

## ***“The Purpose and Function of the Law”***

**Romans the Gospel of God**

**Romans 7:7-13**

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**March 31, 2023**

**Jeff:** Our Father in heaven, we bow before You knowing that You are the Master and King of the universe. You are the Creator, You are the Lord. We are ever thankful to be mindful of that, and to be mindful that we are not only Your servants—for indeed we are—but we’re mindful that we are Your children. Father, You have blessed us with the gift of salvation and we are thankful for that. And as we reflect upon what it is that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ we are humbled by the fact that You not only saved us—justifying us, bestowing upon us the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ,—but even more than that You adopted us into Your family making us sons, and we’re thankful for that. Lord, we ask that You’ll bless us and strengthen us by Your grace in that knowledge. And we pray, Father, that the status that we hold in Jesus Christ would cause us to be motivated to pursue holiness and to pursue love for one another, and to pursue fellowship in Your church.

Father, we’re thankful for these things and praise You for them. We also realize that in this world we will have trouble. As sure as sparks fly upward man is born to trouble, and we recognize that the Christian seems to be born to even more trouble. And Father, though the anger and the hatred of the world is often subtle, we catch glimpses of it. And we recognize it for what it is. And Lord, we pray that You would indeed preserve Your church. We ask that You would uphold her in the face of affliction. And we pray, Father, for Your hand of blessing to rest upon her. Lord, we pray for our brothers and sisters at Covenant Church, and we ask that You would minister to them, especially those who have experienced loss. Father, we ask that there would be justice in the wake of this. And certainly, Lord, we ask that there would be an abundance of grace.

Lord, we certainly pray for our brother Kevin. We ask that Your hand would be upon him. We pray, Father, that You will bless him in those who surround him; let him find comfort. Most of all, let him find comfort in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his union with Him.

Father, we’re thankful for the birthdays that we’ve heard about—for Bruce’s birthday and for Kevin’s. And we’re mindful that those are happy occasions wherein we are reminded that people have been given to us as gifts. And so, Father, we’re thankful for them.

Father, we also bow before You as we open the Word. And we ask that You will use the book of Romans to change and shape our lives so that we might be different, even more different than we were this morning coming into this place. And Father, we pray that this difference would manifest and exalt Your glory all the more. And we pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Don Maurer:** And we’re thankful for another birthday, too.

**Jeff:** So let’s—*(Laughter)* Yes, right.

**Don:** Yesterday.

**Jeff:** Don’s birthday.

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**Don:** No, Jeff’s birthday.

**Jeff:** Jordan’s birthday. *(Laughter)* Sit down, Don. *(Laughter)* All right; let’s start with Romans 7:7-13. That’s what we’re going to read today. So if you’ll turn there let’s turn our attention to Romans. And let me read this text to you: Romans 7:7-13.

*“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.*

*“I was once alive apart from the law. But when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good.*

*“Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”* The word of the Lord.

**Brave Men:** Thanks be to God.

**Jeff:** Well, today I want us to think about some introductory points. I’m actually going to give the outline in just a minute. But I want us to think through some things that we saw at the end of the last time that are important for us to think about this time. And then we’ll look at the outline.

I want us to think first of all about our relationship to the law. I want to briefly touch on this because I think this is one of those things that is important for us to have in mind, because we often talk about grace and law. And we think about law as if it were simply one thing, and it isn’t one thing. “We know that the law is holy, righteous and good.” Certainly the Scriptures tell us that. We also understand that the law is the embodiment of the righteousness of God. So if you want to know what the righteous character of God looks like, at least as it is manifested in this life, you look at the law. That reflects the moral character of God as He gives it to His created beings. And so the law is good; the law is righteous; the law is a reflection of God.

And yet, when you think about the law, the law has different uses. And so when you think about different aspects of creation, one of the things that we realize is that the law doesn’t have one particular use for everybody in every context. So there are what theologians call the three uses of the law.

So first of all there is the use of the law that brings sinful man into a recognition of himself as sinful, and therefore in need of a Savior. And so for instance this is what James talks about when he says that we look into the law as a mirror. We see our reflection; we see that it is the law reflecting back to us the sinfulness of our character and our need for a Savior.

So the law says, “*Thou shalt not murder.*” We look at ourselves in the mirror of the law and we see a murderer. Maybe we haven’t taken a knife to someone. Maybe we haven’t shot someone; maybe we haven’t done something like that. But certainly we’ve called our brother a fool says Jesus, and that is of the same species as murder. And therefore we are murderers; that’s the idea. So that’s the first use of the law.

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The second use of the law has to do with the political world; it has to do with mankind in general. We often call this the application of the law in terms of God’s common grace. In other words, even men who have never read the Scriptures know that it is wrong to murder. Why? Because the law written on tablets of stone has also been written on the hearts of people. And so someone who has never read the Scriptures knows that it is important for everyone to be what? Just and fair, right?

For instance, if I have never read the Scriptures, if I’ve never known the Ten Commandments, and I go to work for somebody, and I get to the end of the week, and they promise to pay me \$500 for that week’s work, and they give me \$100, and I say to them, “Where’s the other \$400?” And they say, “Well, I had to deduct a few things that I neglected to tell you about.”

You’re going to cry, “Foul! You have stolen from me!”, right? We know that implicitly. We understand that even if we’ve never read the law in our lives we know we’ve been cheated; we know we’ve been stolen from. And so the law really brings order to society; it restrains evil as it were. Okay, so there is law and it restrains evil. That’s the second use of the law.

Then there’s a third use of the law. And the third use of the law is that it is a guide for the Christian. In other words, you become a Christian. You are now justified; you are now saved. And the question is, where do I go from here? How do I live my life? And oftentimes in today’s context people will talk about spirituality.

Now spirituality is a good thing in so far as it goes. But what we really need to talk about is righteousness. What kind of righteous character should a Christian have? If you want the answer to that question where do you go? You go to the law, because the law will tell you the righteous character that you ought to have as a believer.

Not that you will merit anything before God by obeying the law, because Christ already merited salvation on your behalf. No, you’re not going to merit a thing.. But you are going to have a guide in the law. And when you fail you will have forgiveness in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you get back up and you start obeying the law again. Why? Because you want your life to look like the righteous character of the Author of that law who is God Himself, revealed in Jesus Christ; that’s the idea. Those are the three uses of the law.

Now when we looked at the first six verses of Romans chapter 7, it talks about our deadness to the law. Remember this illustration. It says that we were like this woman married to this man. And rather than the man dying and her being free, she dies. She’s married to this man. She thinks she’s going to be free. No, the story goes, “And she dies.” She’s now dead to her husband and no longer bound to him.

And she is now resurrected to a new life. And that new life is to her new husband. Who is her new husband? Her new husband is Christ.

And so you see the idea. The idea is that we were in relationship to the lawing that first sense. That is, it convicted us; it told us of our need for a Savior, and it killed us. And in Christ we died to that law because He satisfied its requirements on our behalf. So we died to that law. But it’s also in Christ that we were raised to a new relationship in Jesus Christ. And now the law becomes our guide.

That’s the way you need to understand Romans chapter 7 in order to understand the uses of the law and what Paul is talking about here. So in the first six verses he’s talking

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about how we are convicted by the law, that we are brought to our need for a Savior. Our Savior satisfied the righteous requirements of the law and experienced the penalty for our having broken the law, so in His death is our death. And yet death couldn't hold Him because He was righteous. And so in His resurrection we have life; that's the idea.

And now we're going to enter into a new phase of our study with this text. And so in 7:7-13 we run into something significantly different. But I want to just pause and ask if you have any questions. Is there anything that you want to re-visit from the last time? We talked a lot most of the last time about some extraneous things that had to do with our text, but not necessarily about the text itself. So let me ask you: any questions? Any thoughts or comments that you want to make? Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** Some people distinguish between the law of God found in the Old Testament in the Ten Commandments, as well as the ceremonial law and everything, from the law of the Spirit or the law of Christ.

**Jeff:** Right.

**Don:** What would you say to that? How would you correct that?

**Jeff:** Well, I think people often do that in order to say that the law of God in the Old Testament is something substantively different from the law of Christ in the New. And oftentimes there are reasons why they might do that. Oftentimes they center around certain commandments and the avoidance of those commandments. But I think that when you ask yourself the question in light of the New Testament,—what did Christ come to satisfy?—He came to satisfy the law of God and its requirements. And He did satisfy it in His own righteousness. But remember, that alone could not bring us salvation, because we stood under the law's penalty. So He had to go to the cross and satisfy the penalty that was levied against us. So He took that upon Himself.

But I think that when you see the law of Christ referenced in the New Testament, that's the third use of the law that's being referenced there—that idea of the guide that the law now becomes. And I think there's a similar pattern with regard to the Sabbath, now the Lord's Day, right? These things are now the Lord's. It's the law of God; it's the Sabbath. But now it's the law of Christ; now it's the Lord's Day. I would say that it's a shift not in substance, but in thinking. Does that satisfy you, Don?

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Yes?

**David Miller:** In addition (and this may not have been part of the lesson), when you break the law there are consequences, either political, social or spiritual discipline, that sort of thing. And then there are benefits to maintaining a righteous posture and all your needs, such as in 1 Peter and so forth. I wanted to mention that.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. You know, it's interesting. I'm counseling a man right now, a younger man. And his temptation is to walk away from the faith. He made a profession and everything. And I said that very thing to him. I said, “You know, if you belong to the Lord Jesus you're going to be brought back to Him. And yet I want you to realize that what you're doing and the way you're living your life is going to produce bad fruit; it's going to produce bad consequences.” And so he had enough foresight to look ahead to see that these things will produce consequences in your life. “If the Lord brings you back to Himself, which I trust He will, you're going to be brought back with those consequences. And they may not be easily avoided or gotten out from under.”

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Let me use that illustration, because it kind of goes to the second use of the law; the law restrains evil. So what was I telling this guy? Well I was telling somebody who has made a good profession to use the law as your guide. What I’m also telling him is that the law restrains you from evil, right? And so use it as such. Put the law to use in that sense. And trusting that the Spirit is living in him, though he is disobedient for a time, I’m saying to him, “I believe better things concerning you,” right? “Obey this law. Even though you’re not obeying it out of a right motive right now, even if you’re not obeying it to honor Christ, obey it for self-preservation, for your own benefit at this point in your life.” I’m appealing to him at this point on the basis of both the third and the second use of the law to avoid the very things you’re talking about, right? Anything else? Yes?

**Ted Wood:** If you don’t mind, I’m curious as to why this young man is kind of being driven or tempted or whatever, to move away from this, because he once said that this was the truth. And now basically he’s walking away; he’s saying that it’s not the truth.

**Jeff:** Well this opens up a broader kind of subject. And so I’ll say it like this and then you can probe more if you’d like, but I think I’ll just say this. And this is going to come from my own color and opinion. So if you don’t like it, you don’t have to like it; it’s all right.

I’m part of the home school movement. I wasn’t raised in home school, but we home-schooled our children for a time. Our daughter is in a Christian school now, and so on and so forth. But I have a tendency to think that when children are sheltered from every consequence and from every outside certain negative person, and from everything that’s going on in the world, when they get exposed to it, it sometimes has an enticing element to it. And I think that’s what has happened.

Now I want to say this to you. I think that you can expose your Christian school kids to too much of the world. And I have a tendency to think it’s a balance, and I’m not always sure I strike that balance well. But I do think it’s a balance between letting them know what’s happening in the world and keeping them from some of those things. But I think that’s why.

Okay. Well, let’s go on. There’s something going on here in this text that’s really fascinating when you think about it, because Romans 7 is one of those texts that’s really hotly debated. And why is it hotly debated? Well because there are some parts of this text—some parts of Romans chapter 7—that some will see as distinct about Paul’s pre-conversion life. And then there are others who will see the whole thing as Paul’s believing life. And that raises a lot of consequential issues when you talk about this particular text. In fact there are some who are so strongly influenced by their own view of this text that they’ll actually eschew those who write commentaries from another perspective.

Alexander White was like this. You may not know him well, but he as a Scottish preacher, and he loved *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and wrote a book on the characters of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. But he had a long standing order from his publisher to have any commentary written on the book of Romans sent to him. And he would get the book in the mail. He would immediately turn to Romans 7 and he would read what the author had to say about Romans 7. And then he would decide on that basis whether or not the commentary was for him. And so he would send it back with a note in it if it wasn’t his position, saying, “This commentary is not for me.” And we oftentimes do that.

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But I want us to think about what we’re encountering. And so I’m going to come at it from a particular position. I’m not going to outline the positions other than to say what I say. But let me simply say to you that in 7:7-13 I think what we have is what we would call a flashback.

In other words I think that now, having given us the principles in 1-6, Paul is now taking us backward in time. He is now saying to us, “This is what life looked like for me prior to my death to the law in Jesus Christ, and my resurrection to newness of life in Him.” So 7:7-13 is something of a flashback; Paul is taking us backward. And he’s looking at life from his pre-conversion base.

And so I want us to look at this text with this outline in mind. I want us to think about the law’s function. I want us to think about how sin and the law interface. And then I want us to think about the nature of the law. All those are in these short verses, and I want us to think about those things together.

So first of all let’s think together about the law’s function. Now let’s ask the question: What does the law do? Now you might think that we should ask the question that Paul asks. And he certainly asks it, and so let’s ask it before we ask this one. And that is, “*What shall we say, then? Is the law sin?*” No! There, I’ve asked it and I’ve answered it.

Now let me ask this one. What does the law do? And the answer to that is: the law reveals sin. The law itself is not sin. But the law itself does reveal sin.

Now the question that we have to ask is how does the law reveal sin in the unbeliever? Remember, that’s what we’re asking here. We’re going backward in time. We’re not asking the question: how does the law reveal sin in the believer? We’re asking: how does the law reveal sin in the unbeliever?

Now I want to take two examples. And I want to take those two examples, but I want to say something to you about those two examples; we need to think about them in context. They are both examples that apply to covenant children. In other words, both of these examples that I’m going to talk to you about are examples that are applied to children who have been raised in the covenant, raised to believe the right things, raised to do the right things.

Now we’re going to take those two examples. We’re going to take those two examples because they’re readily made for us in the Scriptures. But I want you to see that no matter whether the child is raised in the covenant or outside the covenant, the law functions in a very similar way, okay?

So the first one I want us to look at is in Mark chapter 10. And this is the story of the rich young ruler. Now you know the story of the rich young ruler. He comes to Jesus and he basically says, “*What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?*” And remember, I think it’s Mark who says that Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and loved him.

I love the way that John Gerstner handles this. Who knew John Gerstner? You know John Gerstner. (*Jeff imitates his voice.*) He had a gravelly voice. And you know, R. C. Sproul obviously loved him; he was his mentor. But one time John Gerstner was preaching. (*Jeff imitates him*) And he said, “And Mark said He loved him. Why did He love him? Because he was stupid.” (*Laughter*) “He was a stupid young man.” I thought that was hilarious. My wife never enjoyed that man’s tapes. (*Laughter*) I absolutely loved them. (*Laughter*)

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Anyway, the rich young ruler comes to Jesus. And he says, “*What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?*” And what does Jesus say to this covenant child? That’s one of the things that we have to remember: this is a covenant child raised in a covenant home. What does He say to him?

**Jim Hamilton:** “Give it away.”

**Don Bishop:** “Give it all away.”

**Jeff:** Before that?

**Paul Deffenbaugh:** “You know what to do.”

**Don Maurer:** “You know the law.”

**Jeff:** You know, this is great, all of these answers. “*Why do you call me good.*” We’ve already left that, Gary; we’re already far from that. C’mon! (*Laughter*) What did you say, Don?

**Don Maurer:** “You know the law.”

**Jeff:** “You know the law.” Why would He give him that as an answer? Did Jesus not go to Evangelism 101? (*Laughter*) Does He not know the gospel. Why would He direct this young man to the law?

Well, I’ll tell you why He would direct him to the law. He would direct him to the law because even a covenant child needs to come into contact with the first use of the law, because a covenant child is not a believer on the basis of biology. In other words, the covenant is not functioning *ex opera operato*. In other words, just because he’s born into a Christian family does not mean he is a Christian. And so he needs to come into contact with the very first use of the law. He needs to have the law put in front of him as a mirror. And he needs to see his sinfulness in relation to that law, and therefore his need for Christ. That’s what Jesus is doing to him. He’s holding up the mirror of the law, the first use of the law to this child. And He’s saying, “Look into the mirror. What does the law tell you?”

“Okay, Jesus; what does the law tell me? It tells me to have no other gods.” And then recite the law. No. “What does the law tell you about yourself?”

And what does the young man say next?

**Jim:** “I’ve kept all of those.”

**Jeff:** “I’ve kept all of those.” And I think that’s why John Gerstner said, (*imitating him*), “He’s stupid.” (*Laughter*) Because he thinks he kept the law from his youth. He thinks he’s kept all those things.

Do you know what he grew up in? He grew up in a home where if he did something good his parents said, “Yea! You did great!” He was never told, “Oh no, honey; that’s sinful. That’s a transgression of God’s law, and you need forgiveness for that.”

I’ll never forget that I was sitting beside my son who was probably I don’t know, maybe a year or two years old at the time. And my wife was in the shower. I had the opportunity; I was alone with him. And I thought to myself that I’m going to take the opportunity to share the gospel with my son. I wanted to make sure that I would do this repeatedly throughout his life.

So we’re sitting there. My son was sitting there and he had a binky in his mouth. I was reading him a book and I decided to set the book beside me. And I said, “Son, let me tell you something. We are sinners.” And he took out his binky and he said to me, “Daddy, I thought we were boys.” (*Laughter*)

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I said, “We’ll talk later.” (*Laughter*)

**Ted:** Is this the beginning of gender confusion? (*Laughter*) We start with a woke crowd. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** All right. So the man says, “*All those I have kept from my youth.*” John Gerstner says he’s stupid. And he is stupid because he doesn’t recognize the fact that the law goes beyond the positive or negative statement that is made in the tablets of stone.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** In other words, when you think about murder it’s not just about taking someone’s life, but it is a species of that. Like Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, if you call your brother a fool, you’ve committed murder.

Now I want to pause and I want to go back to you just for a second. I want to hit the “time out” button. I want to stop for a second, because sometimes we have a tendency to take Jesus’ words at that point. And we have a tendency to do things with them that they won’t sustain.

For instance, I’ve counseled some wives whose husbands were involved in pornography. And the wife will say, “I have legitimate grounds for divorce.” And I’ll say, “Why?”

And she’ll say, “Because she has committed adultery on me.” And I’ll say, “Have you had an affair?”

And she’ll say, “no, no, no. Jesus says that if he looks at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery. And therefore Jesus says that I have legitimate grounds for divorce.”

And do you know what I say to her?

**Ted:** “Get a life?”

**Jeff:** I say to her, “As soon as we grant you the divorce, we’re probably going to have to execute you. Murder is a capital crime, and if you’ve ever called anyone a fool, then we’re going to have to exercise capital judgment upon you.”

That’s not what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying that calling your brother a fool is of the same species. But it doesn’t merit the same consequence. There needs to be wisdom exercised in that.

All right. So we find that the boy thinks that he has kept these from his youth. And so Jesus now moves the conversation forward. What He wants to do is, He wants to show this young man that he has not kept these from his youth. And what does He do? Jesus then applies the law.

And how does He apply the law? Well, first of all let’s think about what the law is if we break the law down. How does Jesus break the law down into the lowest common denominator? I’m talking about the Ten Commandments; how does He break them down? In the New Testament He says that the law can be summed up in two phrases: love God and love your neighbor, right? Those are the smallest breakdowns of the law that we have in the New Testament.

So Jesus does that very thing to the young man. He breaks the law down and then He applies it. So what does He tell him to do? He says, “All right, you come and follow Me. But first you go and sell all you have and give it to the poor, and then you come and follow Me.”



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What is He telling him to do? Well, what He’s telling him to do is, He’s telling him to love his neighbor to the nth degree by selling all his possessions and giving them to his neighbor. And then He’s telling him to love God by coming and following after Him.

So what He’s doing is, He’s going to the nth degree in both commandments, and He’s telling him that this is what it means to obey the law. Go do it. And what does the young man do? He goes away sad, because he can’t do the things that Jesus has asked him to do.

And no one can; that’s the point of this. No one is able to keep this law. And that should have driven this young man to Jesus. Rather than going away sad, what he should have said to him is, “Jesus, I can’t possibly do that.” And then Jesus might have said to him, “Why can’t you do that?”

He might have said, “Because I love the things that I possess too much.” And then Jesus would have started meddling in his life. You see, that’s the whole point of this. In other words, the law shows him his need. And rather than seeing his need for what it is, he walks away.

And you can’t grab them and say to them, “No, no, no! Come back and look in the mirror again and receive Jesus!” No, it doesn’t work like that. The Spirit blows where it wills, right? But what you can do is, show them the mirror of the law. And that’s what Jesus is doing at this point.

All right, that’s the idea. Now having that in mind, I want you to think about Paul’s own experience. For he says, *“For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”*

Now think about this. He’s a covenant child. He grew up knowing these things from his youth. He knew the law said, *“Thou shalt not covet.”* What is he talking about? Well, I’ll tell you what he’s talking about. What does he have in mind? I think that when you put the pieces together you begin to realize that there are some things at play here that are exposing sin in him. And that is that the law is exposing sin in him.

Let me just talk to you about some of these things. First of all he says what in Philippians chapter 3? “If you Judaizers think you are this, then I am so much more.” Remember that? Let’s just read that, because we need to understand this perspective that Paul has on himself.

Look at Philippians chapter 3. In verse 4 he says, *“Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews: as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law blameless.”*

All right, that’s the way he thinks of himself. And then he runs into Stephen. Go back to Acts chapter 6. Now the reason why we know he runs into Stephen is because he’s the one who is holding the cloaks of those who are stoning Stephen. Saul approved of his death.

But I want you to notice this. When you look at this text, you realize a couple of things. First of all, in Acts chapter 6 and in verse 9 it says, *“Then some of those who belonged to the Synagogue of the Freedmen, (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.”*

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You say, “That’s not a big deal. Why should I be bothered by that?” Well I want you to think about who was from Cilicia. The apostle Paul was from Cilicia, okay? And he rose up to dispute Stephen.

Now look at what verse 10 says. *“But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”*

Now here is the apostle Paul—a Pharisee among Pharisees, a Jew among Jews. He is a bright, shining star in Judaism. And here he is; he is present at Stephen’s defense. And he’s debating with Stephen, a man who knew the law. And verse 10 of Acts chapter 6 says that none of these, including Paul, could best this man’s arguments.

And Romans 7 says, “I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” “I would have not known what it was to envy had not the law said, ‘Thou shalt not envy.’”

Do you see the point? The point is that here is where he’s saying, “I need to kill this man, or at least approve of those who are about to kill him, because he is better than me. And I can’t tolerate someone being better than me.”

He was the best. And I think that’s what is behind the text here. I think that when Paul says in Romans 7, “I wouldn’t have known what it was to covet, unless the law said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’” But let’s think about what he says, and this is the function of the law. The function of the law is to convict us of our sin.

Now think about this. How do sin and the law interface? This is an important question. There are three actions here that we need to keep in mind when we think about this. And this is going to reach back into Paul’s example.

First of all, sin exploits the law. Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. I want you to think about what Paul says. Paul says that sin seizes the opportunity afforded by the law. Sin exploits the law.

Now I want you to think about this; I want you to think about an example. The law is like a sleeping bear. You’re in the cage with a sleeping bear. And the sleeping bear is the law. And what happens? Sin comes to the door. And right on the door it says, “Don’t wake up the bear.” Sin comes to the door and starts rattling the cage. And the law wakes up. And the law starts beating the daylights out of you. It’s that sleeping bear that wakes up and sees that you’re in the cage, and then it starts tearing you to pieces.

And you say, “Save me!” And all you hear is, “The law can’t save you.” It can only point out your sin.

That’s what happens in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Remember the guy whose profit is lust. And Adam says, “Hey, I’ll give you my three daughters.” And you remember that he leaves them. But he says to me, “Man, I took a piece of them with me.”

What does he mean by that? There’s a piece up here; he’s got an imagination. And remember this: The law comes after him and just beats the daylights out of him. And he starts hollering, “Save me!” And Moses can’t save anyone; all Moses can do is beat you up. All the law can do is beat you up.

And think of it. Sin seizes the opportunity afforded by the law. And through the law sin kills you. And that’s why he asks the question: Is the law bad? No, the law is not bad. But sin exploits the law to your death.

So think about Paul, right? Paul said, “I know the law. The law says, *‘Thou shalt not covet.’*” And then all of a sudden sin comes along, and actually covetousness comes

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along. He covets; he’s envious. And sin rattles the cage, and the law wakes up and starts to kill him. And Paul cries out, “Help me!” But there is no help from the law.

You know, this is the thing I can’t understand. When I was in college I went to the synagogue in Sharon and I listened to the rabbi speak. And this is what the rabbi said. “See, the problem with you Christians is that you need Jesus. We have the law.” And all he said was driving me to Jesus; that’s all he did. I thought, You can have it. Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** I think it’s interesting too that Paul doesn’t talk about murder or adultery or whatever. He could use the excuse, “Well, I never did those things outwardly.” Covetousness is inward.

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Yeah, that’s right.

**Don:** That really nails it.

**Jeff:** That’s exactly right. Well, along comes sin and Paul says that he died. I want to hasten us along here and go to the second point: Sin produces more sin. This is the second action under that second point. Sin not only exploits the law, but sin actually produces more sin.

Verse 8: “*Sin produced all kinds of covetousness.*” In other words, sin, once it exploits the law, all of a sudden I begin to see it everywhere in me, in places I wouldn’t have expected. It’s like a cancer. And you see, that’s the whole point of what Jesus was trying to get the young man to see.

Sin is deceptive: this is the third point. Sin is deceptive; look at verse 11. “*For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.*” And I think part of what he’s saying there is that sin takes what is holy, righteous and good in the law, and through it brings about his own death. So in that sense it deceives him. It tries to convince us. Here’s what sin in us tries to do. It tries to convince us that the law is bad.

Think about it. You want something that you are not supposed to have. And sin in you says, “You know what? Isn’t the law terrible? And the God who gave it is just as bad, because He doesn’t want you to have happiness and fullness.” And that’s the way sin deceives us. It lies to us, deceives us, and sin would actually betray us and seek our own death.

Well, what is the nature of the law? Let me say this quickly. Maybe not. There’s no sense in rushing; I rushed last time. I’ll just start with this point the next time, and then we’ll go on. Let me close us in prayer. You guys are a quiet group this time; you just let me talk.

**Ted:** It’s very deep and very good stuff. And Jim said he’s feeling guilty. (*Laughter*)

**Jeff:** All right, let’s pray. Father, thank You for this day and for the time You’ve given us. Bless us, Lord, and bless us not only with thoughts about the law, though it is holy, righteous and good. Bless us with thoughts about the abundance of Your grace given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, Lord, bring the law to mind as a righteous guide for living, always pointing us back to the Lord Jesus Christ, for in Him we have the forgiveness of our sins, and we thank You for that. And we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. (*Applause*)