

**Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church**  
**Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 7, Verses 7-12**  
**Notes from Tuesday October 26, 2010**  
**Last Revised on October 31, 2010**

**Songs**

**Opening Prayer**

**Introduction**

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

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Last week we completed the first six verses of Chapter 7.

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Tonight we will continue reading at Verse 7 of Chapter 7.

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But first let's begin with some review.

**Review**

The overall theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**.

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which is, Paul tells us, **God's** good news concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh **(1:3)**,

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and who "was declared to be the **Son-of-God-in-power** according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." **(1:4)**

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In him is **fulfilled** all that God promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scripture. **(1:2)**

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Paul has been called and set apart by God to **proclaim** this gospel. **(1:1)**.

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He longs to visit **Rome**, to proclaim the gospel there in person, however circumstances continue to prevent him from doing so in person, so he has written this long letter instead.

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These and other important things are explained in the long introductory section of this letter, which continues through the middle of Verse 16 of Chapter 1, which is about where the body of the letter begins.

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**Verses 16, 17, and 18 of Chapter 1** (as we have frequently observed) are a powerful preview and summary of much that is contained in this letter.

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Please turn with me to Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 16-18, which I will now read once again as part of this review:

**Paul's Letter of the Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 16-18 (Review)**

**16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

**17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."**

**18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**

In the **remainder of Chapter 1**, Paul examines the **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** of men,

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which is how **all** men and women everywhere are and have always been, except for Christ alone.

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To be **human** is to be ungodly and unrighteous.

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In **Chapter 2 and also the first 20 verses of Chapter 3**, Paul drives home the point that such ungodliness and unrighteousness has always pervaded all of humanity, including **even** the most **law-abiding Jews**.

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The bottom line is that **nobody** is capable of justifying themselves through obedience to the Law, or otherwise.

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Which brings us to the very heart of this letter and, some would say, to the very heart of the Bible: **Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 21-31**,

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Please turn with me there. It reads as follows:

**Paul's Letter of the Romans, Chapter 3, Verses 21-31 (Review)**

**21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--**

**22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:**

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

**24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**

**25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.**

26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

30 since God is one---who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

This is God's word.

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So, **nobody** can justify **themselves**, through obedience to the law, or otherwise.

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We are justified only by **grace** through **faith**, and we cannot claim any credit for such justification, because even our **faith** is a free gift of God.

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Naturally some may ask if such **faith** overthrows the law.

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In the mouths of some (Jews for example) this might be an accusation directed against Christianity from without and in **defense** of the law.

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In the mouths of others, this might be a statement arising from within Christianity and directed **against** the law.

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But here Paul speaks from **within** Christianity and in **defense** of the law!

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As we have just seen, Paul ends this most important section of Romans by saying that, far from overthrowing the law, faith actually **upholds** the law.

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Q. What does Paul mean by this? (i.e. that faith upholds the law?)

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A. Without the justification which comes by grace through faith, every man is bound to **die** for his sins; and the law has **nothing** to do with dead men, as we saw in last week's lesson. The **law** dies with us, in some sense. So **one** of the way in which faith upholds the law is by saving us!

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A. (Another answer) The law is **spiritual** and without faith in God it is impossible to please God in any way. In Chapter 1, Verse 5, Paul says that

his apostolic mission is to proclaim the gospel to all the world so as to bring about the “**obedience of faith**.” I begin to see what that means: of course God is only interested in the obedience which flows from faith, because any other kind of obedience is **hypocrisy!**

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A. (Finally) The **justification** which comes by faith is attended by **sanctification** which naturally (accidentally) results in obedience. Paul often speaks of such natural obedience as “fruit” because it grows out of the true inner transformation that is accomplished by the Gospel.

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To quote Karl Barth: “Grace **is** Obedience.”

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So much for Chapter 3.

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**Chapter 4** is all about **Abraham** --- who is in many ways the best example of **faith** and one of the better examples of **obedience** set forth in the Old Testament.

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God graciously **spoke** to Abraham and **promised** to bless him, in ways that seemed fantastic and quite **impossible**.

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Nevertheless Abraham **believed** God and this, his faith, was counted to him as **righteousness**.

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And such faith **produced** in Abraham acts of obedience which were truly **astonishing**.

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The same has been true for all of God’s **other** men and women of faith before and after Abraham.

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They **believed** that God was willing and able to do what He said.

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And this faith was counted to them as **righteousness**. (Cf. Hebrews 11)

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And now **all** the promises which God has ever made to all his faithful children, have found their “yes” in **Christ**. (2 Cor 1:20)

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This gospel of **grace**, long obscure, has been fully **revealed** to Mankind, in and through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

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**This** revelation, of Christ at Calvary, is become the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

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All who do believe it....are justified, declared righteous before God, and “***have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***”(5:1b)

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Paul begins to explore this peace we have in **Chapter 5**.

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In **the first 11 verses of Chapter 5**, Paul speaks of the peace, and joy, and hope, and love that **believers** experience, even in their suffering,

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as we contemplate the fact that God in Christ came down to suffer **with** us and for us while we were still his enemies.

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And now that we have been **reconciled** with God, and in this awesome way, we are all the more confident of our salvation,

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because we know that, having died to atone for our sins, Jesus then **rose** from the dead, and **ascended** to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God **interceding** for us!

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In the remainder of Chapter 5 (**Verses 12-21**) Paul carefully illuminates the power and efficacy of the gospel, by discussing how it has overcome the Fall of Man.

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The first Man, Adam, **disobeyed** God and so sin entered the world and with it came death for all men.

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Yet the **obedience** of Christ unto death has, by God's grace, atoned for every sin committed by every one who trusts in Him.

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"What shall we say then?" Paul asks at the beginning of **Chapter 6**.

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"Are we to **continue** in sin that grace may abound?"

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"**By no means!**" he answers himself in the first part of **Verse 2**,

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and then asks the question "How **can** we who died to sin still live in it?"

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He then refers in Verses 3 and 4 to the meaning of Christian **baptism**,

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a rite in which we identify ourselves **personally** with the **death** and **resurrection** of Christ,

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in order that we might walk in "**newness of life.**"

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It is our **abhorrence** of sin, especially our **own** sin, and our desire to **die** to sin, that leads us first to **faith** and Christ and then into a public **profession** of faith through the rite of baptism, and also to **repentance** of sin.

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It would be truly **absurd** to emerge from the waters of baptism, and to take our place in the body of Christ, which is the Church, with the sense that it is OK now to sin or, that **any** of our sins (past, present, or future) are somehow OK.

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Christians do **not** think this.

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On the contrary, Paul continues in Verses 5-11 of Chapter 6, by becoming **united** with Christ,

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we are set **free** from sin and death,

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and assured a blessed eternal life **with** God, which surely **will** be a life eternally without sin!

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Therefore he concludes this baptismal meditation in Verses 12-14 of Chapter 6 with this **admonition** for our present life on earth:

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that we **must not** allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies.

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A similar set of issues is examined in Verses 15-23 of Chapter 6 where Paul is preoccupied with the metaphor of **slavery**.

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Here Paul is trying to help us see that there are **two** and **only** two alternatives available to us.

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**Apart from Christ**, all men and women, are slaves of **sin**. This is alternative **number 1**.

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But when we become followers of Christ, we become **slaves of God**, in the happy sense that Paul means here. This is alternative **number 2**.

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You can't be **both** --- i.e. a slave to sin **and** a slave to God --- that is **logically** impossible.

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You cannot be **neither** --- there simply is no independent third alternative.

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Men and women who chose to remain slaves of sin will surely die, and this is what all men and women **have** chosen, unless and until they become slaves of God.

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But Paul is interested, just here, in the behavior of these faithful **slaves of God**. What **should** they do? And what are that actually **seen** to do?

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His answer is that, because they are already saved from sin and death and bound for a blessed eternal life, believers in Christ **should** sin no more, even in this life, and this is what they are **actually** seen to do, albeit imperfectly.

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This desire for and this tendency toward holiness and fellowship with God, is the **ongoing** work of the **Holy Spirit** in each Christian believer for so long as we tarry on this earth.

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Paul will address the work of the **Holy Spirit** in Chapter 8.

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But just now (last week, and tonight, and next week) we are in **Chapter 7**.

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 which explores our new relationship with the **Law**, now that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (5:1)

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 We know already, from what we read at the end of Chapter 3, that Paul does not mean to say that the Law is **bad** or that the law has been **overthrown** by the gospel. On the contrary, he somehow sees the gospel as **upholding** the law, as we have just been discussing.

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 We have already begun to glimpse the answer to this riddle: God's eternal **gospel** does not change God's eternal **law**; both are part of God's eternal **perfection** and His eternal plan for our **salvation** from sin and death.

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 Gods law drives us **toward** the gospel, the gospel changes not the law but **us**, through faith, so that we come to have a different **relationship** with God and with His Law, and so that we are finally able to keep his law, by accident, through love, rather than merely pretending to keep his law, out of fear or pride, which is the best we can do under law without the gospel.

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 That is what we studied **last week** in the **first six verses of Chapter 7**.

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 With Christ we have **died** to the law and, so, are no longer held captive by it.

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 Instead we have been reborn to serve in the new life of the **Spirit** --- and against the fruits of the Spirit there is no law! (Gal. 5:23)

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 Questions before we read on?

### **Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 7-12**

Will someone please read Verses 7-12 of Chapter 7, in Japanese.

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 Thanks. Will someone please read those same verses, in English.

**7 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."**

**8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.**

**9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.**

**10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.**

**11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.**

**12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

Thank you.

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If our salvation is by grace through faith, and if this salvation brings **freedom** ... from captivity to the law, and new life in the Spirit of God, as Paul teaches, then what **good** is the law?

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This is a very real, and important, and (I think) **difficult** question.

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Why this is such a weighty question becomes increasingly clear, as we pause to ponder, once again, what Paul has in mind when he uses the word "**law**."

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Certainly Paul means to include the **Ten Commandments** and much else which appears in **Torah** proper, our Pentateuch.

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Probably Paul also means to include much else which appears in the **Prophets** and in the entire Jewish Bible, our **Old Testament**.

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Evangelical Christians hold the **entire** Bible, **New** Testament and Old to be **authoritative**, the very **Word of God**.

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And we mean not just the **words** written on these pages, but the forms of **prayer** and **worship** and **song** and **praise** and **ceremony** and **moral teaching** that surrounds and grows out of the Holy Scripture.

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We read in **2 Timothy 3:16,17** "**All Scripture** is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

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The question could even be as general as this: in view of the **gospel**, what good are any of the teachings and practices and rites and ceremonies of any human **religion**, Biblical or otherwise?

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Even of the **highest** and the **best** religions: the religion of **Israel** and the **visible** Church of Jesus **Christ**.

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Doesn't the gospel set us **free** from **all** of that.....religious stuff?

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From all of **this**? (e.g. Tuesday Evening Bible Study)

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Since we are free in Christ, what is all of this **for**?



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Do you begin to see the **issue** that Paul is dealing with?

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OK. Let's get into it. Verse 7 reads:

(Verse 7)

**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."**

Paul does not **seriously** entertain the notion that the "law is sin,"

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because however broadly or however narrowly Paul understands the word "law" he means to include the "law" which is given by **God**.

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And of course God, by **definition**, does not (and indeed **can** not) "sin."

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By **posing** the question in this way (i.e. "is the law sin?") it seems to me that Paul is intending to **shock** his readers into remembering that the law comes from God and, therefore, **must** be perfectly good, and that nobody, certainly not Paul, intends to disparage God' law.

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We remember Jesus **Himself** defending the law in no uncertain terms.

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Consider Matthew 5:17-20, where **Jesus** says: ***"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."***

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"Yet," Paul says (in 7:7) it is the law through which I came to **know** sin.

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This is probably a point in **support** of the virtue of the law, rather than a **concession** that the law has some negative aspect.

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The law Paul seems to say is like an **instrument** with which I can probe, or a **lens** through which I can see and better understand the existence and the nature of my sin and corruption, which might otherwise remain **hidden** until it is too late.

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God has given us the law so that we can check and see how **sick** we really are: sick indeed unto **death**!

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 Notice that throughout this section Paul uses the **first person singular** pronoun.

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 I am certain that Paul means to **include** himself.

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 But it is almost certainly wrong to think of Paul as reflecting here only on his own **personal** experience.

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 Rather this is a “**generalizing**” singular in which Paul speaks of himself as typical of his **class**.

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 Certainly we would be right in understanding his class to include **Jewish** Christians especially and **Christians** generally, even you and me.

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 But to some extent I think we would also be right to understand Paul as speaking for all men who are in any way **religious**, which finally includes **all** human beings.

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**Being** human means, one way or another, thinking of God, if only to deny Him, and of divine law and, hopefully, if we are very fortunate, coming to some sort of an understanding that we are **sinful**.

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 Somewhere Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of those Christians who are **fortunate** enough to know that they are the worst sinners in the church.

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 The beneficial aspects of Law (and Religion generally) include (but are not perhaps limited to) its ability to help us to **perceive** our outward sin and the inward corruption from which it flows.

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**None** of this is supposed to make us “feel **good** about ourselves...”

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 On the contrary, we remember Christ saying “...only **God is good**.”

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 Here in Verse 7, Paul points to the **10th Commandment** --- the law that prohibits covetousness --- as the prime example.

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 Q. What is **covetousness**?

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 A. In the narrowest sense, as presented in the Decalogue, it is desiring something that properly belongs to someone **else**.

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 A. It has been common in the faith of Israel to generalize this to include any **inordinate desire**.

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 A. e.g. Desiring that which God has **denied** to you.

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 A. e.g. Desiring that which God has not **given** to you.

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 A. e.g. Desiring **anything** at all ... other than obedience to God.

(n.b. to desire anything apart from the will of God is by definition sin.)

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 Q. Can you think of why Paul picked **this** example? (i.e. of the law against covetousness as an example of law generally)

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 A. Well, the 10th Commandment is a good example of a law that makes us **aware** of something sinful when we might not otherwise have even realized that it was sinful. Our desires often seem to us to be **natural**, and so not sinful, but we forget that our desires arise from our fallen, **sinful** nature. It is our nature to **sin** and to desire **many** things other than obedience to God!

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 A. Covetousness is an **emotion**, not a **behavior** and therefore something we cannot easily control with our will. You might through an exercise of will, or lack of opportunity, keep from acting on such a desire, but the desire **itself** is nevertheless a sin. This notion that sinful desire is, itself, sin underlies much of what Jesus had to say about sin.

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 A. So if you honestly thought, as Paul **himself** may once have thought (Phlp 3:6), that you were capable of keeping the whole law it only means that you had failed properly to understand the 10th Commandment, and the law generally. Nobody who is alive can keep it. We **all** desire things which are inconsistent with the will of God.

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 (n.b. It has been noted before now that to violate the 10th commandment is to violate the first commandment and, therefore, **all** commandments.)

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 A. Perhaps the most important reason why Paul chose to speak here of the **10th** commandment, rather than some **other** law, is that covetousness was (and perhaps still is) the sin which begets all other sin; it is the sin which took mankind down in the Garden of Eden as told in Genesis Chapter 3 and, almost certainly, Paul has Genesis 3 in view throughout most of this section.

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 Some commentators refer to Romans 7 as Paul's commentary on Genesis 3.

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 Verse 8 reads:

**(Verse 8)**

**But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.**

Here almost for sure, we are supposed to have in mind **Adam and Eve** in the Garden of Eden, and **all** men and women descended from them.

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 In the Garden, God gave man few rules, indeed only **one** rule, and that was the

one rule necessary for man's eternal **life** and **prosperity**.

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He told them **not** to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

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I understand this to mean that Mankind must never presume to determine, by their **own** efforts **apart** from God, what is good and what is evil, because that way leads down to **certain** death.

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But precisely that one rule was seized by **sin** as an **opportunity**.

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Notice that sin is here being **anthropomorphized** --- set opposite to God and Man as a willful adversary a third party hostile to both!

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We think of the **Serpent** in the Garden.

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We think of **Satan**.

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We think of the **Chaos** which God **opposes** through his good creation.

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Adam and Eve were in some sense "tricked" into following their **own** desire, rather than the **express** will of God (i.e. the law) and so they pulled sin and death down on top of **themselves** and **all** men, till Christ should come and redeem us.

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We are **all** followers of Adam and Eve in this respect: law produces in us inordinate desire, covetousness of all kinds, which we can resist acting out, with varying degrees of success, but which we cannot eradicate from ourselves through force of will or otherwise while we remain in this world, and so we remain dead, under the weight of our own sin, freely chosen.

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And so the law **continues** to show us just how sinful, just how dead in sin, we **still** are. We therefore understand our need for a Savior and that the gospel of grace is the only way. We can **never** justify ourselves.

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Our "**old** self" --- the one which died with Christ and in some sense is still dying with Christ until we breath our last --- is simply irredeemably wicked.

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The old self must **die**, so that the new self can be reborn in Christ.

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But sometimes we, the dead, still think we are alive in our own right.

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Verse 9 reads:

**(Verse 9)**

**I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.**

Again I think we are supposed to have **Genesis 3** in the back of our mind, and our own sorry lives also simultaneously in view.

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Sin is nothing more or less than something that is **not OK** with God, something that God will not **allow** to stand.

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Yet God in his infinite and unsearchable wisdom has made men free enough to will and to do even those things which are **not OK** with God, and which therefore require subsequent remediation.

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When there is no real **understanding** of God's will, then our potential for doing things which are not OK with God remains only a **potential** danger.

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But once there is a **commandment**, the danger becomes critical.

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Our very freedom --- that which makes Man most like God --- is our undoing,

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if and when we behave as if we actually **are** God, setting our will opposite His.

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This is **sin**, and it rightfully kills us.

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In the case of Adam and Eve, we could say that they were truly alive apart from the law, until God said "*thou shalt not eat from the tree.*"

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However in case of we their **decedents**, we are all born into sin, and so when we think that we are alive apart from the law, this is just because we do not know the law well enough to realize how dead we **already** are.

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For us, therefore, the law plays the very vital and totally **beneficial** role of making our sin plain to us.....of letting us comprehend that we are the walking dead... and that it is our own sin, freely chosen, that has killed us.

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Verse 10 reads:

**(Verse 10)**

**The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.**

Here, again, I think Paul is viewing the contemporary world through the filter of Genesis 3.

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God said, "do not eat of this tree, of the fruit of the knowledge of Good and Evil," or you will **surely** die.

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Again, I have always understood this to mean something like, please listen to me and do what I will tell you, because if you try to decide things for yourself, you will fall into sin and death soon enough.

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Yet it was that **very** command --- to believe God, to trust him and rely upon him --- which they disobeyed and, the rest is history.

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Yet beyond the Garden, this thought also applies to the “legalist” ... the “pharisee” the “religious man” who supposes that he finds self justification in his obedience to the law and in his personal piety in his church activity or whatever.

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Religion can only serve us well by making us more certain that religion can never save us, but this is a very important achievement, and one that is necessary to our salvation.

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Verse 11 reads:

**(Verse 11)**

**For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.**

This point is **simply** and **easily** seen in the story of the Garden of Eden.

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Adam and Eve had the **freedom** to sin or not to sin, to disobey or to obey God, and God commanded them **not** to exercise their freedom contrary to his express will, or they would **surely** die.

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Once God’s will had been expressed, Adam and Eve were in danger, and Sin took advantage of this situation, bringing them down, and all of their posterity with them.

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But that is all we know about the history of humanity **before** the first sin.

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**Virtually** all of what we do know about humanity, is what we know about fallen **sinful** man.

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I think **all** men wonder about God and come into contact with some **religion**, one way or another, and develop various, mostly strange and faulty, ideas about God and what God wills.

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But it was to the descendants of **Abraham**, Isaac, and Jacob that the true and living God came especially close to Man and began to reveal himself to them and through their Holy Scriptures.

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And on Mt. Sinai God entered into a covenant with these people and gave them **laws** which they promised to keep.

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And notwithstanding their own troubled history, faithfully recorded in their own scriptures, showing that Israel hardly **ever** did anything **except** to fall away from God and sin against him,

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there were always some in Israel who came to believe that the **law** would somehow **save** them, just as there are always some in the Christian church who believe that the law will save **them**, and yet in every case, **sin** seizes the opportunity to **kill** us through the law.

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Again, that is what law, prophesy, scripture, religion, and the like are **good** for: to make us finally and more fully understand that **we** are dead in sin.

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Which is really the **opposite** of saying that the **law** is sin.

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It is **because** the law is perfect that we **sinner**s are unable to keep it.

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Verse 12 concludes today's lesson:

**(Verse 12)**

**So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

So we continue to understand the shape of Paul's thinking, concerning the law.

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Next week we will continue reading and may finish Chapter 7.

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Does anyone have any comments or questions?

**Closing Prayer**