

## ***Psalm 1 (Opening)***

- 1**     *Blessed is the man*  
          *who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,*  
          *nor stands in the way of sinners,*  
          *nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*
- 2**     *but his delight is in the law of the LORD,*  
          *and on his law he meditates day and night.*
- 3**     *He is like a tree*  
          *planted by streams of water*  
          *that yields its fruit in its season,*  
          *and its leaf does not wither.*  
          *In all that he does, he prospers.*
- 4**     *The wicked are not so,*  
          *but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*
- 5**     *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,*  
          *nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*
- 6**     *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,*  
          *but the way of the wicked will perish.*

## Introduction

I remember summers as a kid growing up. They were always full of fun and carefree. It was like there were no worries in the world.

Sure, I knew there were probably problems in the world. It was the early 1970s after all. My dad watched the six o'clock news every night he was home, and I remember there being a map from the newspaper taped to the wall above the back of the couch. I didn't know what the map was of, but I knew it must have been important. Now I realize it was a map of Viet Nam, but I didn't pay much attention to it back then.

I didn't know about what the government was doing or not doing. It didn't affect me, and there wasn't anything a kid could do about it, so why worry about it, right?

I do remember knowing a few things about government, though. I remember a song about how a bill becomes a law, about the preamble to the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence. It's amazing how much you can learn 60 seconds at a time.

The more I learned about how things in our government worked and didn't work, the more I understood, and the more I realized my responsibilities. As I got older, I started taking those responsibilities more serious.

It's been said that getting older is mandatory, but growing up isn't. I'd say that's about right, to a point. There is a point when you have to accept the responsibilities that you have and live as an adult. But that doesn't mean you can't let your hair down and play like a kid when you get the chance.

The advantage of not growing up is that you don't have any responsibilities. Just like the summers when I was a kid, you have nothing to worry about. We had chores, but when they were done, we could play until we had something else we needed to do, like eat dinner or supper, or go to bed.

But a disadvantage of not growing up is you tend to not understand the responsibilities that laws put on you, and because of that, you may ignore those laws and because you ignore them, you break them. That's not a good thing.

We're continuing our study of Romans, and today we're going to look at Romans chapter 7, verses seven through 12. Paul is still talking about the law.

In the previous six verses, Paul talks about how, as Christians, we need to obey the spirit of the Law of Moses. Paraphrasing Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, it all comes down to not "don't do it", but "don't even think about it".

Let's see what else Paul has to say about the Law.

### ***Romans 7:7-12***

*<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.<sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.<sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.<sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.<sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

### **The Law Is Not Sin**

Back in verse 5, Paul had said that our sinful passions or desires are awakened by the Law. That's what brings the question that Paul starts this section with, is the Law sin? Of course the answer is no, but Paul had to ask the question.

Paul points out that the Law isn't sin, but that without the Law, we wouldn't know what sin was. Paul has already pointed that out back in Romans chapter 3, and a few other places. He says that because we have the law and can read and understand the law, we know what sin is, and we know what God expects from us. Let's look at that passage in Romans 3.

### ***Romans 3:19-20***

*<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

Paul says there's no justification through the Law for man before God, but the Law does explain to us what God expects from us, even though we're probably not going to be able to do it.

Like Paul said in verse 6 of Romans 7, we need to follow the spirit or the intent of the Law, not the letter of the law. But doesn't our human nature want us to follow the letter of the law?

### **The Law Is Our Teacher**

Paul says in verses 7 and 8 that if it weren't for the Law, he wouldn't have known that coveting was bad, and he also wouldn't have coveted things! The law pointed out to coveting, so now Paul wanted to do it!

Paul also says that apart from the Law, sin lies dead. Sin has no ability without the Law pointing out that sin exists and is an option. That doesn't mean that the Law is bad, it just means that sin takes advantage of the law and uses it as an advertisement for doing what is wrong, instead of helping us realize that we should avoid those things.

Paul says that being buried with Christ frees us from the law, so we should avoid doing bad things that the law points out, but do the good things that we know we're supposed to do.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says it this way:

### ***Galatians 5:13-15***

*<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

Freedom from the law is not freedom to sin, like Paul talked about back in Romans chapter 6. Just because we're not bound to the law doesn't give us free reign to do whatever we want. Like I said earlier, not just "don't do it", but "don't even think it".

### **Alive Without the Law**

Verse 9 of Romans 7 seems to be confusing to a lot of commentators out there, at least the ones I read. But for some reason it seems clear to me. Maybe I'm just looking at it in too simple a manor. Or maybe that's exactly how Paul meant it to be taken; simply. Paul says that he was once alive without the law. How can that be?

How could Paul, a Pharisee of Pharisees by his own admission, have ever been alive without the law? If we understand Jewish tradition, we can see how.

According to Jewish tradition, a child is not held responsible to the law. He is to learn about the law and traditions until a particular age, the age of accountability. Using Paul or Saul as an example let me share with you from The Teacher's Commentary, from the introduction to the book of Acts.

## ***The Teacher's Commentary (Acts)***

*Saul was a product of two worlds. Committed to his Jewishness, he was still at home in the Gentile city. Throughout his life, Saul would seek out such cities, those centers of communication and culture, in his driving desire to communicate the Gospel.*

*Saul's life, however, centered in the history of his people and his God. As was the custom, by age 5 Saul was learning to read and write and study the Scriptures. By 10 he was taught the traditions which had grown out of generations of interpreting the Law. At 13 Saul entered the community of Israel as a responsible adult, and became a "son of the Law" (bar mitzvah). At that age some boys went on to deeper studies in Judaism under well-known teachers. It is a testimony both to Saul's promise and to the family wealth that he traveled to Jerusalem to study under the most famous of first-century rabbis, Gamaliel I. Already Saul had been trained both in the Scriptures and in the trade of tentmaking, for the Jews believed firmly that a scholar should labor, and that a laborer should be a scholar.*

So we see that all Jewish males are held accountable to the Law beginning at age 13. That's when a Jewish boy becomes a bar mitzvah, or literally translated, a son of the Law. Before that, they are apart from the Law, and their parents are held responsible for the child's actions.

So Paul can rightfully say that for a time he was alive apart from the Law. But Paul adds that as soon as he was responsible to the Law, he died. Sin took over his life. Since he understood what the Law was saying not to do, he recognized more and more that he was in fact, doing just what he wasn't supposed to do!

Now that he had become bar mitzvah, or a son of the Law, he was responsible for his actions, so he was suddenly having to worry about sacrificing for his sins.

In his first letter to Corinth, Paul explains it this way. At the end of what we've called the "Love Chapter", 1 Corinthians 13, Paul has one sentence that sums up what he says here in Romans 7.

### ***1 Corinthians 13:11***

*<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.*

Tying these two together, this is what I hear Paul saying: Once I became responsible for my own actions, I had to pay the price for those actions. I couldn't rely on anyone else to carry the weight of my sins, and I began to realize just how much I sin on a regular basis. Because of that, I realized that I had earned death because of all my sin.

To me, Paul's life shows us a really good example of all of humanity throughout the spectrum of time. I see three phases in Paul's life, and you can identify the three phases with three different dispensations of time that we as a human race have experienced.

First we have the time from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden until Moses brings the Law to the people of Israel. During this time, since the Law didn't exist, there was no definition of what sin was. I compare this time to Paul's first 13 years, before he was bar mitzvah.

Once Moses shared the Law with the Israelites, they were bar mitzvah, sons of the Law. Israel was bound to the Law from that time until Christ nailed the Law to the cross through His death and final sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

After Paul's experience with Christ on the road to Damascus, and his immersion three days later, Paul was then covered by God's grace, and receives mercy rather than justice as the Law says he should. This is the dispensation that we are currently living in, being covered by grace.

## Conclusion

Paul closes this part of Romans by saying that the Law and commandments are holy, righteous and good. Even though Paul says sin uses the law to cause death, the Law itself is good.

Just like back when I was a kid, even though I didn't know anything about the laws of this country, they did affect me and everything around me. The same goes for the Law of Moses and the Christian. Even though we're not bound to the Law of Moses, the spirit of the Law still applies. Following the spirit of the Law is easier than following the letter of the law, because we don't have to worry about the justice involved with the Law. We need to understand how God wants us to behave but we don't need to be concerned with the final punishment of disobeying the Law, because we're covered by mercy and grace because of our faith in the sacrifice of Christ to cover our sins.

If you're already covered by God's grace, fantastic. If you haven't accepted Christ's lordship over your life, given up your hold on sin by repenting of your past sins, and obeyed Jesus by being immersed for the remission of your sins, we need to talk about your future.

***Hebrews 3:12-14 (Closing)***

*<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*