

Romans 7:7-12 The Law is holy

Using the Law Lawfully (1Timothy 1:8)

The Law is holy

In Romans 7:6 Paul teaches we have been released from the Law. We have been released from its penalty, the guilt associated with sin and from the tendency to legalism, but this doesn't mean we have been released from the call to a holy life. Anticipating misunderstanding, Paul asks his third rhetorical question, *Is the law sin?* After an emphatic denial he explains himself further.

Paul's short answer (Romans 7:7) is in keeping with what he has already said, that the Law reveals sin (Romans 3:20), so how could he have known sin except for the Law?

To help us get a handle on Paul's following thoughts imagine a teenager playing on swings in a playground. A friendly sort of person comes along and taps the teenager on the shoulder, and points out, albeit a bit sternly, a notice placed outside the playground, which the teenager had missed, "For under 8's only."

Like the teenager we are often ignorant, in our case of God's standards of righteousness. It is incredible that Paul, who was trained in the Law from a very young age and a Pharisee, described himself as ignorant (1Timothy 1:13), that is, until "someone tapped him on the shoulder," and pointed a few things out to him. That someone was Jesus and the Holy Spirit working in His life. This is why we need Jesus.

Imagine the teenager now standing outside the playground, looking at the swings, and the sign, and longing to play again! Something is stirred up in him, a covetous desire, to have what he knows he can't have. *But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covertness* (Romans 7:8a). Sin, the evil inclination, which seems to have a mind of its own, causes the teenager to be deeply conflicted on the inside. We can imagine him saying, *Apart from the law, sin lies dead* (Romans 7:8b), that is, "Apart from that sign, I didn't know it was wrong, sin was dead." *I was once alive apart from the law* (Romans 7:9a), that is, "I was thoroughly enjoying myself before I read the sign!" *But when the commandment came* – when I got the tap on the shoulder - *sin in me came alive, and I died* (Romans 7:9b), that is, "I was conflicted on the inside, I knew it's wrong but I so wanted to play."

In Romans 7:10-11 I think Paul is going over this again, but at a slightly deeper level. *The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me* (Romans 7:10). The commandment, which shows the way of godliness, actually has the exact opposite effect. Why is that? Because the Law finds me out to be a sinner. *For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me* (Romans 7:11). Imagine the teenager: something rises up in him on the inside. He looks around to the left and the right, and no-one is watching! He goes back onto the swings. Sin, through the commandment deceived him and through the commandment killed him. That describes all of us at some time in our lives.

That's it, and Paul has answered his question: the problem isn't the Law, but its sin in us. The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:12). But, just to complete the analogy, suppose the friendly person who pointed out the sign also said, "I promise that in 3 weeks you will Go Ape, all expensed paid. Just stay away from the children's playground." Do you think the teenager would want to go back onto the children's playground? No way! He would be full of excitement, knowing that even if he had to wait, it would be worth it! (see Romans 4:13).

Using the Law Lawfully

But we know that the Law is good, if a man use it Lawfully (1Timothy 1:8)

So, the Law is holy and good, but how might we misuse Biblical Law?

1. Apply it in a way that is intended only for Jews and not for gentiles: gentiles don't have to become circumcised or take on other identification markers of Jewishness.
2. Perverting it into a legalistic system of self-righteousness.
3. Using it to lead people away from Jesus rather than leading people to Jesus.
4. Ignoring the complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the difference this makes to understanding the Law.

How might we use the Law in a positive way? Realise that:

1. The Law reveals we are sinners, and therefore are in need of Jesus Christ – top priority.
2. The aim of the Law is love, that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith (1Timothy 1:5, Matthew 22:40, Psalm 119:18).
3. That the Law isn't just rules, but it is the wisdom of God (Deuteronomy 4:6).
4. The Law isn't just commandments, but each commandment is a revelation of God's character. For whatever reason, one of the ways God chose to make Himself known was through commandments.

The relationship of the Christian to the Law is a huge subject. But I believe it is important because in our generation there has been an unprecedented Satanic attack on the foundation of godliness found in the 5 books of Moses (the Law.) If you attack the foundations the building won't stand, and if you attack the integrity of God's Law the New Testament won't stand. It's not only about creation, but the Law contains the foundations of marriage, family and the understanding of human beings as made in God's image. In addition it sets forth a vision for creation care, the environment, animal welfare, debt forgiveness, rules for war, the rule of law and matters of justice and mercy.

Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi in the UK, says this about God's commands found in the Law (the Torah):

They constitute the architectonics of a free and just society. They respect human dignity. They honour the integrity of nature. They give the land the chance to rest and recuperate. They protect Israel against the otherwise inescapable laws of the decline and fall of nations. Only by recognizing God as their sovereign will they guard against overbearing kings and the corruptions of power. Time and again Moses tells the people that if they follow God's laws they will prosper. If they fail to do so they will suffer defeat and exile. All this can be understood in supernatural terms, but it can be understood in natural ways also. (Ki Tavo (5772) - Listening and Law.)

As Christians we can find much personal spiritual nourishment in the books of the Law. For example,

1. **Deuteronomy 25:4** *You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.* This command reveals God's concern for animals. But in the New Testament Paul quotes this verse twice (1Timothy 5:18, 1Corinthians 9:9) using it to show that those who preach the gospel should receive financial support. It's amazing to think that this otherwise obscure verse about oxen contains a revelation of God's heart that everyone should have an opportunity to hear the gospel!
2. **Deuteronomy 22:1** *You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother.* In ancient times the loss of an ox or sheep could have a very significant impact on one's livelihood. God is concerned that his people be provided for and that the lost ox or sheep be returned. But it also teaches that we should return lost property. But maybe this verse also has something to say about God's heart for lost sheep, as in the parable of the lost sheep, that we should return lost sheep to their rightful Owner (see also Galatians 6:1).

The Law is good ... if we use it lawfully, and if we don't get all tied up in all the legalism and condemnation Jesus died for.