

THE EPISTLES TO THE ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

1. Introduction (1:1-17)
2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
3. Justification: the position of righteousness from God (3:21-5:21)
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 - b. Concerning the Law (7:1-25)
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 - 3) Christians' relationship to sin (13-25)

B. Preview of Romans 7

1. Tom Constable, *Paul needed to explain the believer's relationship to the Law because of people's natural tendency to view law as a means of making progress. The apostle had already shown that the Law has no value in justification (3:20). Now he spoke of it in relation to progressive sanctification. If believers are not under the Mosaic Law (6:14), what is our relationship to it?*
2. Grant Osborne, *This is certainly one of the most difficult and debated portions of the book, and its meaning depends on two preliminary issues. First, there is the question of Paul's switch to first-person singular forms in this section...The second issue is similar. Is Paul describing Christians, non-Christians or the non-Christian in verses 7-13 and the Christian in verses 14-25? Both issues will be addressed in verse 9.*

ROMANS 7:7-12, THE LAW'S RELATIONSHIP TO SIN

A. Paul rebuts the claim that the law is sin (7-8)

1. Paul denied the idea that the law is sin and explained how the law revealed his sin (7), ***What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."***
 - a. Paul speaks personally here as he uses *I* three times in this verse and *me* once in verse 8. An understanding of these personal pronouns will be addressed in verse 9.
 - b. Paul spoke of the relationship between sin and the Law in Romans 7:5, *For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.*
 - c. In verse 7, Paul explains more fully why the Law is not sin.
 - 1) Some believe that the Law is comprised of moral and ceremonial parts of the Mosaic Law.
 - 2) They would contend that God has only terminated the ceremonial part of the Law.
 - 3) Here, Paul uses the 10th Commandment from the moral law to prove his point that the Law is not sin but not that immoral behavior is permissible for Christians, Romans 8:4, *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*
 - a) Exodus 20:17, You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.
 - b) Now, Paul knows that it is sinful to covet.
 - d. Christians are reminded that the Law provides awareness of sin.
 - 1) Romans 3:20, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*
 - 2) The Greek word for *sin* means to *fall short*.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *We see that we fall short of what God requires when we become aware of His laws...The Law is similar to an X-ray machine that reveals a tumor. The machine itself is not bad simply because it reveals something bad. Likewise the Law is not sinful because it exposes sin.*
 - 2] Warren Wiersbe, *The Law is a mirror that reveals the inner man and shows us how dirty we are.*

2. Sin came to life in Paul through the commandment (8), ***But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.***

a. Sin came through *the commandment*.

- 1) The *commandment* refers to the 10th commandment, covetousness.
- 2) Sin *seized or took* opportunity to produce covetousness as a result of the command against coveting.
 - a) Douglas Moo, *The law is not “sin,” nor the originator of sin, but the occasion or operating base that sin has used to accomplish its evil and deadly purpose.*
 - b) John Witmer, *The Law is not the cause of the act of sin; the principle or nature of sin within an individual is. But the Law’s specific commandments stimulate the sin principle into acts that violate the commandments and give those acts the character of transgression.*
 - c) C. E. B. Cranfield, *Why was the divine commandment an opportunity for sin? . . . the merciful limitation imposed on man by the commandment and intended to preserve his true freedom and dignity can be misinterpreted and misrepresented as a taking away of his freedom and an attack on his dignity, and so can be made an occasion of resentment and rebellion against the divine Creator, man’s true Lord. In this way sin can make use of the commandment not to covet as a means of arousing all manner of covetousness.*
 - d) Romans 8:7, *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.*

b. Sin is dormant apart from the law.

- 1) Thomas Constable, *“Dead” here means dormant or inactive but not completely impotent, as is clear from verse 9 where this “dead” sin springs to life.*
- 2) Sin exists apart from the Law but is less active without it.
 - a) Romans 7:5, *For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.*
 - b) 1 Corinthians 15:56, *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, *Believers who try to live by rules and regulations discover that their legalistic system only arouses more sin and creates more problems. The churches in Galatia were very legalistic, and they experienced all kinds of trouble...Their legalism did not make them more spiritual; it made them more sinful! Why? Because the Law arouses sin in our nature.*

B. The Law which promises life proves to be death because of the deceptiveness of sin (9-11)

1. Paul declared that when he understood the law, sin came alive and he died (9), ***I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.***

a. Paul’s use of personal pronouns in Romans 7:7-12, to whom or what does it refer?

- 1) Primary positions
 - a) Paul presents his personal experience with law and sin.
 - b) Adam is represented by his struggle in the Garden of Eden.
 - c) Israel is in view before and after receiving the Law.
 - d) Everyone who is convicted by the demands of the Law.
- 2) Is there a conclusive answer or a combination?
 - a) I believe it is a combination.
 - b) Paul is addressing his own condition and everyone convicted by the demands of the Law.
 - 1] Leon Morris, *In this chapter he keeps on using the first person singular pronoun though he has not done this since the opening of his letter...Moreover, words like, “What a wretched man I am” Who will rescue me from the body of this death? (V. 24) are impossibly theatrical if they apply to the people, but not to Paul himself?*
 - 2] Grant Osborne, *...Paul uses his own experience to describe the basic human situation.*

b. Is Paul describing Christians, non-Christians or non-Christians in verses 7-13 and Christians in 14-25?

- 1) I believe Paul is describing his non-Christians experience in verses 7-13 and his Christian experience in verses 14-25.
- 2) Paul switches from past tense verbs in 7-13 and present tense verbs in 14-25.
- 3) Grant Osborne, *Paul describes every person, first on the basis of his Jewish past and then on the basis of his Christian present.*
- 4) Paul’s emphasis on the Law would indicate that he was speaking to a Jewish audience in 7-13 and then to a Jewish Christian audience in 14-25.

- c. *once alive apart from the law*
 - 1) That can't refer to Paul having life before the Law came since he was born after the coming of the law, Galatians 4:4, *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,*
 - 2) John Stott, *Perhaps therefore we should understand 'alive apart from law' as meaning that he had not yet come consciously under the law's condemnation.*
 - 3) Note Philippians 3:6, *as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*
 - d. *but when the commandment came*
 - 1) Paul is speaking at the point in time where he became aware of God's demands in the Law.
 - 2) Paul did not realize his inability to keep the law until his Damascus Road experience.
 - e. *sin came alive*
 - 1) It means *spring into life* or *began to operate*.
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *Sin was previously dormant because there was no conscience or conviction of sin ... With awareness of the law, sin took advantage of it and established a bridgehead in his life, attacking him via temptation, thereby leading him into ever-increasing sinful deeds.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *...in his past, Paul had lived unaware of the Law's true demands and was therefore self-righteous. His pre-conversion struggles were mainly intellectual (e.g., Was Jesus the Messiah?) rather than moral... When the commandment entered Paul's consciousness, it aroused sin, and he died in the sense that he became aware of his spiritual deadness. He was not speaking of His union with Christ in death here.*
 - 4) Augustine, *The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing.*
 - f. *and I died*
 - 1) Paul speaks of that death which results in sin, an acknowledgment that he was spiritually dead.
 - 2) Genesis 2:17, *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*
 - 3) C. E. B. Cranfield, *Physical death, when it comes, is but the fulfilment of the sentence already passed.*
2. What Paul thought was life brought death (10), ***The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.***
- a. The Law promised life for obedience.
 - 1) Leviticus 18:5, *You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*
 - 2) Romans 10:5, *For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.*
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *... it seems fair to conclude that the law would have given life had it been perfectly obeyed.*
 - b. Disobedience brought death.
 - 1) The result of disobedience is death.
 - 2) Genesis 4:7, *If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.*
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *From these verses, it seems fair to conclude that the law would have given life had it been perfectly obeyed. In this sense the law "promises life," even though God did not give it with this intention—for he, of course, knew that the power of sin made it impossible for any human being to fulfill the law and so attain the promised life.*
3. Paul was not only deceived but it killed him (11), ***For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.***
- a. *for*
 - 1) Paul gives the reason how the commandment proved to be death.
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *This verse sums up the whole of verses 8–11 and traces the progress of sin and the law in destroying the life of all who fail to turn to Christ in faith.*

- b. *sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment*
 - 1) John Witmer, *Apart from the Law, the principle of sin was dormant and inactive; but using the commandments of the Law, it demonstrated its controlling force over one's actions.*
 - 2) Grant Osborne on deception, *All through Scripture this is the way Satan defeats God's people, not overpowering them but tricking them and leading them astray.*
 - 3) Revelation 12:9, *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*
- c. *deceived me and through it killed me*
 - 1) Sin works deception through the Law to kill spiritually.
 - 2) Grant Osborne, *For Adam and Eve it was physical death that entered the world and reigned over it (5:12–14). For us now it is also spiritual death.*

C. Paul's conclusion is, the law is holy (12), ***So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.***

- 1. He declares not only that the Law is not sin in verse 7 but now he declares the Law to be holy.
 - a. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The law is holy. For Paul, as for Jesus, it is God's law, deriving from Him and bearing the unmistakable marks of its origin and authority.*
 - b. Thomas Constable, *Far from being sinful the Law is holy. It comes from a holy God and searches out sin. It is righteous because it lays just requirements on people and because it forbids and condemns sin. It is good because its purpose is to produce blessing and life (v. 10).*
- 2. He adds that the commandment is holy, righteous and good.
 - a. Psalm 19:8, *the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;*
 - b. The commandment, not to covet, represents the whole Law.
 - c. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Paul...piles up the adjectives, because he wants to make his denial of the false inference that the law is sin as strong and emphatic as possible.*
 - 1) It is *holy* as noted in 12a.
 - 2) It is *righteous*
 - a) It is just in demanding what is right as John Calvin declared, ... (it) *cannot be charged with anything wrong.*
 - b) Deuteronomy 4:8, *And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*
 - c) Psalm 119:37, *Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules.*
 - 3) It is *good*
 - a) C. E. B. Cranfield, *They are good, in that they are intended for men's benefit.*
 - b) The nature of the Law is good which is characteristic of God, Mark 10:18, *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."*
 - c) C. K. Barrett speaks of them as *beneficent in their intention.*

CONCLUSION

- Douglas Moo, *The experience of Israel with the law should also remind Christians never to return to the law—whether the Mosaic or any other list of "rules"—as a source of spiritual vigor and growth.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *The problem is not with the Law; the problem is with my sinful nature. This prepares the way for the third topic in this chapter.*