000 Puritan sermons when I was working on my doctorate—the one thing that I consistently saw was this. In their preaching of the Gospel, they generally started with a presentation of the law, not saying, “Do you want eternal life?” That's a consequence; it's not the goal. Remember the goal of salvation is to put you in a position to be obedient to God's law, to honor him by your obedience. And they know that a person would not understand salvation unless they understood the nature/character of sin. So they started by preaching the law before they got to the work of the Holy Spirit in comforting you by removing you from being in Adam to being in Christ. They preached the law of God. They showed its relevance. And by means of it, they brought men and women to an understanding of what sin really is in the sight of God.

Now notice, what sin is in the sight of God, not in the sight of the person. There's a difference. They were trying to help people understand this is how God views sin, not how you view it. How you view it is irrelevant. The real issue is how does God view sin. That's why they started with their law work. To them, in summary, the Gospel always started with this—the holiness of God, then the sinfulness of man. It didn't start with God loves you and has wonderful plan for your life. Now that may be true. If you're not in Christ, it's not a very wonderful plan. But if you're in Christ, it is. So you don't start with that. You start with God is holy. You are sinful. I am sinful. The Holy Spirit convicts, convinces, converts and comforts. It's the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, then the role of the Holy Spirit is what?

***Audience Member:** To guide us into all truth.*

And to introduce us to whom?

***Audience Member:** To the person and work of Christ.*

The person and work of Christ. The next thing in the Gospel presentation is the person and the work of Christ. The person means his absolute holiness and his work means his sinless perfection and perfect obedience. They went from the holiness of God to the sinfulness of man to the absolute perfection of Christ and his sinless obedience and perfect obedience, and then they went to repentance and faith. Response to the Gospel. You see how logical that is? This because they prepped everybody's heart and condition by helping them realize the nature of sin and their own true nature. That's what Paul is saying is you don't understand the evil of this world until you look at the good of this world found in the Gospel of Christ. Without the law, we have no knowledge of sin.

There are a couple of books that I've read that are just wonderful. They're not popular. In fact, the little publishing company that we began and developed after I came back from England with my doctorate, Don Kistler and I began to create Soli Deo Gloria. We brought some of the great Puritan works. Now these are not things that Joel Osteen would publish, let alone read. Here are the titles—The Deceitfulness of Sin. You're going to buy that at a Christian bookstore? Of course not. You want something, “Give me ten steps to happiness, 13 steps to being fulfilled, and 15 steps to undo the 25 you just learned.” You see, that's what we look for, because people don't want to be exposed. Paul is saying this—you don't understand the nature of sin until you understand the nature of the law and it's sinless perfection and it's perfectly glorious illustration of who God is in all of his nature, because the law reveals the pure holiness of God.

Another interesting title by Jeremiah Burrows. Would you buy this? The Evil of Evils. Is that going to be a popular...do you know how many we sold of those when we brought them back into publication? We published 1,500 at a time; we sold 5,000 in the last 20 years. People are not going to buy that, because they don't want to be convicted. They want to be told what are the benefits. They don't want to be exposed. They don't want to be convicted. They don't want to be convinced. They don't want to be converted to the God of biblical revelation; they want to be converted to the God of their human imagination. The God of my perception is the one they want to worship, let alone be comforted. That's why you see such lousy fruit in the church in America. A lot of people are trying to do good, good works when they can only do good, bad works because they may not be in Christ; they may still be in Adam. I don't know that. You have to judge them by their fruit. What's the power of the church? We're not very powerful are we? Why is that? I don't know. The Scripture makes it very clear. Only those who can bear fruit are the ones who are in Christ, not who think they are, but they may still be in Adam.

The Puritans always preached the holiness of God, then the sinfulness of man, then the person and work of Christ, and then repentance and faith. Paul tells us this, that the law is essentially spiritual. It's concerned with the person's heart and his ultimate attitude toward God. That's what the law exposes. It exposes your heart and your ultimate attitude toward God.

Paul goes on to tell us in these verses, to say that it was only when he understood the meaning of the law, that he understood the truth about lust and that to covet is as reprehensible as to commit, that a desire is as damnable as the deed. He says that desire to do it is equally damnable as if we just did it. You see, that's why the Scripture it is far more heinous to have sins of the flesh that are not exposed as they are the sins of the mind. In other words, when you think about it, you've done it. Do you realize that? When you thought about hurting somebody, you're guilty of murder. When you talk about somebody with your mouth, defame their character, you are guilty of murder. You see, he is saying this—that the thought of doing it is equally as damnable as the fact that you did it. You and I say...what do we say? "He's a good guy." "Really?" Is he really a good guy? Then why did he do what he did? Is he really a good guy? Do you see how we look at that? We don't understand what Paul is saying. Paul says when you understand the true nature of sin, you're going to realize that your thought, your mere thought about doing it is the same thing as you just have done it.

If you don't understand that, you're never going to understand the joy of your salvation, that you've been set free from that in Christ. But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ there is hope. You see, that's why often times...that's interesting; I have to be honest here. I wish we weren't recording this. I could be a bit more honest with you. Boy, have I had a tough time with my thought life since I'm studying Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8. It has just gone haywire. Because what's happening? I'm studying the true nature of sin as I'm looking at the law. What's it doing? It's exposing and arousing things in me that I go, "Oh nooo! Nooo!" and I have to say, "Lord, remove that thought! Because if you don't, it'll be a disaster because the thought I just has had is equally as heinous and damnable as the sin that I would commit if I did it. I'm guilty before I even do it." Week after week as I'm studying this stuff, I almost called Tim and said, "Tim, you teach it. I don't want to do it anymore." I've really been exposed to the law. That's what happens when you study the Scripture.

Paul is going to tell us in a moment that sin uses that which is good to arouse your senses. So I've had to say so many times, even driving here tonight, "Lord, you've got to remove that thought, because if you don't, it's a disaster, because I could fulfill that and do it." You see, that's what Paul is telling us. Until you understand the nature of sin, you'll never understand what sin is and why we do the things we do.

You see, he had never known this before, that the thought was equal to the doing, until he was exposed to the law, and his eyes were open to this issue of lust and coveting. He came to this conclusion—to

desire to sin is sin. To desire to sin is sin. He was exposed by the law because he said, “I never knew what it meant to covet so many things, and I began to realize that my desire for that which I do not have was sin, even though I didn’t go after it.” That’s what the law does to us, he tells us.

In my judgment, there’s no better way of understanding the nature of the Christian doctrine of salvation than to examine our understanding of the true nature and character of sin. The degree to which you understand the true nature and character of sin will be the degree to which you will rejoice in this statement—but thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. They’re directly related to one another. The more you understand that, the more you’re going to be grateful, and the more you’ll be motivated by gratitude because of your gratitude for Christ did something that God did for you that you couldn’t do for yourself.

Now we move to verses 11-13. We look at a condemnation usage. We saw an illustration; now we see how the sin condemns us. He goes on to tell us that sin used the law to rekindle the sinfulness of the flesh. Sin used the law to rekindle our sinfulness, thus natural people are doomed by the law. What does it do? It constantly rekindles the sinfulness of the flesh. That’s why they’re doomed. They’re in Adam. They’re stuck. All the law does is constantly rekindle their senses, their desires of the flesh, because you’ve not been released of that yet.

There’s nothing more foreign to biblical teaching than this notion that we have today in the church that sin is purely negative. That’s the common attitude today in the church, especially in America. We’re told that we must not talk about sin as something in and of itself. What we really mean is that there are certain things we would like to see in a person, but they’re not there yet. In other words, we mustn’t say that he’s a bad, vile person; we must say he’s just not a good man. He’s not a good one, but we can’t say he’s a bad one. You see, in our minds, sin is just the absence of something. We look at it as purely negative. It’s not. He doesn’t have the characteristics yet. He’s not bad man; he’s just not a good one yet. You see the difference?

What I’m saying is negative is we’re always looking for what he’s not because we’re just saying that sin is the absence of something. It’s the absence of certain qualities. When Paul tells us that sin is actually very positive in the sense it’s very active. We shouldn’t say that a man is positively evil and vile, but just that he hasn’t been developed yet to the extent that he should have. The modern church concept of sin is purely negative. It merely talks of the absence of certain qualities. You understand what I mean by negative? It’s just the absence of certain qualities. Or even if they do exist, they’re dormant, they just need to be drawn out. The way they’ll be drawn out would be through education and training. They’ll bring them out. You see, we’ve been told that we must quit saying that people are absolutely, positively evil, because we believe that sin is negative. Paul says it is positive. It is very active.

Now I want to be very sensitive here. Take a look at children. Oh, they’re so precious, they’re so wonderful. All I ever wanted to do in my life was be a dad, and the Lord has seen fit not to give me my own natural children. I have two wonderful step-children who I love dearly. But I don’t have my own natural blood. When I die, my lifeline stops. There will be no more Bickel’s anymore. It’s gone. That’s God’s sovereign grace. I guess he wanted to eradicate us. {LAUGHTER} Which is okay. Take a look at children. Please understand my heart when I’m saying this. We think they’re so precious. We think they’re so gentle. Jonathan Edwards says this, “They’re sinful little vipers.” {LAUGHTER} That’s really what they are. They’re born sinful, little vipers.

When was the last time you had to tell a baby to cry to get his food? When did you time to tell a child to say, “I want”? You see, that’s natural, because they’re born sinful little vipers. They’re in Adam; they’re not in Christ. It is our role to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. That’s why parenting is so critical, that we educate our children in understanding what? Not what evil is, but what righteousness

is. We expose them to the law. They're only going to discover what evil is when you understand what Paul is saying. You've got to teach children the standard of righteousness through the law.

I have this wonderful young friend. She just is a delight to Becky and me. Becky is her pediatrician. Becky does such a wonderful job. She's such a great diagnostician and diagnosed some problems in this little child. This little child is the sweetest thing on the earth, but she's a sinful little viper. When I'm around her, you know, I just want to, "Oh, goo goo, ga ga, goo goo." What I need to do is say, "Look! Stop that!"

Now sometimes her mother will say, "Bruce, would you deal with her." And so I deal with her. I expose her to the consequences of her choices and I give her everything she wants. "Do you want this? Do that. If you want this, do that. My job is to give you exactly what you want. You tell me what you want by how you act." She'll do this, and I take her toy away. She'll cry. I'll say, "Don't cry. Don't gripe. Don't complain. You got what you wanted because you did exactly what you told me you wanted to do by this action. So don't cry to me. Stop it if you want it. If you want your toy back, then what are you going to do?" She said, "I'm going to change my behavior." "Alright, let me see it. You haven't done it yet. I'm going to keep the toy." You see, you've got to understand this definition. They're sinful little vipers. It's our role as parents to rear the up in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

You see, what Paul is saying here is that sin is really positive. There's a positive side of sin that we don't talk about. He gives us an illustration. Would you like to know how powerful sin is? Follow along with this. Here's how powerful sin is. Look at your Bibles. Look at verses 8 and 11. Sin is so powerful that it, sin, can even use God's only holy law to its own ends. Sin is powerful enough that it will use God's law to achieve what it wants, what sin wants to achieve. God gave us his holy law through Moses and sin is so strong that it even used God's holy law as a function or base of operation to bring about its own purposes.

Let me read you verses 8 and 11. "⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead." You see that little word "seizing an opportunity"? That's a military term. In the Greek, it means a base of operation. When a military unit goes into an operation, it forms a base. They go out and come back. They go out and come back. It's a base of operation. That's the word he's using He is saying that sin uses the law as its base of operation, because "I'm going to expose you to the law and I'm going to use it for my own purposes," sin says. That's going to arouse things in you. You see, it seizes the opportunity.

Look at verse 11, "¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment," it used that which is good; used the law of God, which is good, "deceived me and through it killed me." So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. You see, sin uses the law as a base of operation to stimulate within us, in this case, more coveting. I never knew that the desire to covet was equally the same as doing the coveting, of making it happen. You see, it stimulated within Paul a greater understanding. Now that's where God sovereignly used it.

Now we need to understand that God's in control. Sin is not in control. God has ordained this. This is one of the functions of the law. One of the functions of the law is to be positive in its power to have the law be the thing which stimulates within us and exposes us to the true nature and to the character of sin. That's why we look for a Savior. You realize, "I'm hopeless under the law." Do you see that? "I'm absolutely hopeless." But there is an answer, and the answer is this—but thanks be to God, through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 7:25)

You see, Paul makes it very evident that it was not the law in itself, but it was sin, in this present case, Paul's covetousness, his sinfulness, that made it impossible for the law to make a person holy and

happy. The commandment, operating by itself, never kills or hurts anyone. It's the sin that kills. It was the sin that even deceived Paul. He used the illustration of covet—the last of the Ten Commandments. In his unconverted state, into thinking that he was able to live in strict obedience to God's law, and that's what deceived him, "I was tricked into thinking I could make a difference. I could do it." You see, that's when he was deceived, because, "I thought I could do it. I thought I could live a perfect life; I could achieve my justification, I could achieve my sanctification, I could achieve my fit status before God in all of his holiness, that I could achieve perfection, because all I had to do was just, like the little red choo-choo that says 'I think I can. I think I can. I think I can.'" Paul came to the realization of this, "I know I can't, but I know you can. But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

You see, one day, in a very dramatic way, it was made very clear to him that no matter how hard he tried, he could never, ever be able to attain the status of righteousness before God in his own strength. What did that do to him? "Thou shall not covet," and it exposed all the true character and the nature of the things that he thought. That's when he was converted to Christ, because the Holy Spirit did what? Convicted him of his sin, convinced him of his sin, converted him from it and began to comfort him. That's why he wrote Romans 7:25, "But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul had stated that the commandment brought death, in verse 10. But how can something that is so holy, we would ask, and so righteous and so good, verse 12, bring about death? Paul answers it this way, "It is not the commandment operating by itself which brings death. It is transgression of that commandment that does this." In the final analysis, Paul is saying this. The real cause of death is sin using the law to deceive me, and the serious character of sin becomes apparent in this very fact—that in order to expose the sinner, it makes use of something which is itself very perfect, namely God's law. The very holiness that is the moral, spiritual, purity of God's law makes the vileness of sin stand out all the more sharply. That's what he's saying. It's the holiness of the law that makes my sin stand out more sharply.

Let me give you an illustration. Another one of the commandments is this, "Thou shall not take the Lord's name in vain." We isolate that, pretty much just relegate that strictly to not taking the Lord's name in vain meaning profanity. We don't say the word G.D. What do we think? Do you know what the command really means? When you study that commandment as Paul learned it, just as he says, "Thou shall not covet" exposed all of his false desires for things that he didn't have? Do you what that commandment really means when you delve into that? It means this—to have thoughts that are unworthy of God. That's to take his name in vain. It's just manifested by profanity. To have a thought that is unworthy of God is an offense to God. It's a violation of the law. It's damnable. How many times have you heard this? "God isn't fair." Bingo! Violation of the law; because that's a thought that is unworthy of God. That's sinful. The true nature of sin is, you see, when you read that commandment, "Don't take the Lord's name in vain," it's going to expose that. The person who says, "God is not fair," has just committed a heinous act of treason against God and his holy character because they've created a thought that is unworthy of him.

How many times do we hear that when you teach the doctrine of election? "Well that's not fair." Well great. I'm glad it isn't fair. I'll tell you what's not fair, folks. It's not fair that Christ paid for my sins. That not fair. But it's absolutely righteous. It's absolutely just. The next time somebody says God isn't fair, say, "Isn't that wonderful. I'm so grateful that he's not." You see, because you're creating a God of your human imagination. That's a violation of the commandment. When you create a god of your how human imagination—God should be this and God should be that and Jesus should be this and Jesus should be that—that's sin! Because you're creating a false view of the God of biblical revelation. That's what the law exposes. It discovers the rottenness of your mindset of how you think. That's what Paul is saying. You're never going to understand that which is evil until you understand that which is good.

The next time you wonder, “I wonder if God should be like this,” bingo! Sin. You’ve just been exposed. The commandment has exposed that. You see, it arouses all those things. I know what’s going to happen. You’re going to leave here tonight and your mind is going to go goofy. You’re going to start thinking of, “What’s my view of God? Is it this? Or is it that?” You ask people about the nature of God, you’re going to get as many answers as people you ask. Nine out of ten of them are going to be sinful. Because they’re thoughts. They’re absolutely unworthy of the character, the nature and the attributes of God. You see, one of the Puritan writers says that, “Sin is our declaration of independence of God.” Sin is our declaration of independence of God.

How does sin use the law? It does so by first arousing in us the element of rebellion. Let me explain what I mean by that. There are many things that it will arouse. I only have time to go through one. I think this is probably the most paramount. It’s our rebellious attitude. We are born rebels. We are born with an antagonism to God within us. We are born sinful little vipers who are antagonistic in hatred of God. That’s the way we’re born because we’re in Adam. It’s a consequence of the fall of man. That’s a fundamental principle of the Scripture. You can’t avoid that.

Remember Romans 5:10? You’re what? An enemy. You’re born an enemy. I was born an enemy of God. How about Romans 8:7? You have enmity. That means hatred toward God. I was born this way—a sinful little viper, and I hated God, and I was his enemy. But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, that he did something to me when I was exposed to the Gospel of Christ. You see, we’re born wanting to be autonomous. That’s our rebellious spirit. We don’t want to bow down to anyone, and we resent the idea of the law. That’s why so many people do not believe in God. They resent the idea that there’s someone to whom they must bow down their knee. They resent that, and they’re saying, “I’m not going to believe in God because I’m captain of my own soul.” You see, they resent the idea that there’s someone, even God, that they have to bow down to.

Modern man says this, “We’re 21st century people. We can stand on our own two feet. We have all the abilities. We’ve all this gained wisdom from all of these years of knowledge and technology. We’re capable. We can do whatever we want. You can accomplish anything you want.” The natural man hates this notion, that there is someone, even God, before whom he has to bow down and submit himself. That’s what the law stimulates within us.

Why is it, in our culture today, that we want to remove the Ten Commandments from school buildings? Why do we want to do that? Why is it, at Westminster College, they want to remove the word “God” off the buildings? Do you realize they want to do that? There’s a movement afoot to remove God off the buildings of Westminster College because people are exposed. You might offend somebody when you see the word “God,” when you see the word “Ten Commandments.” Why is it we have in these communities the removal of the Ten Commandments? It’s because people resent it. That’s a sign of our rebellious spirit. The law exposes that. You see, that’s exactly what Paul says. Sin uses something that is good, the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, and he uses that to stimulate your rebelliousness. That’s why we resent the law. It’s positively powerful, folks. You’ve got to understand that.

Let me make a few applications as we wrap this up. First of all, if we’re not clear as to the nature of sin, we’ll never really understand the true teaching of the Bible. The entirety of biblical revelation concerning salvation is based upon our clear understanding of what sin is, in and of itself, what’s true nature and it’s character. We shall never understand why we have to die to the law, if you don’t understand the true nature of sin. You see, if you don’t understand the true nature of sin, you’re going to realize that I can do it. But when you understand the true nature of sin, you realize it’s impossible, it’s hopeless. But thanks be to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, we shall never understand why the Son of God had to come and die, we shall never see the necessity of regeneration and rebirth, unless we understand the true nature of sin. That's why so many people in our culture today think this, "I can decide for Christ. All I have to do is invite him into my life." How can that be possible, if the Bible is true about the true nature of sin? How can a dead person, who is dead in their trespasses and sins, do anything, let alone, "I think as a matter of my will, I'm going to invite Christ into my life"? How is that possible, when you understand the true nature and power of sin? That's why grace is this—it's what I have done for you that makes the difference, not what you think you have done. How are they going to do that if the Bible is correct, about the true nature and power of sin?

Most of our troubles today, friends, are due to the failure to grasp and understand the biblical nature of sin; the doctrine of sin. I don't want to end on that. I want to end of verse 25, "How majestic, how holy, how wise and how loving is the God who has provided a way in which sin is removed from those who trust in him. But thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ." May God be pleased to lead our knowledge into living, not just into learning.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you don't leave us hopeless when we're exposed. But it's in our exposure that we discover hope. It's in our exposure of being convicted of our sin, convinced of our sin, that we are converted from our sin, and then we derive the comfort from your Holy Spirit. Father, thank you that we are not left hopeless when we're exposed by the law, but the law is the schoolmaster to lead us to the person and work of Christ. So collectively, Father, we just say and end this session tonight, if we've said anything that's inconsistent with your nature, your revelation of who you are in all of your glory, wisdom and majesty, that you'd be pleased to remove that from our minds, and only those thoughts that are consistent with you will be the things that we remember, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. Amen!