

God Had a Purpose in Giving the Mosaic Law

Romans 7:7-13

Romans 7:7-13 - *"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? 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."^[a] ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. ¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. ¹³ Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."*

Background Notes

The theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is the righteousness of God and the gospel of God. The book of Romans systematically teaches us the good news of how a holy and righteous God can save unholy and unrighteous people like you and me. The key, of course, is that God Himself paid the penalty for our sins in the person of His Son. Because the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross at Calvary, now God can justify (that is, declare righteous) anyone and everyone who receives Jesus Christ as Savior. This great plan of salvation is unfolded in the first four chapters of Romans. After the whole world of mankind is shown to be guilty before God, we learn that salvation is a free gift. God's way of salvation has always been by grace through faith -- God's grace in Christ, and our faith as the means of receiving this free gift of salvation.

Now in Romans 5 through 8 we have the great "package of our salvation." In Romans 5 we see some of the great blessings and benefits of our salvation. We have way more than fire insurance or salvation from hell! We have more than a ticket to heaven, too. We have peace with God and we're reconciled to God.

In Romans 6 we learn of our union with Christ. God has not only declared us righteous (that's justification), but God actually sees us as righteous because we are in Christ. This is our spiritual position. We are united with Christ. In Romans 7 we learn that the believer is free from the Law, and in Romans 8 we will see that the believer has life in the spirit.

What is meant by the phrase "the believer is free from the Law"? Does it mean that believers are lawless? No! Does it mean that believers can throw out the Ten Commandments? No! Does it mean that believers can do whatever they want? No! It means that believers don't have to keep the Law of Moses for salvation -- or for our sanctification! We are free to serve our Savior out of love. Romans 7:6 says, *"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.” Question: Does the fact that we are neither saved by the Law nor sanctified by the Law mean that the Law of Moses is bad? Was giving it a mistake on God’s part? Had God no real purpose for giving the Law? Answer: Certainly not!

Doctrinal Points

1. The law is not sinful, but it reveals what is sinful.

Verse 7: *“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? 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 Mosaic Law can’t save us, nor can it sanctify us (that is, it can’t make us holy). But that doesn’t mean that the Law itself is sinful. The purpose of the Law is to **reveal** what is sinful. In Romans 3:20 we read, *“by the law is the knowledge of sin.”* Here in Romans 7:7 Paul tells us that if it were not for the Law, he would not have known sin. Even before Paul’s conversion, Paul was a model human being! Compared to other people, he was way ahead of them on the “moral scale.” As a child, Paul didn’t steal cookies from his mother’s cookie jar. As a teenager, Paul didn’t lie to his parents, or sow any wild oats. In Philippians 3, Paul wrote about his moral record before he became a Christian, and in verse 6 he said, *“...concerning the righteousness which is in the law, [I was] blameless...”* Blameless! Wow!

But the 10th Commandments got to the Apostle Paul: “You shall not covet...” Here in Romans 7 the apostle Paul says that if it wasn’t for that 10th commandment, Paul would not have known that to covet (strongly desire) something that belongs to someone else is actually sin! But the Law revealed that coveting is sinful. Let me ask you -- if it were not for the Ten Commandments, would you conclude with your own mind that coveting was sinful? We seem to intrinsically know that stealing someone’s house or car is wrong, but just to look and wish that we had that house or car – is that sin? Yes it is, according to the Law. The Law itself is not sinful, but it reveals what is sinful.

2. The law is not sinful, but it arouses what is sinful.

Look again at verses 8-9: *“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.”* Paul found that not only did the law reveal what is sinful, but it actually aroused what is sinful! It aroused sinful desires.

Have you experienced this? What do you do if you see a sign “Wet Paint!” “Don’t touch”? Chances are you are motivated to stick out your little finger and give that surface a tiny touch! Why? Because the law arouses your desire to touch! Store owners know that “Don’t touch the merchandise” signs don’t work very well, so they appeal to human sympathy by saying, “Please don’t touch the merchandise.” Back when I was in graduate school, I was working in the lab with some sensitive equipment that I didn’t want other students to play around with. The first sign I posted was: “Don’t touch the equipment!” That didn’t work! So my second sign said: “Please don’t touch the equipment.” That helped a little, but still

didn't really work, because although it wasn't so quite much of a "commandment," there was a law there. My third sign worked -- but it wasn't a law. I put up a sign that said "Danger, high voltage." It worked! Now that wasn't a lie, by the way -- there really was some high voltage involved -- but you see the law by itself just wouldn't work! The Law itself is not sinful, but it arouses what is sinful.

3. The law is not sinful, but it exposes what is sinful.

Verses 10-13: "*And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. ¹² Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. ¹³ Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.*" The Law, which is good and holy, not only reveals what is sinful and arouses what is sinful (sinful desires), it also exposes what is sinful. It exposes the sinful nature of a person, and that's the point of these verses.

Question: How could the Law of Moses (which was good and holy and righteous and supposed to bring blessing to life) actually stir up sin, and thus deceive Paul and make him miserable and condemn him to death?

Answer: The problem is not in the Law, but in the basic nature of mankind. People have sinful natures that are prone to sin, and the Law exposes how sinful our sinful human nature really is.

Take a lazy person, for example. That person may not realize how lazy he really is until he is confronted by a law that says, "Thou shalt start work every day at 8AM, and thou shalt work a forty hour week." Now that the law is posted, when the person continually comes to work late or doesn't even show up, his laziness is exposed. The "8AM law" has exposed how lazy he really is.

That's the way the Law of Moses operates. It exposes what is sinful, our indwelling sin, and shows us how sinful we really are. The Law is not sinful, but it exposes what is sinful.

Practical Application

Test yourself on the 10th Commandment!

What's the 10th Commandment? "You shall not covet." Let's go back to Exodus 20:17, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.*" Before he became a believer, the apostle Paul thought he was doing pretty well -- until he tested himself on the 10th commandment. When Paul tested himself on the 10th commandment, he realized how far short of God's standards he came, and how sinful he really was.

How do you measure up when you test yourself by the tenth commandment? Let me paraphrase the 10th commandment: "Remember, your neighbor is anyone you have contact with, including fellow believers. So don't covet your neighbor's bigger and better house or SUV or boat or vacation home. Don't covet your neighbor's better-looking or more efficient spouse. Don't covet your neighbor's better standard of living. Don't covet your neighbor's higher IQ. Don't

covet your neighbor's better athletic ability. Don't covet your neighbor's greater musical talent. Don't covet your neighbor's success in business or in scholastic achievement. Don't covet your neighbor's apparently problem-free life. Don't covet **anything** that is your neighbor's!

Can any of us dare to say that we have passed the test of the 10th commandment? If you're not a Christian, testing yourself on the 10th commandment should prove to you that you need to come to Christ for salvation. If you're a Christian, I have a suggestion for you. Every time you think you're doing pretty well in our lifestyle as a Christian and that you're only one step away from perfection, do what the Apostle Paul did -- test yourself on the 10th commandment!