

# THE WEAKNESS OF THE LAW EXPOSED

Romans 7:1-23

by Abri Brancken (6 Nov 2016)

In his letter to the Romans, Paul has explained that we are saved by grace, not by observing the law, because Christ died for us. This does not give us permission to sin — rather, we should serve God by being slaves of righteousness. Paul clarifies the relationship between law and sin in chapter 7. He puts himself in the position before his conversion, someone who knew the law, but did not have the strength to overcome sin. He begins by giving us an analogy from marriage, and he speaks to the Jewish believers, because they are the ones who are most concerned about the law.

## **An illustration from marriage (Rom 7:1-3)**

### **1. (Rom 7:1-3) The law has authority only over the living.**

*“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”*

The apostle Paul lived his life to keep the law perfectly.

He was a Pharisee among Pharisees. He had the best training that someone could get. He also knew that we are not able to keep the law. The natural man cannot keep the law because man is sinful. The flesh is married to the law.

Paul makes the point that death ends all obligations and contracts. A wife is no longer bound to her husband if he dies because death ends that contract. If her husband dies, she is free from that law.

## **OUR DEATH WITH JESUS SETS US FREE FROM THE LAW (Rom 7:4)**

*Rom 7:4 - “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another; to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”*

The believer in Jesus Christ is not only dead to sin, but also dead to the law (Romans 6:3-8)

Paul makes it plain that believers are dead to the law as far as it represents a principle of living or a place of right standing before God. We are not free from the law so we can live unto ourselves; we are free so that we can be "married" to Jesus and so that we can bear fruit to God. Under the law, we did not bear fruit to God. Instead we bore fruit to death, because the law aroused the passions of sins within us.

### **Delivered from the law (Rom 7:6)**

*Rom 7:6 - “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

## **THE LAW CANNOT JUSTIFY YOU BEFORE GOD**

Because we died with Jesus at Calvary, we are dead to the law and delivered from its dominion over us as a principle of justification or of sanctification. The law does not justify us; it does not make us right with God, because we still have sin within. The law does not sanctify us; it does not take us deeper with God and make us more holy before Him. Nothing that you can do in the flesh can deal with internal sin.

The law reveals to us God’s ways, thereby helping us to identify sin and that which is against the ways of the LORD. The law is not an end in itself. It is part of something much bigger. The bigger picture is God Himself coming to save humanity. Our freedom is given not so we can stop serving God; but so that we can serve Him better, under the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

## **IS THE LAW SIN?**

*What shall we say then? Is the law sin?*

1. (7a) Paul asks: Is the law (equal to) sin?

Someone must think, "Surely there is something wrong with the law!"

2. (7b) No, the law is good because it reveals sin to us.

*"Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."*

## **THE LAW IS LIKE AN X-RAY MACHINE**

I would not have known sin except through the law. Sin has always been there, but we did not see it. The law is like an x-ray machine; it reveals plainly what might have always been there, but was hidden before. You can't blame an x-ray for what it exposes.

*"For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." "*

The law exposes and magnifies sin. - (Rom 7:13)

**NB:** If sin can use something as good as the law to its advantage in promoting evil, it shows how evil sin is.

**NB:** We need sin to appear sin, because it always wants to hide in us and conceal its true depths and strength. This is one of the most deplorable results of sin. It injures us most by taking from us the capacity to know how much we are injured. It undermines the man's constitution, and yet leads him to boast of unailing health; it beggars him, and tells him he is rich; it strips him, and makes him glory in his fancied robes.

The law, therefore, is the grand instrument in the hands of a faithful minister, to alarm and awaken sinners." So, that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful: Sin "becomes more sinful" in light of the law in two ways.

**First**, sin becomes exceedingly sinful through contrast with the law.

**Second**, sin becomes exceedingly sinful because the law provokes its evil nature. Sin is a deadly force that kills and destroy.

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.

## **SIN CORRUPTS THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LAW (Rom 7:8)**

*"But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead."*

Paul describes the dynamic where the warning "don't do that" may become a call to action because of our sinful, rebellious hearts. It isn't the fault of the commandment, but it is our fault.

In his book Confessions, the great theologian of the ancient church Augustine described how this dynamic worked in his life as a young man: "There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears - not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in the theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law? The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."

In American history, we know that the Prohibition Act didn't stop drinking. In many ways it made drinking more attractive to people, because of our desire to break boundaries set by the commandment. More law does not help. There needs to be a character, a nature change.

Once God draws a boundary for us, we are immediately enticed to cross that boundary - which is no fault of God or His boundary, but the fault of our sinful hearts. Rebellion is rooted in the heart of man. The weakness of the law isn't in the law - it is in us. Our hearts are so wicked that they can find opportunity for all manner of evil desire from something good like the law of God.

"The word opportunity in the original is a military term meaning a base of operations. Prohibition furnishes a springboard from which sin is all too ready to take off."

### **NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONIES**

A waterfront hotel in Florida was concerned that people might try to fish from the balconies, so they put up signs saying, "NO FISHING FROM THE BALCONY." They had constant problems with people fishing from the balconies, with lines and sinker weights breaking windows and bothering people in rooms below. They finally solved the problem by simply taking down the signs - and no one thought to fish from the balconies. Because of our hearts, the law can actually work like an invitation to sin.

*"Apart from the law, sin was dead"*

This shows how great the evil of sin is - it can take something good and holy like the law and twist it to promote evil. Sin warps love into lust, an honest desire to provide into greed, and law into a promoter of sin.

### **PAUL'S INNOCENCE BEFORE HE KNEW THE LAW**

4. (Rom 7:9) Paul's state of innocence before he knew the law.

*"I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."*

Children can be innocent before they know or understand what law requires. Paul was not alive with the life that the New Testament writers so often speak about. He is alive in the sense that he has never been put to death as a result of confrontation with the law."

*But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died:*

But when we do know the law, the law shows us our guilt and it excites our rebellion, bringing forth more sin and death.

(Rom 7:10-12) Sin corrupts the law and defeats its purpose of giving life.

*"And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."*

- Sin falsely promises satisfaction
- Sin falsely claims an adequate excuse
- Sin falsely promises an escape from punishment
- Sin falsely pretends to be a gateway towards freedom, pleasure and success.

*Sin ... deceived me:*

It isn't the law that deceives us, but it is sin that uses the law as an occasion for rebellion. This is why Jesus said you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32) The truth makes us free from the deceptions of sin.

**NB:** One of Satan's greatest deceptions is to get us to think of sin as something good that an unpleasant God wants to deprive us of. When God warns us away from sin, He warns us away from something that will kill us.

### **WE MUST DIE TO SIN AND THE LAW**

*Therefore the law is holy:*

It is true that we must die to sin (Romans 6:2) and we must die to the law (Romans 7:4). Sin corrupts the work or effect of the law, so we must die to both.

### **(Rom 7:14) The spiritual law cannot restrain a carnal man.**

*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.* Paul sees this carnality in himself, and knows that the law, though it is spiritual, has no answer for his carnal nature.

“Sold under sin”: Paul is in bondage under sin and the law can't help him out. He is like a man arrested for a crime and thrown in jail. The law will only help him if he is innocent, but Paul knows that he is guilty and that the law argues against him, not for him.

### **I DO WHAT I DON'T WANT TO DO**

*15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*

### **LAW OF GRAVITY ILLUSTRATION – LAW OF SIN AND DEATH**

The law of sin and death draws us towards sin. On the other hand, when we are born again, the law of the life rules in us. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. - Rom 8:2

### **WHO WILL SAVE US FROM SIN?**

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus is the fulfilment of the law. He came to do what the law is powerless in doing and that is to destroy the law of sin ruling in humanity.