



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 22



SIN GAINS THE ADVANTAGE THROUGH THE LAW

7:7-14 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." 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. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. – Romans 7:7-14 ^{NKJV}

INTRODUCTION

The nature of spiritual life can easily elude us. It is a life in which **conflict** with sin is realized, even though sin does not have dominion over us. We confront sin, though we are not dominated by it. Some have imagined that when we are born again, every part of the sinful nature is removed from us. This is taught prominently in many conservative circles. The notion is founded upon the sixth chapter of Romans, which states the following: *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (verse 6). The NIV reads, *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."*

DESTROYED DOES NOT EQUAL NON-EXISTENT

The phrase *"body of sin might be destroyed,"* or *"done away with,"* is not to be equated with *"no longer existent."* The latter part of the seventh chapter will strongly confirm this to be the case. The action that takes place when the *"body of sin"* is *"destroyed"* is twofold. **First**, it is cut away from our essential persons by means of the *"circumcision of Christ"* (Col 2:11-12). It has, therefore, no part whatsoever with the *"new man"* (Col 3:10), or the *"new creation"* (2 Cor 5:17) that is experienced in the new birth. Just as the Canaanites and other godless nations were not part of Israel, even though they dwelt in the same land for a season, so the *"body of sin"* is not part of

the *"new creation,"* even though it is found in the same house of clay.

Second, the *"body of sin"* is destroyed in the sense of losing its dominance. It is impotent against faith. In this sense, it has been *"destroyed"* just as Satan was destroyed in the death of Christ (Heb 2:14). He exists, yet is powerless when the believer walks in the Spirit and by faith. Sin, therefore, has no power over us when we walk in the Spirit. As it is written, *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"* (Gal 5:16).

NOT A SIMPLISTIC CIRCUMSTANCE

The matter of our deliverance from sin and the Law, therefore, is not a

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHAT SHALL WE SAY? (7:7)
- II. WHEN SIN TOOK OPPORTUNITY (7:8)
- III. I WAS ALIVE, BUT I DIED (7:9)
- IV. THE COMMANDMENT BROUGHT DEATH (7:10)
- V. WHEN SIN DECEIVED ME (7:11)
- VI. THE LAW IS HOLY (7:12)
- VII. DID WHAT WAS GOOD BECOME DEATH? (7:13)
- VIII. THE LAW AND ME (7:14)

simplistic circumstance. It is not to be viewed as though we were already out of this world and in the presence of the Lord. We remain in the body, and while there, we are, in a very specific sense, *“absent from the Lord”* (2 Cor 5:6). While *“in the body”* (Heb 13:3), we have to contend with sin, even though it has been dethroned.

David had to contend with his wayward son Absalom, who, though not actually king, sought to dethrone David and usurp his throne (2 Sam 15-17). Moses had to contend with Korah and his cohorts, who sought to displace him, even though they were not the true leaders (Num 16). Joshua had to contend with at least thirteen hostile kings in the very land given to Israel by God (Josh 9-10). It should not surprise us that we still struggle against sin, even though we have been forgiven all trespasses and sin has lost its dominion over us. Just as entering Canaan did not mean struggle was over, so entering into Christ does not mean our struggles cease. In fact, this chapter will confirm our rebirth has actually initiated a struggle of epochal, and often confusing, proportions.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

All of this has very much relevance to the matter before us. Because we still

have to contend with sin, we are obliged to know more fully of our relationship to the Law. This is required lest we be drawn back to a system of law, imagining it is sufficient to make us righteous.

Not only does sin no longer have dominion over us, it has lost its mastery over us because we *“are not under the law, but under grace”* (Rom 6:14). There is no grace under Law, no leniency, no kindness toward the transgressor. Rather than offering a remedy for sin, the Law actually accentuates sin. It not only points out the guilt of sin, but aggravates and inflames it: *i.e., “sinful passions aroused by the law”*^{NIV} (verse 5).

To be *“delivered from the law,”* therefore, involves being emancipated from the condition produced by Law—God’s Law: *i.e., “the sinful passions aroused by the law.”*^{NIB} **Now, rather than God’s Word inflaming sinful passions, it feeds the soul, nourishes the spirit, and enlightens the heart.** This marvelous condition has come to pass because of our unity with Christ’s death. In that unity, we died to the Law in order that we might be married to Jesus.

LEST WE THINK WRONGLY

Now, lest we begin to think wrongly about the Law, the Spirit will confirm there was no fault in the Law. Sinful passions were not awakened in us because of any flaw or deficiency in the Law of God. Rather, it pointed out our sinful condition in order that we might see the need of salvation, for the worse sin gets, the more we need a Savior.

The Law Did Not Cause Sin

With great care, the Spirit shows how we cannot blame the Law for our condition. If there were not sinful passions in us, they could not have been aroused by the Law. If sin did not dwell in us, the Law could not have been its *“strength”* (1 Cor 15:56). God has already proved that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, are sinners by nature. Now He will show us it is no fault of the Law.

The Law did not cause sin, but was its *“strength.”* It did not make us sinners, but aroused the sinful passions that resided in the human nature. Men were sinners before the Law, not because of the Law. Under Law sin dominated us because it persistently pointed out we had sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Protection Against Returning

If we take seriously the teaching that follows, we will see the utter absurdity of returning to a system of Law. If we seek to be regulated by Law—even God’s Law—sin will only gain the dominancy over us once again. This is because we still have a fallen nature—*“the flesh.”* Even though it has been cut away from our essential persons by the *“circumcision of Christ,”* yet it lives in these bodies with us. Should we choose to serve God under a system of Law, it will arouse the passions of that *“old man”* that is still with us (Eph 4:22).

The teaching before us is most vital. Though rarely heard in the modern church this is a precious elixir of soul-healing ointment from heaven! It reveals the magnitude of our deliverance from both sin and the Law.

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WHAT SHALL WE SAY?

“7:7 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.’” When speaking to us, the Lord frequently demands a response. Divine communication is not intended to

merely convey information, or increase our knowledge of facts. There is such a thing as *“walking in the truth”* (3 John 3), a condition where the human spirit is brought into the *“communion of the Holy Spirit”* (2 Cor 13:14). By saying *“What shall we say then?”* the Spirit is drawing us into a more profound and effective consideration of the truth. This is necessary because there is more to what has been said than can be comprehended in a cursory or surface consideration. **The spiritual roots of those who linger on the surface of truth will not grow deep.** Shallow thought is an enemy to those who live by faith because it is too close to the world, and too far from God. One of the great tragedies of our time and culture is its commitment to shallow thought and surface considerations. Extended thought, like meditation (Psa 19:14; 104:34), cogitation (Dan 7:28), and musing (Psa 39:3), are not common among professed believers. The desire for appearance, entertainment, and brevity, have yielded shallow and unproductive thoughts and weak faith.

Knowing this proclivity among religious people, and the devil’s aggressiveness to promote shallowness, the Spirit demands our involvement. *“What shall we say then?”*

IS THE LAW SIN?

The question is a most intriguing one! One might imagine it would better be asked, *“Does the Law promote sin?”* Rather, we are asked if the Law itself *“IS sin.”* Every translation, with the exception of the New Living Translation, reads the same way. That exception reads, *“am I suggesting that the law of God is evil?”*

I understand the question to mean, *“Can we credit the Law with our sin? Does the role of the law in the matter of sin relieve us of the responsibility for our sin?”* Just as flesh produces flesh and spirit produces spirit (John 3:6), so only sin can produce sin. If the Law caused us to sin, it would itself be sin. But that is not the case. Sin came from the principle of sin that dwells, by nature, within the flesh. Therefore, the Spirit forbids us to think of the Law as itself sin: *“God forbid.”* May it never be!

Those who are reconciled to God hold the highest respect for the Law of God. They do not demean it because it is holy, being spoken by the Almighty Himself. When put to the test, they will come to the defense of the Law, siding with Jesus who magnified the Law and made it *“honorable”* (Isa 42:21). The motions, or passions, of sin were aroused *“by the Law.”* However, the *“motions”* or *“passions”* were not created by the Law. They were *“aroused”* or *“inflamed”* by it.

There is a principle here that must be seen. When there is enmity between God and man, Divine Law accentuates that enmity, but can by no means resolve it. Outside of Christ, sin so dominates man that the righteous demands of the Lord’s Law only make him worse.

A Principle

There is a principle here that must be seen. When there is enmity between God and man, Divine Law accentuates that enmity, but can by no means resolve it. Outside of Christ, sin so dominates man that the righteous demands of the Lord’s Law only make him worse. To make Law the means of righteousness more firmly entrenches men in sin. This, of course, is why we have died with Christ, that we might be delivered from the Law.

I WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN SIN

“Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.” ^{NIV} Notice, Paul does not say *“I would not have sinned,”* but *“I would not have KNOWN sin.”* Outside of Christ, the reality of sin is **not** the question, but the acknowledge and acknowledgment of it.

Personal Sin

This is not the knowledge of sin in general, although the law did define sin in a general sense. This is the knowledge of personal sin—the awareness that I am a sinner. This is the most precise meaning of the statement made earlier: *“for by the*

law is the knowledge of sin” (3:20). This is not an academic definition, but a **consciousness** of sin. In fact, that is how the NIV reads: *“through the law we become **conscious** of sin.”* This is a matter of conviction, not factual knowledge for the intellect.

This, then, refers to the knowledge of personal sin—particular infractions of the Law. It is as though he said, *“I would not have been aware of my own involvement in sin except through the Law.”* We must zealously seek deliverance from academic, or pedantic, approaches to spiritual life. These are lifeless approaches that have no personal relevance. They leave the individual pointing at the sins of others, and unaware of his own.

A proper understanding of the Law reveals our **personal** transgressions. It is not designed to give us a merely theoretical grasp of the definition of sin. Rather, it convinces its students of their transgression, and consequently of their need for a Savior. It is in this way that the law was *“our*

schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). Thus, when he said *“I had not known sin, but by the law,”* Paul states that apart from the Law he would not have realized he was guilty of sin. The New Living Translation says it very well: *“but it was the law that showed me my sin.”*

What Sin Was Made Known to Paul?

God convicted Cain of murder (Gen 4:10-11). He convicted David of adultery (2 Sam 12:7-10). Of what sin did the Law convince Paul?

Elsewhere Paul testifies to his outward and sincere piety. His words are found in Philippians 3:6: *“as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”* Before a condemning Jewish council Paul confessed, *“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”* (Acts 23:1). Even in his persecution of the household of faith, his deeds were done *“in ignorance and unbelief,”* thinking he was serving God in opposing those who believed on Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:13; Acts 26:9). Prior to his calling, Saul of Tarsus was not an indulgent man, feeding his fleshly appetites, and going after the

things of the world. The Law did not cut him down with the conviction of baser sins, or with the neglect of the Sabbath day, or a lack of zeal for the Lord of hosts. Outwardly, Paul kept the law and walked orderly.

Unlawful Desires

The Word of the Lord is a “a

accommodating. It does not allow for a single wayward thought, but forthrightly condemns it.

Lust Is Deeper Than The Will

I understand “*lust*” and coveting to be deeper in man than the will. Lust provokes the will, but is not synonymous with it. “*Lust*” is the means by which we

rejection of the “*lust*,” with the individual refusing to dwell upon it or fulfill it. This was the case of Paul before he was in Christ. We know he did not fulfill the lusts, for he was “*blameless*” concerning the righteousness of the Law (Phil 3:6).

However, under the Law, the subordination of lust has no merit. The **presence** of lust, even if it is not cultured or fulfilled, is condemned by the Law. Even if it does not work itself out into external expressions, and is subdued by the mind, yet the Law condemns it.

This is a critical distinction, and will be developed throughout the remainder of this chapter. It will confirm how marvelous and indispensable it is to be “*delivered from the Law*,” and have the old nature cut away, or “*circumcised*” from us. Keep in mind, regeneration does not change “*the flesh*.” It remains the same in its nature and bent. Before and after the new birth, “*no good thing*” can be found in the flesh (Rom 7:18).

THE LAW BROUGHT THE KNOWLEDGE

Through the Law, particularly the last of the ten commandments (“*Thou shalt not covet*”), Paul came to see that sin was at the very root of the fallen nature. If there was no other commandment but the tenth one, the entirety of the human race would have still been condemned.

Although man was created to desire and fellowship with God, the entrance of sin into the world so corrupted him that he desired and sought after self gratification only. The spiritual **appetite** of men became corrupted. Even though God “*determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live*,” in order that they might “*seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him*” (Acts 17:26), yet this did not occur. Men did NOT seek after God.

We know this is the case because the Spirit has already affirmed, “*there is none that seeketh after God*” (Rom 3:11). The explanation for this condition is found in this single word: “*lust*.” “*Lust*” is the cause behind every overt act of sin. It is the mother of all willing involvement in transgression.

I understand “*lust*” and coveting to be deeper in man than the will. Lust provokes the will, but is not synonymous with it. “*Lust*” is the means by which we are drawn into sin. “*Lust*,” or unlawful desire, is resident in the flesh, and is part and parcel of it.

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). It probes human motives and hidden desires. It uncovers unlawful desires, or “*lusts*,” showing them to be purely in the interest of self, with no regard for God. Thus Paul says, “*for I had not known **lust**, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*” Later versions use the word “*covetousness*.” This, in my judgment, is too weak. The word translated “*lust*” is ἐπιθυμίαν, and is unusually strong. It is often translated “*concupiscence*” (Rom 7:8; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:5). It refers to a strong longing for what is forbidden, and can have a wide range of objects.

The point of the text is that such lusts were covered in the commandment, “*Thou shalt not covet.*” I would venture to say that very few people have made that association. But Paul, formerly Saul, was an astute thinker in the Law. In his pondering, it came home to him that while he may not had coveted his neighbors house, wife, or possessions (Ex 20:17), he had desired things that were not right.

It is vital to see the point being made. Men do not think lusting is sinful. Some have even said, “*You can’t go to hell for what you are thinking*,” a stupid saying from past days. Another popular song in the 1950’s heralded youthful innocence with the words, “*Standing on the corner, watching all the girls go by.*” By nature, men do not look upon the secret and unexpressed desires of the heart as being sinful. But the Law is not so

are drawn into sin. “*Lust*,” or unlawful desire, is resident in the flesh, and is part and parcel of it. Thus it is written, “*put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*” (Eph 4:22). These “*lusts*,” or “*deceitful desires*”^{NIV} are part of the fallen nature. They parallel the “*spirit of your mind*” that is found in the “*new man*,” or regenerated nature (Eph 4:23). Just as the spiritual mind (Rom 8:6) is drawn to heaven, so the “*lust*” resident in the flesh is drawn toward earth.

The Old Testament word that parallels this idea of “*lust*” is “*imagination*,” as used in the following texts (Jer 3:17; 9:13; 16:12; 18:12). Most contemporary versions translate the word “*stubbornness*,” or “*stubbornly*.” Others read with more focus rendering the word “*perversity*,”^{DARBY} and “*wicked inclinations*.”^{NJB} It is the bent, or frame, of the heart—the way it leans, so to speak. Thus the above texts refer to an “*evil heart*.” The unregenerate heart does not crave the right thing, but the wrong thing. Thus Jeremiah wrote, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” (Jer 17:9).

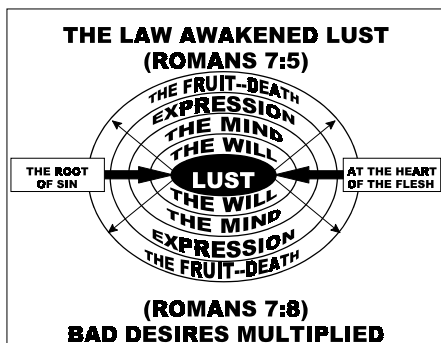
“*Lusts*” speak of the corruption of the natural man. They are inherent appetites for what the law forbids. They provoke the individual to want the wrong thing. These are awakened by the law, not created by it. They are part of human nature, and only need provocation to rise up in dominating vigor. There may be a

WHEN SIN TOOK OPPORTUNITY

“But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.” “Sin,” in this case, equates to the sinful nature (for want of a better term). **It is the principle, or law, of sin that is resident in unregenerate man.** Later Paul will make much of this use of the word “sin” (verses 9,11,13,17,20,23,25). Here, “sin” is not the same as transgression, or a specific act or deed. **Rather, it is the cause of transgression, disobedience, and iniquity.**

The passage before us is scarcely known by those with whom I have been identified. It is as though it was altogether cut out of their theology. For far too many people, what they have heard preached all of their lives would not have been affected one whit if this passage had been removed from the Bible.

But this text has not been removed. Rather, through the inspiration of the Holy spirit, it has been inserted in Scripture. That fact alone proves how critical it is, for “all Scripture” is intended to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). Even the higher critics of Scripture, with all of their literary butchery, have not managed to explain or take the text away.



There is not person, apart from Jesus Christ, who has not sinned. Thus it is written, “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Yet, even if no actual expression of sin had taken place, the principle of sin is still found within the natural man. It is even in the innocent infant, who has not yet come to distinguish good and evil.

David correctly assessed the situation when he said, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”^{NIV} (Psa 51:5). He did not mean he had committed transgressions from birth, but that the sin-principle was resident in him from birth. That is the sense in which “sin” is used in this verse.

Elsewhere, the wicked are said to “go astray” from the womb (Psa 58:3). Following the flood, the Lord said “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination (“imagination”^{KJV}) of his heart is evil from childhood”^{NIV} (Gen 8:21). Even in Job’s spiritually primitive day, those with only a cursory acquaintance with God knew man was fundamentally “unclean” (Job 14:4), and drinks iniquity “like water” (Job 15:14-16).

These words are not in the Bible as mere historical dialog, to be ruled out by contextual or historical considerations. These are in Scripture according to Divine intent, and represent man as he is apart from Christ, or in an unregenerate state.

Paul will now tell us the effect the Law had upon corrupted human nature. He has already said its “sinful passions” were “aroused by the Law” (7:5). Now he elaborates on the effects of that arousal.

TAKING OPPORTUNITY BY THE COMMANDMENT

“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment.”^{NIV} If ever the natural corruption of man can be proved, it is in this statement! If men doubt whether or not the new birth is imperative, here is a verse to ponder. If there was a spark of natural goodness in man, a holy and just Law would have awakened it. If man was fundamentally, or primarily, good, God’s spiritual Law would have brought that goodness to the surface. Men may argue about the extent to which the Divine image was effaced by sin, but they cannot argue about the effect of the Law upon those who are not born again. This is a matter of revelation, not conjecture. The sin principle in men actually sees the holy law of God as an occasion, or opportunity to express itself. It seizes upon that opportunity.

We have before us one of the premier members of the human race. Prior to being in Christ, he was a member of the chosen people. He was also a member of the “strictest sect” of that revealed religion (Acts 26:5), even excelling above his equals in that rigid group (Gal 1:14). He maintained a good conscience toward God, refusing to violate it (Acts 23:1). Concerning outward piety, or the righteousness of the Law, he was “blameless” (Phil 3:6). His persecution of the church of God was not prompted by political considerations, or a desire for personal glory. He thought he was serving God in that aggressive opposition. That, of course, is precisely why he was forgiven that grievous sin—because he did it “in ignorance and unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

How will “the commandment” effect a man like that?—one whose life is devoted to fulfilling the Law after the most strict manner?

When “sin” heard the commandment, it “sized the opportunity” to work within Saul, or took “occasion by the commandment.”^{KJV} One man has said that, in the Law, sin found “a starting place from which to rush into acts of sin.”^{Robertson} Martin Luther once likened sin seizing an opportunity by the Law to the properties of lime. He said lime had heat in it, but that heat was not known until water was poured upon it. The water did not cause the lime to have heat, but brought out the fact that it was there. So it is with the Law. It did not cause sin, but brought out the fact that it was resident in fallen men.

A Premier Example Seen in Israel

In Israel we have a classic example of the truth affirmed in this text. When they were slaves in Egypt, we read not one word about them being given over to immorality or baser expressions of sin. They certainly had not risen above sin, but were not noted for transgression. Much of this is probable owing to the rigor with which they were made to serve the Egyptians.

Upon arriving at Sinai, sin was brought to its peak among these people. They heard the Law of God for the first

time. It was spoken audibly, and under the most fearful of circumstances. It was such a frightening occasion that the Israelites said to Moses, *“Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* (Ex 20:19). Under such circumstances, you would think sin would be far from the mind of the people.

After Moses had been in the holy mount for some time *“the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’”*

Pressured by their aggression, Aaron had them remove the golden earrings from their wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to him. He then formed a mold, and from it fashioned a golden calf, telling the people *“This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”* The next day, the people got up early and *“offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings.”* After that, the people *“sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry,”*^{NIV} or *“gave themselves to pleasure.”*^{BBE}

God said of that occasion, the people *“have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them . . . behold, it is a stiffnecked people”* (Ex 32:1-9). Why had they so reacted? They did not do this on the night of the exodus. Every Israelite came out of Egypt, with not a hoof left behind (Ex 10:26). They *“all”* passed through the Red Sea, with not a disobedient one among them (1 Cor 10:1-2). What happened to them at Sinai?

Their nature did not change. They did not become different people. Rather, the principle of sin, that was within them, took occasion by the commandment. Consequently, the *“motions of sin”* were aroused by the Law.

The principle stated in this verse can also be seen in little children, although it is not limited to them. While their conscience is yet unformed, and they lack understanding, sin does not break forth in

them. Yet, when they become subjects of the Law, able to hear and understand what it says, wrong desires, stubbornness, and transgression break forth in them like a floodtide. **The innocency of youth cannot be maintained one second beyond the time of youth.**

INWARD PRODUCTION

“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” Sin, seizing upon the opportunity afforded by the law, erupted like a inner volcano, producing *“all manner of evil desire.”*^{NKJV} Because of the associations men make with covetousness,

What Paul is saying is this. “Because of my relation to Adam, sin was imbedded in my very nature. Yet, I was not aware of its extensive pervasion into my being. But when the commandment forbidding covetousness came home to me, I had to contend with a barrage of evil desires I never realized were within me. The lusts were divers and many, and I could not stop them from erupting in my mind.”^{GOB}

this appears a rather weak expression. When, however, *“Thou shalt not covet”* is correctly understood, the power of the expression is more clearly seen.

It is as though unregenerate, but devoutly religious, Saul was bombarded with evil desires. What Paul is saying is this. *“Because of my relation to Adam, sin was imbedded in my very nature. Yet, I was not aware of its extensive pervasion into my being. But when the commandment forbidding covetousness came home to me, I had to contend with a barrage of evil desires I never realized were within me. The lusts were divers and many, and I could not stop them from erupting in my mind.”*^{GOB}

The Nature of Sin

Sin is personified in this section of Scripture. It is pictured as a ruthless murderer dwelling within us, looking for an opportunity to slay us. It *“wars against the mind”* (7:23), *“wars against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:11), *“easily besets us”* (Heb 12:1), and, apart from Christ, dominates us (Rom 6:12). Sin is like a mighty armed adversary against whom we *“strive”* (Heb 12:4).

In this text, *“sin,”* is not referring to specific transgressions, but to the principle, or law of sin. It is a law resident in the flesh, and that cannot be separated from it.

What Summoned up Sin?

It is important to take note HOW this statement is made. Paul does not say the Law produced every kind of evil desire, but that SIN produced it. **It was not the nature of the Law that summoned up these despicable lusts, but the sinful nature of man!** Men must learn that sin is more diverse than they are prone to think. Resident in the fallen nature, there are capacities and desires that far transcend our imaginative capacities.

Once again, these erupting desires were not welcomed by Saul of Tarsus, and eagerly fulfilled, as they were among *“sinners of the Gentiles”* (Gal 2:15; 1 Thess 4:4-5; Eph 4:17-19). He could not have maintained a good conscience if this were the case. He was not reconciled to God, and, like others, was *“dead in trespasses and sins.”* Yet, he managed to subdue the outbreak, overflowing, or *“superfluity”* of sin (James 1:21). Even then, however, he was all the while contending with evil desires which came in copious numbers and kinds.

The Point of the Text

We must keep before us the point of the text, lest we get bogged down in its details. In Jesus, we have died to sin and to the Law. This has resulted in our deliverance from the Law, which was our accuser, judge, and executioner.

Throughout the seventh chapter of Romans, Paul is dealing with **the**

principle of sin, and not with overt expressions of it (i.e., fornication, murder, theft, etc.). Deliverance from the Law is critical in this consideration. That is because the Law does not allow for deviate thoughts, whether they are fulfilled or not. They are summarily condemned, wanted or not.

If, therefore, we are not delivered from the Law, we will be condemned by it, whether we outwardly broke a commandment or not (although no such person can be found). **The Law condemns the principle of sin within, even if it is not welcomed or fulfilled on any noticeable scale.**

WHEN SIN WAS DEAD

“For without the law sin was dead.” Other versions read *“sin IS dead.”*^{NASB,NIV} The New Living Translation reads, *“sin would not have that power,”* which does appear to be the sense of the text. This verse does **not** mean sin did not exist prior to the law, or that it could not work within us. We know this is the case, because the Spirit affirmed earlier, *“for before the law was given, sin was in the world”*^{NIV} (5:13). **While the existence of sin, therefore, does not depend upon the Law, its apparenacy and dominance is occasioned by the Law.** To put it another way, sin exists without the Law, but a personal conviction of it does not. Salvation from sin cannot come until the awareness of sin comes.

Further, the phrase *“without the Law”* does not refer to that period of history before God gave the Law through Moses. This is an expression describing the condition of a heart that does not SEE or perceive the law. On the lower end of the spectrum, this principle applies to infants and little children who have no consciousness of the Law. On the higher end, it applies to those who are of age, yet

the Law,” but that the **knowledge** of it was not possessed. Further, this applies to life outside of Christ, and before the new birth. In that state, Paul imagined he was righteous, even though he was not.

It is also important to note that this passage is not a mere personal testimony. This is common in all believers, and is buttressed by Paul’s own experience.

If, therefore, we are not delivered from the Law, we will be condemned by it, whether we outwardly broke a commandment or not (although no such person can be found). The Law condemns the principle of sin within, even if it is not welcomed or fulfilled on any noticeable scale.

have not been thoroughly tutored by the Law because of their failure to see its real intent. Paul is citing himself, prior to be regenerated, as an example of the latter

The words of verse eight mean that the knowledge, or awareness, of sin was, as it were, buried without the Law. The idea is that Paul, as long as the true sense of the law was unknown, imagined he was free from sin—free from its dominion, and free from its guilt. Thus, Paul does not mean that sin was non-existent *“without*

Through him, the Spirit is teaching men about sin, the Law, and our deliverance from them both. This is not a biography of Paul, although he tells us what he personally experienced. He is presenting himself as an example because he has seen the truth. Now, in an expert manner he is tracing it out for us through his own life. He is showing the development of a consciousness of sin, and of the consequent unfolding of a need for a Savior who delivers from sin. In this, he is an example of all believers.

I WAS ALIVE, BUT I DIED

“⁹ I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” It is important to understand Paul is NOT referring to a time when the Law did not exist, but to the time of His life when he did not get the message of the Law—when he did not see its real intent. The New Living Translation captures this sense of the text: *“I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded.”* He was not the first or last person who was subjected to the Law, yet failed to grasp what it was saying. The Ten Commandments still are placed and read in public places where their message is not grasped. There are still people who

affirm they “keep the Ten Commandments.” There are still inquirers like the rich young ruler, who, after hearing the commandments, declared, *“All these things have I kept from my youth up”* (Matt 19:20). In the sense of our text, all such people are *“alive.”*

Once again, while this does, in a rudimentary way, apply to the period of infancy, it is not limited to it. In a fuller sense, it applies to the time when our senses were dulled to the shattering message of the Law, which condemned us.

I WAS ALIVE ONCE

The phrase *“I was alive”* does **not** mean *“alive unto God,”* as in 6:11: *“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but **alive unto God** through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Again, this is not a reference to the time of Paul’s infancy, as many theologians imagine. Such a view robs the text of its power, and encourages the adoption of juvenile and damaging beliefs. Paul is referring to his adult life, when he was a Pharisee, brought up and tutored in the strictest manner in the Law (Acts 26:5). This is when Paul only associated the Law with outward actions. He had ordered his life in such a manner as to be

“blameless” concerning the righteousness of the law—at least, as he perceived it (Phil 3:6). For this reason, his conscience did not condemn him (Acts 23:1), and he fancied he was qualified to even stamp out the name of Jesus among the people (Acts 26:9-11). He was, in this sense, “alive,” imagining himself to have been accepted by God.

During that time when Paul persecuted the church, he had the Jewish attitude described in chapter two. *“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law”* NKJV (2:17-20). At least until the time of the stoning of Stephen, he lived without the slightest twinge of conscience. The message of the Law had not yet come through to his conscience—he was “alive.”

I again want to emphasize this is not a reference to infancy. I do this because of a significant number of theologians that have taught this. An infant is “alive” only in the very elementary sense. As I understand it, a conscience has not yet been developed in the infant, nor a rational sense of well being. Whatever knowledge is possessed is purely intuitive, i.e., knowing its mother, desiring food, etc. This type of existence does not qualify to be included in the “alive” of this text. Here, “alive” does not mean merely existing, but thinking the demands of the Law have been met. Being “alive,” in this sense, was the assessment of Saul of Tarsus, not a mere physical circumstance.

Contemporary Application

It seems to me the circumstance of our text exists in our time. There are people upon whom the message of the Law has never really registered. They fancy themselves to be “alive” because they are think they are keeping the commandments. In many cases, they are not even the commandments of God, but the paltry tenets of some institution. Such people imagine they are accepted by

God, but only because they have been deluded. They are not living by faith or walking in the Spirit (Gal 3:11; Gal 5:17,25). They are not pressing toward the mark, mortifying their members that are upon the earth, or placing their affection on things above (Phil 3:14; Col 3:5; Col 3:1-2). They are not in fellowship with Christ, are not being led by the Spirit, or laying hold on eternal life (1 Cor 1:9; Rom 8:13; 1 Tim 6:12).

Churches are literally filled with this kind of people. They open their mouths and sing what they call praise, yet in their minds they are alienated from the life of God. They have no appetite for the things of God, and can go for long seasons without the slightest exposure to the Word of the Lord. Yet, they call themselves after Christ, wearing His

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name and identifying themselves with His church. They are a contemporary example of what it means to be “alive” without the Law. They have a sense of well being, even though they are treading over the bottomless pit.

It may seem harsh to speak in this manner, but it is necessary to do so, else we will not get the sense of this text. Paul, prior to being in Christ, was scrupulously diligent in his service to God. He excelled above his equals, and was zealous for the “tradition” of his fathers (Gal 1:14). Yet, he was dominated by sin, even though he did not know it. He only **thought** he was alive! Now, the Law will prove the kind of condition he was really in. It will do so with great effectiveness.

WHEN THE COMMANDMENT CAME

“ . . . but when the commandment came ” And when did the commandment come? Some imagine this refers to the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Others think it pertains to the awakening of the conscience in youth. Both of these views, in my judgment, are incorrect.

A Specific Commandment

First, the reference is not to the Law in its entirety, but to a commandment. I understand that some believe the word “commandment” refers to the totality of the Law. While there are times when the Spirit uses “the commandment” in this way (Mk 7:9; Rom 7:12-13), this is not one of them. This refers to “the commandment” that convinced Saul of Tarsus of sin: “*Thou shalt not covet*” (verse 7).

The “commandment came” when it was comprehended, or came home to the heart, that the Law outlawed the desire of anything that Law prohibited. When the letter of that was understood with the intellect, it registered no conviction upon the heart. The commandment did not “come” in the sense of bringing its deeper message home to the heart.

Until “the commandment” came home in its fulness, the root of sin was not perceived as resident in the human nature itself. That “root” is “lust” or “concupiscence.” It is what compels men to commit transgression, and is characteristic of the human nature. It does not speak of something that is actually done, but of the law, or principle that causes men to commit sin.

At what point the commandment in all of its awful implications “came” to Saul, we do not know. But when he realized that “the commandment” was forbidding something that was resident in his very personality or soul, it “came” to him in condemning power. **The commandment actually condemned what he was as well as what he did!** It is then that one realizes he is a sinner by nature, an enemy of God, and utterly “without strength” (5:6). He cannot recover himself from sin, for the

principle of sin is within him by nature, sitting upon the throne and dominating him. Apart from faith in Christ, men are shut up to this condition.

A Travesty of Our Time

There is a travesty that has occurred in our time that is most serious. It is the undue emphasis that has been placed upon the ability and wisdom of man. Great confidence is being placed in natural abilities and disciplines. The current emphasis on formal education, earthly credentials, and various forms of human knowledge is most dangerous. It has caused men to overestimate their power. As a result, they do not sense their deep need of a Savior and His grace. The fact that the very root of sin is resident in

desires, or move the person to earnestly seek a Savior and the remission of sin.

Instead, when *“the commandment came, SIN REVIVED.”* Like a sleeping monster it *“sprang to life”*^{NIV} or *“became alive.”*^{NASB} This is not sin in its various forms, but sin as a governing principle—the *“law of sin”* that is resident within us by nature, or by virtue of our relation to Adam (Rom 7:23,25). The New Jerusalem Bible reads, *“sin came to life.”*

The picture is one of sin easily dominating the individual because of a lack of conviction. It is as though the principle, or law, of sin so dominated us by nature that it could slumber within us while we drank iniquity like water (Job

As this will be developed more fully later in this chapter, these comments will suffice for this time.

I DIED

“ . . . I died.” This is a very vivid expression, captured well in the Basic Bible English Version: *“sin came to life and put me to death.”* The meaning is, *“The life I thought I had was wrenched from me. I became conscious of my basic sinfulness. I was dead before, but did not know it. Now the realization that I was, in fact, ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ registered upon me. I could no longer speak well of myself, or claim that I was righteous.”*^{GOB} He *“died”* in every spiritual sense. Hope died. Confidence died. Self-worth died. Boasting died. Perceived goodness died. Then he learned what he later taught with such power, *“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident”* (Gal 3:11).

Another Kind of Death

Here is yet another kind of death. Already we have read of several different deaths.

- There is the death of Jesus (5:10).
- There is the death *“passed upon all men”* because of sin (Rom 5:12).
- There is death IN sin (Eph 2:1).
- We also read of death TO sin (Rom 6:2).
- There is death WITH Christ (Rom 6:4)
- There is death TO the Law (Rom 7:6).

Now there is the death of all reliance upon the flesh—an awareness that there is nothing about self that can be salvaged. The totality of self is governed by *“the law of sin.”* That is the compelling reason why we must be *“born again”* (John 3:7).

Examples of “I Died”

By saying *“I died,”* Paul means his heart and conscience could no longer sustain him. The commandment came, **filling the heart with condemnation.**

This is what happened on the day of Pentecost when Christ’s murderers cried out, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do!”* (Acts 2:37). They could no longer cry out *“crucify Him,”* thereby seeking to justify themselves.

This was also the experience Isaiah had when, becoming aware of the Living God, he cried out, *“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean*

Having been discovered, the “law of sin” began to work tirelessly, penetrating every thought. It was like a water dam that breaks, flooding the countryside with water than had been pent up. This sin principle, or “law of sin,” began to be more productive and more dominating.

the natural man is altogether obscured. Men speak as though they were more capable than they really are. They conduct their lives as though there was no sinful principle within them—no root that is condemned by God. The commandment has not come home to them, and thus they live as though their intellect and will were the superior parts of their persons.

The impact of this upon religion has been devastating. It has ushered in an era of a *“form of godliness”* that *“denies the power thereof.”* These are the *“perilous times”* of which the Spirit spoke (2 Tim 3:5). They are times in which *“the commandment,”* with all of its power, has **not** come to the conscience of the people.

SIN REVIVED

“ . . . sin revived . . . ” When *“the commandment came,”* it did not bring a blessing. It did not gently lift the sinner and tend to his wounds, pouring in mollifying ointment, so sorely needed. It spoke no word of comfort. It brought no word of cheer, pointing to good things to come. It did not awaken good and holy

15:16). But when *“the commandment came”* home to the conscience, sin woke up, infuriated by Divine demands. Now sin became *“exceedingly sinful”* (Rom 7:13). The human, or fleshly, nature, once thought to be fundamentally good was now seen in all of its repulsiveness. There was an engine that was driving the flesh that was like a grotesque monster. It was *“sin”* in its essence—*“the law of sin.”* From the standpoint of our text, it was *“lust,”* or corrupted desire—the root from which all transgression springs. Now, with sin, as it were, awakened, the defilement in the recesses of the heart became evident.

Having been discovered, the *“law of sin”* began to work tirelessly, penetrating every thought. It was like a water dam that breaks, flooding the countryside with water than had been pent up. This sin principle, or *“law of sin,”* began to be more productive and more dominating. All of this was occasioned when *“the commandment came”*—when *“thou shalt not covet”* was comprehended in its deeper meaning. Many a religious soul has never had such an experience.

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5). Suddenly no desire seemed appropriate,

that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be

what I will call, a theology of the letter. It is an approach to religion that looks at the text of Scripture as an outline for human conduct. It perceives in Scripture neither the nature of God nor the nature of man. Such an approach to religion does not produce humility in its constituents. A lively sense of the grace of God and the need for it are virtually unknown where “the letter” dominates. That is why the Holy Spirit witnesses, “for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor 3:6). When there is no life in the individual, the Law becomes a “letter” that kills and condemns. It bludgeons the sinner, contaminating his conscience.

The danger of a theology of the letter is that it only affects the mind, never the heart. It leaves the individual thinking there is more in him than there really is. The need for Christ and the Holy Spirit is not seen. A necessity of an Intercessor in heaven and one within the individual is not perceived. In such a relationship, the commandment never comes home to the people. They never see what they are.

and all words were out of order. No deeds could be cited that would count one worthy of God.

In this expression (“I died”), the real ministry of the Old Covenant is confirmed. Its job was to verify that the people were in a state of death and condemnation. Thus it is written, “But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so

even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory”(2 Cor 3:7-9). When “the commandment came” to Saul of Tarsus, he saw he was dead and condemned. It was then that he “died,” and all self-confidence was dissipated.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE LETTER

I personally have a background in,

The danger of a theology of the letter is that it only affects the mind, never the heart. It leaves the individual thinking there is more in him than there really is. The need for Christ and the Holy Spirit is not seen. A necessity of an Intercessor in heaven and one within the individual is not perceived. In such a relationship, the commandment never comes home to the people. They never see what they are, and thus rarely seek after the Lord.

THE COMMANDMENT BROUGHT DEATH

⁴⁰ **And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.**” It is with great care that I enter into a discussion of this passage. We must not allow any disrespect for the holy Law of God to be found in us. The fact that it brought death to us was not owing to any fault in the Law. The Law itself is not hostile, but brings out man’s natural hostility toward God. In a sense, “the commandment” is a litmus test which reveals the corruption of human nature.

WHICH WAS TO BRING LIFE

The Law did offer life to the one who kept it flawlessly, and what was true of the Law is true of the individual commandment. Let us hear the Law and its offer of life. “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, **he shall live in them:** I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). “And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, **he shall even live in them**” (Ezek 20:11). Later in Romans, the Spirit makes a special

point of this. “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things **shall live by them**” (Rom 10:5). Distinguishing the Law from faith, Galatians 3:12 affirms, “*And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*”

Paul is referring to this promise of the law when he refers to the commandment, “which was to bring life.” From another viewpoint, however, the Law was never intended to bring life, but to point out that men could really not live up to its righteous demands.

It is clear from our text that prior to being in Christ, Paul felt he had lived up to God’s Law. He was “alive,” and confident in his standing with God. At that time, he did not see the real message or intent of the holy Law, even though he had extended academic knowledge of it.

THE COMANDMENT BROUGHT

DEATH

And what of this commandment “which was to bring life?” As soon as it “came,” or was comprehended, it brought death! It discovered consistent and enormous sin in the one toward whom it was directed, even though that person thought his obedience was satisfactory.

Now that a fuller understanding of “the commandment” was attained, surely the individual will be able to enter into the work of keeping it more fully! But this was not the result. Instead of becoming better, the sinner became worse. Unable to stem the tide of lust, it broke over the boundaries, flooding the mind and drowning men, pushing them beneath the floodtide of sin. Rather than being an occasion for celebrating life, it became the occasion for the singing of a funeral dirge. Sin was deeper than man thought. The infection was more pervasive than he imagined. He was nearer to condemnation than he ever dreamed possible. He found himself capable of more great sin.

"The commandment" did not bring blessing. If did not bring life, and it surely did not bring exceeding great and precious promises. It was a light that exposed the real nature of fallen man. It confirmed to those who understand it that they were separated from God and in a state of spiritual death.

DO NOT FORGET!

This is a retrospective look. Paul is speaking of his own past, but he also is speaking for all who are in Christ Jesus. He is showing us how the Law was our schoolmaster. It was not a tutor in the sense of proclaiming factual data. Rather, as illuminated by the Spirit of God, it uncovered our corruption, offering no

remedy for it and no hope for us.

We were not able to extricate ourselves from the condemnation and death brought upon us through the law. If God did not deliver us, we should have expired in that state, forever cut off from God. But the point of our text is that we have been *"delivered from the Law,"* having become *"dead"* to it *"through the body of Christ."*

This passage is showing us how precious that deliverance from the Law is. It is also confirming how blessed is our marriage to Christ, for we were delivered from the Law, becoming dead to it, that we might be married to another, even to

Him who is risen from the dead.

In view of these things, those who promote a system of Law as a means to justification have rendered an unspeakable handicap to men. Thinking themselves to have brought the means to life to men, they have actually become the promoters of death. They are shutting people out from God, not bringing them to Him. They are giving strength to sin, not making it weaker.

If Jesus died to deliver us from the Law, then those who magnify Law above faith are working against Christ and are enemies of His cross. They hurt believers, and do not help them.

WHEN SIN DECEIVED ME

⁴¹ ***For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*** Other versions read, *"For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death."*^{NIV} *"Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death."*

^{NLT} This language is precise and powerful. It paints a vivid picture of the dilemma from which we have been marvelously delivered. This is no small thing, not a mere theological technicality. Ponder the strength of the words: *"seizing . . . deceived me . . . killed me."*

SIN

Keep in mind, when the text says *"sin,"* it does not mean a specific deed or expression. This is the *"law of sin"* that is in our members. In particular, it is what I have called the root, or fountainhead, from which all transgression springs. Without being too redundant, it is the *"lust"* introduced in verse seven. This is the natural trait within man that compels him to seek self-interests. The compelling effects of those interests range from failing to seek and serve God, to striving to gratify the baser *"desires of the flesh and of the mind"* (Eph 2:3). The extent of sinfulness may vary, but its presence will not.

Care must be taken not to view *"the law of sin"* as a mere philosophical and lifeless term. The remainder of this verse will confirm the importance of this law.

TAKING OCCASION

The words *"taking occasion"* ^{KJV,NKJV} may lead one to think this is a gentle and

incentive] from the commandment . . . "

The Spirit is taking care here not to make the Law the cause of our transgression. The Law is the *"strength of sin,"* not its cause. That *"strength"* is seen in the increase of our guilt, the contamination of our conscience, and the awakening of the hostility resident in the fallen human nature.

Keep in mind, when the text says *"sin,"* it does not mean a specific deed or expression. This is the *"law of sin"* that is in our members. In particular, it is what I have called the root, or fountainhead, from which all transgression springs.

It is something like this: when the natural man, with its propensity to sin, hears the commandment, it immediately suggests disobedience. It concludes the commandment is restrictive, taking all good from us. It reasons in accord with the "lusts" of its father Satan (John 8:44): *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Gen 3:5). **SATAN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY**

AFFORDED BY THE COMMANDMENT.

Just as Satan himself seized an opportunity in the Divine commandment, so the sinful nature, now resident in man, hears the commandment of God and takes it as an occasion to transgress. That very thing occurred at Mount Sinai. As soon as the commandments were heard, the *"law of sin"* seized upon the opportunity to

relatively unthreatening expression. But this is not at all the case. The word translated *"taking"* comes from the Greek word *λαβουσα*, which means take hold of, take advantage, take into possession, and seize. It is an aggressive word that reveals the power and swiftness with which the principle of sin works within us. The Amplified Bible captures this sense of the word. *"For sin, seizing the opportunity and getting a hold on me [by taking its*

commit iniquity. The Israelites requested of Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us” (Ex 32:1). That single request broke the first three commandments, and the tenth as well. **SIN SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY AFFORDED BY THE COMMANDMENT.**

The Law Reveals Man’s Condition

The carnal mind will reason, “If sin seized an opportunity when it hears the commandment, then it is better not to hear the Law of God, or be subjected to His commandment. Then sin will not break forth in us.” But this is flawed reasoning. The Law did not make us sin, it **discovered** the sinful nature within us. Expressions of sin existed before the coming of the commandment. They were **accentuated** by the perception of the commandment, not created by it.

Man cannot be accepted by God until his nature is changed—until he becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The fact that an individual may not have committed transgression in variety and quantity brings him no closer to God. It is his **nature** that condemns him! As it is written, we “were by **nature** children of wrath” (Eph 2:3). If anyone doubts that is the case, consider that the nature within man used the holy law of God as an occasion to sin! **To say it another way, man is not a sinner because he sins, but sins because he is a sinner.**

DECEIVED ME

Once again, the personification of sin is pointing us to the “law of sin” that is resident in “the flesh,” of sinful nature. That sinful principle, Paul says, “deceived me.” Other translations read, “beguiled me,” ^{ASV} “seduced me,” ^{DARBY} “I was tricked,” ^{BBE} and “fooled me.” ^{NLT} That confirms our fundamental ignorance.

But how did sin deceive Saul of Tarsus, and all others who are unregenerate? There are several areas of

deception fostered by the “law of sin.”

- ❑ It blinds men to the full intent of the law, constraining a surface view of it.
- ❑ It leads men to believe they can fulfill the law in their own energy.
- ❑ By promising satisfaction in “other things,” unrelated to God.
- ❑ By suggesting there are no real penalties for transgression.
- ❑ By suggesting that the sins already committed were not too serious.
- ❑ That the standard set forth in the Law is only a suggestion, and is not to be taken seriously.

It is as though the principle of sin used the very Law Saul thought he could keep, to condemn him. Where once it awakened all manner of unlawful desires within him, now it bludgeoned him with a guilty conscience. All confidence was destroyed, and the very commandment in which life was sought became the occasion for devastating death. To put it another way, the commandment which Saul thought was leading to life, actually led him into death. It did so because it discovered in him a principle that would not go away, and could not be subdued. As a result, his conscience was defiled, his confidence destroyed, and his hope shattered.

Man cannot be accepted by God until his nature is changed—until he becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The fact that an individual may not have committed transgression in variety and quantity brings him no closer to God. It is his nature that condemns him!

On a practical basis, the outcome of the deception was that sin was minimized and self strength and worth were magnified. Although the “pleasures of sin” are only for a “season,” the deceived person stumbles on in transgression, oblivious of the destruction that awaits him. Yet, our text provides an additional view. The result of deception is not described as one of momentary pleasure, but of death.

KILLED ME

“ . . . and by it [the commandment] killed me.” This equates to be driven out from the presence of the Lord, in which Saul of Tarsus imagined he was welcome. This is another way of saying the conscience became defiled, forbidding the person to stand in the presence of the One who desires to save Him.

All of this because of the “law of sin!” It was awakened and aroused by the Law. Because of the hostility that it had against the holy Law, it worked more vigorously to provoke sinful indulgences. It caused all manner of wayward desires to erupt within—things Saul knew were not right. As a result, his conscience became a goad that prodded him, convicting him, and contaminating all of his thoughts. All of the exalted thoughts Saul had of himself were swept away in the deluge of condemnation. He had trusted in the Law to save him, and to give him life. However, in the end, it condemned him, causing his death. He was stripped of all delusion that he was good. Sin deceived and killed him. It is utterly hopeless for a person in that condition to save himself—and that is the condition we all were in.

THE LAW IS HOLY

“¹² **Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.**” Here is classic example of spiritual reasoning and sound mindedness! He has

just finished saying that the sin principle used the Law of God to deceive him and kill him. Now, looking back on the occasion, Paul says that circumstance

proves “the Law is holy, and what it commands is holy and upright and good.” ^{NJB} The “strength of sin is the Law,” yet it is “holy.” The Law was given that “every

mouth might be stopped and all the world become guilty before God," but it is "just," or righteous. The Law aroused the sin principle resident within fallen man, yet it is "good."

AN EXPRESSION FROM DAVID

This verse is to be considered against the background of a statement made by David. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psa 19:12-13).

Because of his faith, David sensed sin was more dominant in him than he was

The very fact of David's prayer reveals he had come to exactly the same conclusion as Paul. The failure of their lives to measure up to the Law of God moved them to fault themselves, not God's Law. They did not complain that the law was too demanding.

able to detect or even understand. That is why he exclaimed, "But who can detect their errors?"^{NRSV} He knew he had hidden propensities, but knew neither their number or what they were. Thus he cried out, "Forgive my hidden faults."^{NIV}

Why did he speak in this manner? Why did he not excuse his errors as faults, saying he was "just human?" It was because of the holy Law of God that had defined sin for him, and made him acutely aware of the "law of sin" within him. He knew any seeming goodness in men was only a veneer, and did not reveal their real persons. Thus he prayed, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." Presumptuous sins are sins coming from pride; sins of insolence and arrogance. If the human nature is not basically sinful, such a prayer is a foolish absurdity.

The very fact of David's prayer reveals he had come to exactly the same conclusion as Paul. The failure of their lives to measure up to the Law of God moved them to fault themselves, not God's Law. They did not complain that the law was too demanding, or that it asked impossible things of us—even though it does.

THE NATURE OF THE LAW

Our society, as well as the professed church itself, could do with a good dose of this perspective. The Law of God is "holy and just and good." Keep in mind, this conclusion is drawn from the fact of man's basic sinfulness, not from a Divine statement describing the character of the Law. **Man's impurity has underscored the law's virtue!**

The Law is holy because it reflects the character of God. "Holy" means blameless, without fault. It is pure and without mixture. There are no hidden agendas in it, no directions that are ungodly. The law of God always tells the truth and properly represents God's will.

The Law is just because there is no iniquity in it. It precisely

declares the truth, and that without respect of persons. It aims to glorify God, and perfectly reflects His mind on things of which it speaks. It is ethically proper and right. It is not unfair in its demands upon those who are made in the image of God.

The Law is good because it helps us to discover what was latent within the flesh. It leads us to realize our sinful condition, and to see our need of a Savior. It is useful, beneficial, and sound in every part. What it commands is holy. What it requires is just. What it demands is good.

Why Men Recoil from the Law

Why do men recoil from the Law of God? Why do they want it removed from their public places, houses of government, and public schools? It is because they do not believe it is holy! It is because they

have not been persuaded that it is just! It is because they are convinced it is not good! It is too threatening to their conduct, and exposes their ways and persons as unacceptable to God.

They may cite political or social reasons for their opposition to the law, but they are deceived in doing so. The Law scrapes against their sinful nature. It is like a scouring pad upon their corrupt natures. While they seek to lay the blame on the Law itself, the fault is found in their very nature.

Paul confessed the Law did all of the things to him that people of our day complain it does to them. But he did not ask that the Law be removed. Rather, he allowed the law to bring him to Christ, that He might be delivered from condemnation.

LIFE PRIOR TO BEING IN CHRIST

We must ever keep before us that this is a picture of the Law's ministration BEFORE we were in Christ. It did not change our condition, but revealed it. Because of this, it could not justify us, but could only condemn us. We possessed within us a principle that is not allowed in heaven—"the law of sin." We had a nature that is not allowed in the courts of the Lord, and the Law exposed it.

GOD IS JUSTIFIED IN HIS SAYING

This passage glorifies God because it upholds what He has said, even if it condemns man. This confirms what was said earlier—a word taken from David. "Let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings, and mightest overcome when Thou art judged" (Rom 3:4; Psa 51:4).

While sinful men seek to justify themselves, the person living by faith insists that anyone speaking in contradiction of God is a "liar." That person desires God to be openly "justified" or vindicated in everything He has said. The person living by faith knows man has judged God when he violates His commandments, then seeks to justify himself in doing so. The believer wants God to "overcome" in all such situations. For He alone is righteous. That person knows the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good.

DID WHAT WAS GOOD BECOME DEATH?

⁴¹³ *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 Holy Spirit is careful and zealous to protect the glory and righteousness of God. He teaches us in such a manner as leaves us bowing at the feet of our Lord, and holding up His Law as honorable and above all reproach. We are not “under the Law,” but we love and respect it! We have been “delivered from the Law,” yet we find no fault in it, confessing that its weakness was owing exclusively to us. As it is written, “*The Law was weak through the flesh* . . . ”(Rom 8:3).

DID THE LAW CAUSE OUR DEATH?

There is good reason for asking this question. We have been told that the Law aroused the sin principle within us. Sin worked through it to deceive us, and finally remove any hope of life we were deceived into thinking we had. The NASB reads, “*Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me?*”

If this is true, then what is good proved to be as dangerous as what is evil. Sin and the Law are then occupants of the same room, and are engaged in the same ministry.

Is it not written that the Law, or First Covenant, was the “*ministration of death*” (2 Cor 3:7)? Does it not follow, therefore, that is caused our death? “*God forbid!*” Neither the Word nor the character of God will allow for such a conclusion!

SIN PRODUCED DEATH

It was SIN that produced death in us, not the holy Law of God! Until the Law, or until the “*commandment came,*” sin did not appear as sin. It did not wear the tag of “*transgression,*” or represent itself as being unlawful. It came under the guise of “*It is my right to do so.*” It hid its true nature by deceiving men into thinking, “*Everyone has a right to their opinion,*” or “*I can do as I please.*”

The **philosopher** looked at sin and concluded the very appetites condemned by God were born in us, and therefore should be gratified. The **psychiatrist** pondered sin and concluded it was the result of some birth defect, disease, or bitter experience. The **sociologist** thought upon sin and determined it was the unavoidable effect of ones environment. The **idolater** considered sin and made a god out of it, deifying his own lust. The **educator** looked at sin and deduced that more information was needed. The **politician** ponders it and concludes that laws should be passed that allow for its expression. The favored of this world refuse to see sin as it is!

Remember, this is the sin nature—what compels the individual to commit transgression and violate specific laws of God. It is the NATURE of sin that is being exposed by the holy Law! It is elsewhere called “the flesh.”

But sin is known by the trail of tragedy it leaves behind. It is so corrupt, so diabolical, that it produced death in us “*through what was good.*” That is what the root of human nature did! Had it not been for the Law, men would have tended even more to listen to the world’s foolish wise men.

This is a day when the perspective of this text is sorely needed. It is vital that sin be seen as “*sin,*” and not as a mistake, disease, or maladjustment. It must “*appear* [as] *sin,*” not as an infirmity. It is not an addiction, but a character, a nature, an inner law or principle.

EXCEEDINGLY SINFUL

Through the commandment of God, sin became “*exceedingly sinful.*” Other versions read, “*utterly sinful,*”^{NASB} “*sinful beyond measure,*”^{NRSV} “*much more evil,*”^{BBE} “*how terrible sin really is,*”^{NLT} and “*unbounded sinful power.*”^{NJB}

The wickedness of sin cannot be measured. It has no boundaries. There are no depths to which it will not sink. There is no extent to which it will not go to justify its presence. If Cain sees his brother offer a more acceptable sacrifice than his own, he will murder him. If Joseph’s brothers are offended by his dreams and favored status, they will think nothing of selling him into slavery. If the Jewish council does not like the words of Stephen, they will stone him. If the Jews at Lystra are offended by the powerful preaching of Paul, they will drag him out of the city and stone him.

There is no boundary to sin, no limits to its depravity and innate wickedness! If Haman does not like Mordecai’s refusal to do obeisance to him, he will seek his death. If the three Hebrew children will not bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol, he will have them thrown into a furnace of fire. There are no depths to which sin will not descend!

The Sin Principle

Remember, this is the sin nature—what compels the individual to commit transgression and violate specific laws of God. **It is the NATURE of sin that is being exposed by the holy Law!** It is elsewhere called “*the flesh.*”

There is a Divine strategy revealed in the giving of the Law. **Sin had to work death in us in order for us to see its true nature.** The Law was given to make this happen. Men greatly error when they summon the psychologist to scenes of human tragedy, to explain the what and the why of brutality and violence. In vain men ask the philosophers and sociologists for an explanation of deviate conduct that is outside of the bounds of both reason and propriety. It is the sin-nature that causes these things to happen.

A time must come when men are brought to realize the problem is in human nature! Every person out of Christ is dominated by *“the law of sin”* that is resident in their nature, or basic constitution. The fact that it does not break forth in deluges of violence or deviate indulgence in all people does not mean such a thing is not possible. Given the opportunity, together with the removal of Divine restraint, the darling Absalom can try to wrench the Kingdom from his own father David, even seeking to kill him.

When the Spirit refers to sin BECOMING exceedingly sinful, He does not mean that the nature of sin becomes worse and worse. Rather, it is PERCEIVED as being *“exceedingly*

sinful.” The fact that it worked death in men through a holy, just, and good commandment proves that to be the case.

HUMAN DEPRAVITY

While some theologians argue against the notion that man is depraved, or utterly corrupt, they cannot make their argument from this passage! If the human nature is not utterly fallen, what need is there for a Savior (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14)? Why must man be given both repentance and remission (Acts 5:31)? How is it that Divine grace in abundance is needed if there remains a single vestige of goodness in the natural man (Rom 5:17)? Why must we be drawn to Christ (John 6:44)? Why is deliverance necessary (Heb 2:15)? Of what purpose is the enlightening of the eyes of the

understanding if man is not sinful at the core (Eph 1:18-20)?

Again, I must remind you that we are speaking of the principle of sin, not of individual transgressions. This is the law that, as an engine, drives the transgression. It is embodied in the word *“lust,”* and is awakened by the holy Law of God, as though an intruder had entered its house.

The awfulness of the sinful nature would never have been correctly known if it was not for the holy Law of God. The Law provoked that wicked nature to arise from seeming slumber and work prodigiously to produce sin and death in us. For the sensitive, the volume of sin that was within was stunning.

THE LAW AND ME

“¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Here is a grand summary statement, and an introduction to the marvelous section that follows. You see at once that this is a profoundly strong statement. It is also in the present tense, where verses seven through thirteen are all in the past tense: *“had not known sin. . . had not known lust. . . wrought in me . . . sin was dead. . . I was alive . . . the commandment came . . . sin revived . . . I died . . . I found to be unto death . . . taking occasion by the commandment . . . deceived me . . . slew me.”*

The Spirit will now draw some conclusions upon the basis of what He has taught us. He will bring things together, and that in a most marvelous way. Paul appeals to our comprehension, acknowledging that he has received the point, and expecting that we have done the same: *“WE KNOW.”* This is knowledge common to the household of faith. It is not philosophical knowledge, but something that has been realized in the inner recesses of our hearts. We know it to such an extent that we will immediately recognize the truth of what is said. The statements that follow are not for information, but for

confirmation.

THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL

This is a profound statement, as becomes abundantly evident when you try to explain it. *“Spiritual,”* in this case, is

The Law was unsuitable as a means to justification, but it “is spiritual.” It brought no power or mercy to us, but it “is spiritual.” We died to it in Jesus, but it “is spiritual.” It is not of faith, but it “is spiritual.” We were delivered from the law in order that we might be married to the risen Jesus, but the Law “is spiritual.”

used in its highest sense. There is such a thing as *“spiritual wickedness”* (precisely the same word—Eph 6:12). That is wickedness of an unseen and dominating order. We do combat with it in a higher realm—above the order of flesh and blood.

But our text means more than that. He is not saying the Law is *“spiritual”* merely in the sense of being of a higher order, or from an unseen realm.

First, this is the Law of God—the Law that stopped every mouth and caused the world to become guilty before God (3:19). It is the Law which brought *“the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). It is summarized on tables of stone, and called *“the words of the covenant, the ten commandments”* (Ex 34:28). That Law is *“spiritual.”* It is the Law that convinced Paul of his sin, and it is that Law that brings us to Christ (Gal 3:24). As a covenant, it was temporary, and characterized by fading glory (2 Cor 3:7-11). However, by nature, it *“is spiritual.”*

The Law was unsuitable as a means to justification, but it *“is spiritual.”* It brought no power or mercy to us, but it *“is spiritual.”* We died to it in Jesus, but it *“is spiritual.”* It is not of faith, but it *“is spiritual.”* We were delivered from the law in order that we might be married to the risen Jesus, but the Law *“is spiritual.”*

Given by God. The law *“is spiritual,”* because it was given by God Himself. *“All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,”* (2 Tim 3:16), and the Law was *“given”* and *“written.”* The breath of the Holy Spirit is upon the Law, empowering it for its assigned work.

Harmonious with the Divine nature. The Law *“is spiritual”* because it is in harmony with the Divine nature. It is at variance with nature of fallen man, but not with the nature of God. It articulates His mind, and carries His perspective.

Characterized by heavenly rationality. The Law *“is spiritual”* because it possesses a heavenly form of rationality. It is not ethereal, but appeals to the mind, provoking thoughts and profound considerations.

It deals with spiritual matters.

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it deals with spiritual matters—things that have to do with the real issues of life. It defines the proper direction of inner life.

It reaches into the spirit of man.

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it reaches into the inner part of man—into his spirit. Like a sharp two edged sword, it discovers and delineates between the soul and the spirit of man. It uncovers sin at its root—in the human spirit.

Because the Law *“is spiritual,”* we have the utmost regard for it. It originated with God and brings glory to Him. It does God’s work and prepares men to receive Christ. Let there be no disdain for the Law of God among us.

I AM CARNAL

At this point we begin to see more clearly why man must be justified. When Paul says, *“I am carnal,”* he speaks for all of us. He is not writing a biography, but unveiling the reason why we have been delivered from the Law. Other versions read, *“I am of the flesh,”*^{NASB} *“I am unspiritual,”*^{NIV} and *“I am fleshly.”*^{DARBY}

When Paul says *“I,”* he is referring to his natural self—how he is without Christ and apart from justification. No person in Christ can be described in the words of this verse. In fact, the Spirit will tell us later, *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”* (8:9). *“Flesh,”* or carnality, is a state of nature, not of grace!

It is possible to refer to a part of a

person as though it were the whole of the person. Thus, when Lazarus died, Jesus asked, *“Where have you laid him?”* (John 11:34). The same terminology is used of the burial of Jesus: *“And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre”* (Acts 13:29). Technically, in both cases, they only buried the body, not the soul or the spirit. Yet the body is spoken of as though it were the whole person. This is because the

The Law *“is spiritual”* because it reaches into the inner part of man—into his spirit. Like a sharp two edged sword, it discovers and delineates between the soul and the spirit of man. It uncovers sin at its root—in the human spirit.

body was a part of the person, though not the whole of him.

Thus Paul could refer to the part of himself called *“the flesh”* as though it were he himself. While here he admits to owning that part (*“I am carnal”*), the latter part of this chapter will find him disowning this part. For now, he speaks in this way to bring to our attention the sharp contrast between the natural man and the spiritual law of God.

Carnal Christians?

Some might object, saying there are *“carnal Christians,”* even though no such combination of words is found in Scripture. And, if such words are not found in the word of God, they can hardly connote a Scriptural meaning!

Immediately, some flee to the third chapter of First Corinthians, pointing out Paul’s indictment of the Corinthians for being *“carnal.”* And, indeed, he did charge them with carnality. *“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now*

are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” (3:1-3).

Were these Christian traits? Are they the marks of those who are in Christ? The point of the text is that they were conducting their lives as though they were not even in Christ. They had allowed the sinful nature to again assert itself. As a result, they were not able to be addressed as spiritual people. There was envying, strife, and divisions among them. They were walking like unregenerate men, even calling themselves after men. Anyone who imagines this passage sanctions the presence of carnal people in Christ’s church needs to rethink their foolish position. These people were soundly rebuked for being in that state. Later in the chapter he speaks of those mingled in the church who were *“wood, hay, and stubble”* that could not withstand the sure judgment of God (1 Cor 3:10-13). With great solemnity, he went on to say, *“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are”* (verse 17).

When Paul says, *“I am carnal,”* he was not saying he was like the Corinthians. He was not confessing to being envious, fomenting strife among believers, and being the cause of ungodly division. Rather, he was speaking of his person apart from Jesus – the part that was crucified with Christ, and cut away from his essential person by the *“circumcision of Christ.”*

While he will disown this part of himself later in this chapter, referring to it as *“not I”* (7:16,17,20), he says here it is *“I.”* He means it is still with him, though separate from him. If it was possible for Rebekah to have children with contrary natures within her womb, it should not surprise us that those in Christ have contrary natures within their bodies.

It is as though Paul speaks for the natural part of himself, knowing it will not acknowledge its true nature itself: *“I am carnal.”*

What Does It Mean to be Carnal?

In the sense of our text, what does it mean to be “carnal?” First, this is a condition that is opposite of the spiritual Law of God. To be “carnal” is to be the opposite of God’s holy law, and hostile toward it. Carnality involves minding earthly things, which constitutes one an “enemy of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18).

To be “carnal” is to be fleshly, with appetites that are anchored to the earth. This is the “natural man” which “cannot receive” or know “the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). To be “carnal” is to be locked into the state of nature, which God has condemned.

By confessing “I am carnal,” Paul was doing two things. First, he was acknowledging that the Law was spiritual, and had successfully uncovered the sin principle that was resident in himself. Second, he was affirming his need of Christ Jesus and his refusal to trust in the flesh. This is what he was of himself and apart from the Lord Jesus.

In the ultimate sense, Paul is showing us why men cannot be justified by the law. In their natural state, they are everything that the Law condemns, and nothing that it commends. This is precisely why we had to die to the law, being delivered from it.

SOLD UNDER SIN

Here again the Spirit moves Paul to use most powerful words. Other versions read, “sold in bondage to sin,”^{NASB} “sold as a slave to sin,”^{NIV} “given into the power of sin,”^{BBE} and “I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master.”^{NLT} It is not possible to miss the strength of this language. It is most arresting, indeed.

I must emphasize that Paul is showing why it is imperative that we be delivered from the Law as a means to justification. The requirement for remission, justification, and a Savior to effect both, is absolutely essential. By nature we are enslaved to sin, unable to remove its

shackles from us. Apart from Christ we are not capable of righteousness. Sin is our master, and we do its bidding eagerly. When the Law makes demands of the flesh, it only rushes with more eagerness headlong into sin. Robertson says of this phrase (“sold under sin”) “Sin has closed the mortgage and owns its slave.”

In the beginning chapters the Spirit confirmed there was “none righteous, no not one” (3:10). Now he is telling us why. It is because there is nothing good about the flesh—about the natural man, or the person without Christ within. Such people do not merely have “the law of sin” within

upon the sons of disobedience”^{NKJV} (Col 3:5-6). “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”^{NKJV} (Rom 8:13). “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:24-25).

Such exhortations would not be necessary if the flesh was recoverable. But it is not. It is “carnal, given into the power of sin.”

FLESHLY RELIGION

By nature we are enslaved to sin, unable to remove its shackles from us. Apart from Christ we are not capable of righteousness. Sin is our master, and we do its bidding eagerly. When the Law makes demands of the flesh, it only rushes with more eagerness headlong into sin.

them, they are ruled by it. Sin is their uncontested master, and they are not able to do anything about it. They are “sold under sin.”

THE FLESH HAS NOT CHANGED

When we are born again, “the flesh” does not change. It is reduced to obsolescence, now being called the “old man” (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). With energy, he is to be “put off” and denied expression. He has not changed, he is still “sold under [the dominion of] sin.” The flesh is not included in the phrase “all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). Our perspective of it has “become new,” but its nature has not changed. Blessed is the person who sees it.

The seriousness of this matter is seen in various exhortations to believers. “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming

The danger of a religion that centers in the flesh and its corrupted appetites ought to be evident. It is a sin grievous beyond description to make a religious appeal to the flesh—the fallen part of man. It is not capable of doing what is right, and has been rejected in its totality by the Living God.

No one whose lineage can only be traced to Adam will dwell forever in the house of the Lord. Those who lived in spiritually primitive times, before the coming of Christ and the declaration of the Gospel, will be righteously judged upon the basis of their longing for and anticipation of a Savior.

In regeneration, our old nature is not made good, but a good nature is created within us. This is done by virtue of our connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. That blessed affiliation frees us from the condemnation of the Law, and from the power of the flesh as well. That blessed circumstance needs to be proclaimed.

CONCLUSION

When you ponder the rarity of a message like this in our day, it becomes

even more precious. God is greatly to be praised for unfolding the magnitude of

His great salvation. I have often said this, but must do so once again. There are at

least two things that have eluded the modern church. First, the depth to which sin has taken man. Second, the extent to which God has gone to save us. Both of these realities have been expounded with power in this text.

Sin took us to depths from which we could not recover ourselves. We had to be delivered by another, even Jesus Christ. Not only did sin send us to a moral bottom, the "law of sin" penetrated every part of our person. The root of sin was found in us, and we could not pull it out. In our dealings with sin, it is important that we do not limit ourselves to the expose of particular and reprehensible transgressions. While they must be exposed and condemned, men must also hear of the root, or cause, of sin.

The principle of sin is resident in the flesh, and men must know it. It is only as this is seen to a measurable degree that the grace of God and a Savior from sin will be properly seen. Half-heartedness and inconsistency are the direct result of NOT seeing that "no good thing" dwells

in the flesh.

In my judgment, contemporary problem-solvers fail to take this into consideration. They deal too much with surface issues, and do not come to grips with the root of the problem. That root is the sin nature that is part of the flesh, or our natural being. As long as we deal with on the surface, we will be shut up to a law-system. The irony of that whole approach is that the Law arouses the sin principle, causing it to be more active than it ever was before.

The thoroughness of salvation is exhilarating to consider. First, it deals with the transgressions we have committed, forgiving us all trespasses. Our account is settled, and our iniquities are blotted out like a thick cloud. The conscience is purged, thereby allowing the believer to come into the very presence of God, to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

In regeneration, the corrupt nature, tied to our flesh, is cut away from our

essential persons and put upon the cross. Thereby the sin principle is put to a disadvantage. We are then buried with Christ into a state of death to both sin and the Law. We die to sin in the sense of it no longer dominating us. We die to the Law in the sense of it no longer being able to condemn us.

In being joined to Christ, we come into an area of unspeakable advantage and provision. Not only did Jesus deliver us from sin, the law, and the devil, He is leading us to glory. His intercession and mediation assure that we will always have what is required to make it safely from earth to glory.

All of this, and more, is opened to us in a marvelous Gospel, that is itself "the power of God unto salvation." There is no reason why any believer should ever be dominated by sin. God has made provision for us to abstain from fleshly lusts, put to death the part of us that gravitates to sin, and resist the devil. These provisions are for all who are in Christ Jesus. Our text has strongly affirmed these realities.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 11/17/2000 Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 7:15-25, **"INWARD STRUGGLE CONFIRMS JUSTIFICATION."** One of the most profound explanations of both justification and struggle is found in this passage. Properly understood, it brings relief to those experiencing inner struggles. The introduction of new life has brought fierce conflict within. This passage clarifies the nature of that struggle. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship.

The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva

406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)
Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)

Adah Hutchcraft (jahutch@planetdirect.com)

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

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