

Romans

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”

– Romans 1:16

Is The Old Law Itself Bad?

- **Look where we've been w.r.t. the Mosaic Law:**
 - *“by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (3:20)*
 - *“a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (3:28)*
 - *“the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression” (4:15)*
 - *“Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound” (5:20)*
 - *“for you are not under law but under grace” (6:14)*
- A cursory, hasty reading might lead one to the conclusion that the law necessarily must be bad, even *the cause* of sin and death: **is this really the case?**
- Paul answers two more questions about law/grace in chapter 7

Joined Together With Christ

- vs. 1-6 are a direct continuation of 6:1-23
 - **Main Point:** you (speaking particularly to Jews) died to the Law that you might live together with Christ
 - *i.e.* the new life you live, you live for Him, not for sin
 - Read Gal 2:17-21
 - **Illustration:** a woman is bound in marriage to her husband as long as they are both living (cf. Gen 2, Matt 19)
 - Death dissolves the covenant and bond of marriage (cf. Matt 22)
 - If she marries another while her husband is alive, “*she will be called an adulteress*” (and vice versa)
 - *Note that adultery can be a present condition that someone chooses to abide in, not just a one-time occurrence of fornication while married*
 - These truths concerning marriage were assumed to be perfectly understood by Christians: today this is not always the case...

Joined Together With Christ

- **vs. 4-6 – Now, Paul draws a conclusion:**
 - Through obedient faith – i.e. baptism into Christ's death (6:1-4) – you died to the Law (cf. Col 1:22, 2:13-14, etc.)
 - *SO THAT* you might be joined to Christ who was raised from the dead (i.e. live in obedience to His will – 6:11,13-14,19)
 - *IN ORDER THAT* your new life might bear good fruit (cf. Eph 2:10; Titus 2:14, 3:8; etc.)
 - **Before Christ:** sinful desires made it impossible to find justification in the Law – it *defined* all people as sinners!
 - The fruit of that life was death (6:23) – Paul will expound on this point in vss. 7-12
 - **After Christ:** released from the bondage of the Old Law by means of death/resurrection (6:1-4) – we walk conduct ourselves in accordance with new life in the Spirit (6:22; Titus 3:5-8)

Fruit of Life and Death

- **vs. 5-6 – Look at the details of these verses:**

- *“when we were in the flesh”* – this is life before becoming servants of Christ: living according to the desires and appetites of the body
 - Read Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16-26; Eph 2:1-3; etc.)
- *“the sinful passions”* – i.e. the desires to use the body for things that are bad
 - Read Jam 1:13-15
 - Throughout Rom 7-8, remember: Satan tempts us by twisting our own desires to seek out evil
 - With a law-based salvation, you only get to mess up **one time**: from then on, you are a sinner condemned by the Law
 - *The Law is not sin (evil): it merely defined right and wrong*
 - *The “flesh” is not sinful until we act on the desire to do something wrong and thereby become sinful*

Fruit of Life and Death

- **vs. 5-6 – Look at the details of these verses:**

- *“aroused by the Law”* – this is difficult and perhaps misleading:

- “aroused” is not in the original text (see NASU italics)
- Sinful desires **are not** caused by or exacerbated by the Law: it is “holy, righteous, and good” (vs. 12)
- “sinful passions by the law” must mean that the desired behaviors are sinful **according to (i.e. defined by)** the Law

- *“were at work in our members to bear fruit to death”* – *i.e.* the desires to do evil were raging within our bodies, and to what end?

- The consequence of sin is death: that’s the only fruit that such a life can ever bear (cf. Rom 6:20-23; Eph 2:1-3)
- This statement stands in contrast to vs. 4 – joined together with Christ in the New Covenant, we bear righteous fruit to God
- This was impossible when condemned by God’s law

Fruit of Life and Death

- **vs. 5-6 – Look at the details of these verses:**

- *“but now we are delivered from the Law”* – i.e. in Christ, salvation does not depend on perfect sinlessness, but upon God’s grace

- See Rom 5:20, 6:14

- Grace strips away the advantage that sin finds in law-based salvation

- *“having died to what we were held by”* – i.e. the bondage of sin, which exploited the limitations of the Law (see Rom 6:5-14)

- This bondage was broken forever when we **died** according to the likeness of Christ – i.e. were baptised for the remission of sins (Rom 6:1-4 with Acts 2:38, 22:16, etc.)

- The Law provided no such escape, only condemnation for all who sin:

- God’s grace in Christ takes away the terrible authority of sin

Fruit of Life and Death

- **vs. 5-6 – Look at the details of these verses:**

- “*so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*” – describes the necessary result of the spiritual change

- Literally, “*newness of spirit*” - either meaning:

- the newness the Holy Spirit *gives* (by obedience to the word – Titus 3:5)

- *or* newness of one’s *own spirit*/soul that comes with salvation through the gospel (Rom 6:3-4; II Cor 5:17; I Pet 1:3,22ff)

- “*oldness of the letter*” refers to the obsolescence of the Mosaic Law (i.e. the “letter” of the Law) – e.g. Heb 8; Gal 3:21-25

- Through the grace of the gospel, men are released from law that only could bring condemnation due to their sins, and now walk in newness of life to serve God

- the “**voluntary service of emancipated slaves in expectation of eternal life**” (Reese 296)

A Note On Rom 7:5 and the NIV

- **Some Christians vehemently oppose the NIV translation on the basis of the “sinful nature” verses like Rom 7:5, Gal 5:16, etc.**
 - This phrase is sometimes seen as a blanket acceptance of the Calvinistic doctrine of innate depravity – i.e. every human inherits the inherently sinful nature passed down from Adam
 - The word(s) in question comes from the Greek noun *sarx* and is translated “flesh” in the NKJV, NASU
- **However, the NIV does not necessarily advocate the false doctrine of innate depravity with this phrase:**
 - The phrase itself only indicates man’s tendency to sin – Paul’s very point in this passage (see also Jam 3:2; I John 1:8; etc.)
 - The context of the passage proves Paul (and implicitly all humans) was innocent as a child, not inherently sinful (see vs. 9, NIV)

A Note On Rom 7:5 and the NIV

- Those who find innate depravity absolutely in “sinful nature” overlook several important factors:
 - The context of the passage (*as translated in the NIV*) shows that this was not the translators’ intention (vs. 9)
 - “Nature” does not *necessarily* mean “from the moment of birth” — but what comes “naturally” to a person can change over time
 - The translators give an able defense of this rendering of *sarx* (see Kenneth Barker’s *Accuracy Defined and Illustrated*, 1995)
 - In that defense, Barker specifically points out that forcing “sinful nature” to mean innate depravity inherited from Adam “**reads too much into the word ‘nature’**” (pg. 54)
 - Barker goes on to state his disapproval of the view that “sinful nature” implies innate depravity, opposing Robert Martin’s *Accuracy of Translation and the NIV* (Banner of Truth, 1989)

A Note On Rom 7:5 and the NIV

- Those who find innate depravity absolutely in “sinful nature” overlook several important factors:
 - The proponents of “innate depravity” were long using the KJV, ASV and other translations (i.e. “flesh”) to make their point long before the NIV was ever produced
 - In any one of these translations, when one allows the text and the context to interpret itself, innate depravity is proved totally false – *even when reading the NIV!*
 - All translations have limitations – even errors – and this is without exception:
 - To condemn a translation based upon disagreement over one particular phrase would lead to condemning all translations.

Is The Law Sin?

- i.e. Law allowed man to be bound by sin with no means of redemption: is it inherently evil?
 - Main Point: God's Law was not the problem – it *defined* right and wrong, but man's *disobedience* condemned him.
 - Paul shows the utmost respect to God's law, remaining inoffensive to the strictest of Jews, while making several vital points:
 - God's law requires utmost obedience, uncovering and condemning every sin
 - Sin takes advantage of the law, and through it attains a deadly force: *just one transgression leads to spiritual death!*
 - The law, being only a *part* of God's plan for man, leaves man a slave of sin and death: it offers no means of redemption.
 - When we understand good but succumb and commit sin, God's grace in Christ offers salvation when law cannot.

Is The Law Sin?

- **Remember Eve in the Garden:** keep in mind her temptation and fall while you work through the difficulties of this passage.
 - God made all things, including man and woman, “*very good*” – not a single flaw inherent to their nature
 - God gave a commandment to man and woman – and there is no argument that could prove this commandment evil or sinful itself
 - An evil force was at work against man, trying to twist Adam and Eve’s desires in order to deceive them into sinning
 - Evil forces still wage war today, battling for the souls of all people through the deceitfulness of sin
 - See Eph 6:10-13; I John 2:15-17, 5:19; I Pet 5:18; etc.
 - Eve was deceived by sin (Heb 9:13; I Tim 2:14), and so fell to the spiritual consequences of violating God’s law (cf. Rom 5:12ff)

Is The Law Sin?

- **Certainly not!** Again, for the third time, Paul states that the suggested inference in in every way false.
 - *“I would not have known sin except through the law”* – i.e. the law is God’s means of communicating right and wrong to man
 - *“law”* here is generic: it does not necessarily mean the Mosaic Law, but Paul goes on to apply the principle to that Law.
 - Man has no means of knowing God’s desire without law (i.e. His expressed will, cf. I Cor 2, II Tim 3)
 - Without knowing what is right, a person can never become what God desires for us to be (Rom 8:29; Eph 2:10; Titus 3:8)
 - **Bottom line:** law itself is not the problem – God’s expressed will defines for us what is right and what is wrong so that we can strive to be more like Him

Is The Law Sin?

- **Example:** “*covetousness*” – also translated “*lust*” (cf. NASU footnote) – intense desire for what is prohibited/forbidden
 - Part of the Mosaic Law (Ex 20:17), and condemned strongly by the gospel (Col 3:5)
 - Paul would not have no the sinfulness of covetousness without God defining this evil for him
 - Of course, let to his own ignorance, he never would have known to strive against such temptation to be righteous...
 - **However**, sin took advantage of this commandment and deceived Paul to desire forbidden things rather than wholesome things
 - Here, “sin” is the personified form of the evil sway of Satan
 - There was nothing wrong with Paul’s capacity to desire: sin took advantage of the commandment, deceiving Paul to *desire bad things*, thereby accomplishing his condemnation under the law

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:13 – this question brings to a close Paul’s great discussion of salvation by law vs. salvation by grace**
 - Some versions place vs. 13 in the paragraph containing vs. 12, others with vs. 14ff
 - The whole discussion is connected: **God’s law is not responsible for anyone’s spiritual death any more than it is responsible for anyone’s choices to do wrong**
 - Through vs. 12, Paul demonstrates that the law of God is holy and good.
 - Vs. 13: just because the law is good by definition and nature, is it responsible for the spiritual death of the disobedient?
 - Paul will demonstrate that the law is not responsible for spiritual death, but instead the forces of evil that influence man to do wrong – **but God provides a way of escape through Christ.**

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:13 – sin is responsible for spiritual death, not the law which defines for man right and wrong**
 - The law demonstrates what sin really is: exceedingly sinful
 - Remember: Satan tries to make sin look like something it is not, even that sin is advantageous and its consequences negligible
 - The law – and the consequences promised by the law – show that sin is exceedingly terrible, the most terrible thing known to man
 - God demonstrates this ultimately in the sacrifice of Christ who “became sin for us”
 - Just look at Christ crucified, an innocent man bearing the transgressions of the world: **that’s what sin really is!**
 - Satan exploits God’s expressed will to bring spiritual death to man through sin – **the law is not the problem!**
 - But in spiritual death, man comes to realize his need for a Savior.

The Spirit Is Willing But The Flesh Is Weak

- Rom 7:14-25 – the conflict between flesh and spirit, and its resolution in the grace of God
 - Several things to remember when interpreting these verses:
 - Paul is speaking rhetorically, either:
 - As a person outside Christ, struggling to keep the law of God perfectly but continually failing
 - As a person in Christ, fighting against the urges to sin but always knowingly falling short in some way
 - Good arguments on both sides: BUT the point is the same – you cannot win against sin on your own; you need God's grace
 - When Paul speaks of himself (i.e. "I") he means his flesh (body, vs. 23), his spirit (inner man, vs. 22), or both: *be careful with the context*
 - Paul is never making an excuse for sin, as if the sinner is not responsible for what he/she does (cf. II Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10-12)

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:14 – the law of God is spiritual, but the body of man is not: the source of much conflict**
 - “*Spiritual*” indicates two facts:
 - First, that the law of God is of divine origin, revealed by the Holy Spirit – not of any earthly or carnal source
 - Second, the law of God appeals to the spiritual part of man – i.e. the inner man, seat of intellect and emotion – not the flesh
 - Keep in mind that the law of God is not addressed to the flesh of man, but the spirit – and the flesh is not attuned to the law of God
 - “*I am carnal*” is set in opposition to “*spiritual*” – i.e. not a synonym for sinful, but simply, “*I am fleshly*”
 - Here Paul emphasizes the physical aspect of his nature: he is flesh and bone, with all its desires, passions, and lusts
 - Next he deals with fleshly lusts that war against the spirit (I Pet 2:11)

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:14 – the law of God is spiritual, but the body of man is not: the source of much conflict**
 - “*sold under sin*” represents the binding power of sin: *my fleshly self, with its strong appetites and desires, is in bondage to sin*
 - **We know how this happens:** not through birth or inherited nature, but “*whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*” (John 8:34)
 - By choosing to sin, we make ourselves slaves of sin
 - There may be a distinction here between the “bondage” of sin in the physical man and the “slavery” of sin that represents sin’s powerful hold over the spirit of man outside of Christ
 - Paul might not be talking about the same bondage here as in Rom 6 (i.e. *death’s grip on man’s soul due to sin’s consequences*)
 - Here Paul seems to emphasize the tendency of man to sin with his body: i.e. *as long as I am flesh, sin is an ever-present danger*

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:15** – Paul explains the conflict between spirit and flesh (i.e. defining “sold under sin” from vs. 14)
 - **Paraphrase:** *Because I know what is right and want to do it, and yet I still struggle with temptation and sometimes end up doing evil.*
 - “For” indicates that Paul is explaining his previous statement
 - “*what I do*” – i.e. his behavior shows his struggle with the desires of the flesh to do the opposite of God’s will
 - “*what I do not understand*” – probably means, “I don’t understand why I struggle so much against what I know is wrong”
 - i.e. I know what I’m doing, and I know God’s law against it – I don’t understand why then I am at war within myself
 - The outcome of this struggle: I end up behaving in the opposite way God wants – I end up doing those evil things I hate
 - Can you sympathize with the plight Paul describes here?

Does The Law Bring Death?

- **Rom 7:16 – the struggle itself proves the righteousness of God’s expressed will!**
 - Think how ingenious this argument is in answering in the negative the question from vs. 13
 - Clearly, Paul rhetorically speaks in first person but calls upon the reader to see *himself or herself* in the situation he describes
 - A – You know God’s law
 - B – You want to obey it rather than doing evil
 - C – You struggle against temptation and wind up sinning
 - D – The act of sinning brings with it spiritual death
 - Now put it all together: if you admit that spiritual death comes from you behaving *against your own rationality and against the law-*
 - **You admit and consent that the law is not at fault: the law is good!**

The Spirit Is Willing But The Flesh Is Weak

- **Rom 7:17-23 – the war within for man’s soul**
 - “*So now*” – Paul expands on the preceding argument and conclusion
 - vs. 17 & 20 are just repetition of the same fact:
 - If my flesh does what my intellect knows is wrong and wants to avoid, it is not “*I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*”
 - What in the world does that mean?
 - Two lines of evidence to figure this out:
 1. **vs. 18-19** – “For” indicates that Paul is continuing to explain what he meant in vs. 17
 - You *cannot* interpret vs. 17, 20 without vs. 18-19!
 2. **Other passages in Scripture** – II Cor 5:10, Rom 14:10-12; Jam 4:7; Rev 20:12
 - You are responsible for your own actions: **there is no excuse for sinning, and its no one’s fault but your own.**

The Spirit Is Willing But The Flesh Is Weak

- **Rom 7:17-23** – Since it is abundantly clear that Paul is not making an excuse for sin and not passing the blame, what does he mean?
 - “*it is not I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*” must be figurative language with which Paul describes the battle between the “I” that is his flesh and the “I” that is his spirit (inner man)
 - If I do with the body the things that in my innermost being I do not want to do, what is controlling me?
 - Not the intellect, not the inner man, but I am letting the body with its lusts and desires control the course of my behavior
 - “*Sin*” is just another personification, just like in vs. 8 – if I do the things I know are wrong, I have allowed evil forces to take control of my body and behavior
 - **So who is to blame?** Sinful acts are a symptom of Satan working in my life, *but who allowed him control of my body?*

The Spirit Is Willing But The Flesh Is Weak

- **Rom 7:17-23** – Since it is abundantly clear that Paul is not making an excuse for sin and not passing the blame, what does he mean?
 - vs. 18, 22-23 make it perfectly clear that Paul is discussing a struggle between his spiritual self and his physical self
 - *“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh”* – don’t take this too far: the flesh is not predisposed to seek God’s law (*“good”*)
 - We already know this from vs. 14 – God’s law does not appeal to the flesh of man, and the flesh of man does not heed it!
 - The flesh is only an instrument – *neutral to right and wrong*
 - With the inner man, I agree that the will of God is good and desirable
 - But with the body, I am often pulled away by temptations and evil desires, enticed to sin which leads to death
 - **This allows sin to get the upper hand, and no matter my intentions, I am imprisoned: how can I be saved??**

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