Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sin and the Law, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 7:7-13
Code: 45-51A

Tonight again it is our great privilege to look together at the 7th chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans - Romans chapter 7. Our text for tonight is taken from verses 7-13. Let me read it to you as the setting for our message tonight. Romans 7 beginning at verse 7:

"What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I have not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of coveting. For apart from the law, sin *is* dead. For I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*. Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

Now at first reading, that seems a very intricate, complex, and difficult argument. But it need not be so, as you shall find out as we look together at this great passage. Before we look at the text in particular, let me just remind you of the greatest good news ever known, and that is summed up in this simple statement. "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." That is the greatest good news ever known. The whole human race because of sin is bound for hell. Every man, every woman born into this world has hell as a destiny.

And the reason for that is that every person in this world lives in rebellion against God and against God's divine law. Every person is a violator of the divine commandment. And God, being a God of justice, must require punishment for such violation. And since man's crimes against God are so severe, since the magnitude of them is so monstrous, there's no way that men can ever pay the debt they owe. But even though they can't fully pay the debt, they can't ever come to a time when the debt can said to be paid, they will pay what they can pay by an eternity in hell where they will suffer. And so men are born into the world bound for hell because they have sinned against God and God is a God of holiness whose justice demands such a punishment.

But even though that is the fact of man's being, it is not the desire of God's heart. And that's why Peter writes, "God is not willing that any should - " what? " - perish - " 2 Peter 3:9 " - but that all should come to repentance." And so, God has sent Jesus Christ into the world to pay the debt that all men

and women owe, to die the death that all should die, to bear the sin that all should bear.

And God has ordained that when a man or a woman believes in Jesus Christ and accepts Him and His work on their behalf, his or her sin is forgiven forever. And then God has ordained that not only is their sin forgiven but they are granted the very holy nature of Jesus Christ. They become partakers of the divine nature itself. It is granted to that believing sinner and he is thus equipped to spend eternity in heaven with God.

And so I say again the best news that has ever come into the world is that Jesus Christ died to save sinners. And by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, men can be made right with God. They can escape judgment. They can receive the impartation of divine righteousness. They will have paid for them a debt they could never pay on their own. And they will be equipped for heaven in a way they could never be on their own.

Now this is what the apostle Paul is really making the theme of his entire epistle. This is the doctrine of justification by faith. That is, men are made right with God through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. It is equally the central doctrine of the Epistle to the Romans. It is the heart of the gospel, and it is the heart of Paul's message.

In fact, we've been focusing on that wonderful doctrine since we started this study. Can I take you all the way back to chapter 1 for a moment and call your attention to verse 16, where Paul gives us in a condensed statement the theme of the rest of the whole epistle to the Romans? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith."

Now there's the theme of the book. Men are made right by faith. The gospel is a message that comes to sinners and tells them of a salvation by grace through faith available in Jesus Christ.

Now having established the theme in verses 16-17, Paul then begins to discuss that theme throughout the rest of this marvelous epistle. And we've already learned that in chapters 1 and 2 he showed the need for salvation, the need to be made right with God. In chapters 3 and 4, the method of salvation, how a person is made right with God. And it is by faith in Jesus Christ.

And now in chapters 5 through 8 - chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 - the apostle Paul is showing us the results of salvation by faith, the results of justification by grace. And we've been learning all about those results. First of all, in chapter 5, we saw that when a person comes to the Lord Jesus Christ there is security. He's made peace with God. Things are settled in that relationship and he is secure in Christ.

Then when we came to chapter 6, we found out that not only is security a byproduct of justification by faith, but holiness is another one. As peace with God in chapter 5 gives us security, so union with Christ in chapter 6 grants us holiness. And so the believer receives the impartation of divine holiness. And rather than sanctification being set aside from justification by faith, or rather than justification by faith eliminating sanctification, as Paul was accused of teaching, it rather produces it. The questioners would say to Paul, “Well, if you preach justification by grace through faith without works, works have no part in salvation, and that works have no part in sanctification and so forth, then what you’re really saying is that people can do what they want and grace will cover everything.” And so Paul points out that rather than justification by grace through faith leading to license, it leads to holiness.

Last time, as we began to crack open this tremendous 7th chapter, we saw a third element in terms of what comes as a result of justification by faith, and that is freedom from the law. Freedom from the bondage of law. We also saw in verses 1-6 that fruitfulness is a result, and so is service to Christ. Verse 5 says - or rather verse 4 says - we bring forth fruit unto God, and verse 6 says we serve the Lord, no longer in the oldness of the letter, but in newness of spirit.

So, justification by faith is his theme. He announces the theme in chapter 1:16-17. He unfolds the need for it in the rest of chapter 1 and 2. He describes how it occurs in chapters 3 and 4. In 5 through 8 he shows its results. And we’re in the midst of those results right now.

Now the essential words, then, in the first eight chapters of Romans are the words “grace and faith.” He is presenting a salvation that is a gift of God received by faith. And so, as you flow through - and let me just do that with you for a moment. Turn back to chapter 3, and I just want to run you very rapidly through a few key verses - you will see these key terms and key ideas.

In 3:22 we read, “Even the righteousness of God *which* is by faith.” There’s that key word. Verse 24. “Being justified freely by His grace.” Verse 25. “Whom God hath set forth *to be* a covering through faith.” Faith and grace. Verse 26. “To declare, *I say*, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.” That’s faith again. Verse 28. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith.” Verse 30. “Seeing *it is* one God, who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.”

Chapter 4 verse 3. “For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God - ” that’s faith again “ - and it was counted to him for righteousness.” Verse 4. “Now to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” Verse 5. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Verse 11. “He received the sign of circumcision - ” did Abraham “ - a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had*.” Verse 13. “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”

And again the emphasis is faith. Verse 16. “Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might* be by grace.” Verse 20. “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith.” There it is again. Grace, faith, grace, faith, everyplace.

You come to 5:1. “Therefore being justified by faith.” Verse 2. “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace.” Verse 18. “Therefore as by the offense of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.” And here we find again it is a gift, a gift of grace. Verse 20. “The law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Verse 21. “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign unto life.”

Chapter 6, verse 23 sums up the same thing. “For the wages of sin *is* death but the - ” grace “ - gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now you get the flow very readily when you look at those particular terms that what a unique message Paul is giving in a Jewish context. They had been raised as all men assume that you appeal to God, and you appease God, and you please God - whatever god you’re trying to appeal to - by your goodness, or by obeying His rules, or His laws, or conforming to His standards, that you sort of work your way into His good favor. And the Jews certainly were committed to that as a way of life.

And when Paul came along and preached a salvation that was a free gift and you couldn’t earn it, and that it was received not by works, but by faith, and faith itself was a gift of God, it was very, very hard for the Jews to accept. And then when he said at the end of chapter 5 that the more sin, the more grace abounds, that became almost impossible for them to handle.

The Jews, you see, had a profound commitment to the law of God and to a works righteousness system that you do your thing and please God. And so in 6:1-2, they would accuse Paul of freeing everybody by his grace principle to run amuck, to just do whatever they want. I mean, the more sin, the more grace, so you’re just turning them loose to lawlessness. After all, you see, they believed that the law procured holiness, and the law maintained holiness, and if you take away the law, and you take away the rules, and you take away the standards, then you have eliminated the safeguard to holiness. And so all they can see is the whole society running amuck under this kind of grace teaching.

Now they highly esteemed the law of God. And you can divide the law of God, I guess, simply into three parts, as far as a Jew was concerned: The ceremonial law, the social law, and the moral law. They saw it as one because it was given to them as one, because they were a unique people. And they believed that you had to keep all of those laws, that that was the standard of holiness. And the only way you could get holy, and the only way you could stay holy was to keep the laws.

Now the rabbis, by the time of our Lord and the time of the ministry of Paul, had summed up all of the Old Testament law into 613 commandments. And in order to be perfectly holy and to maintain that holiness, you really had to work hard to keep up with 613 commandments.

And just for my own curiosity sake, this week, I got out a source that has them and I read every one of them. And it would be almost impossible to keep them all. They're just a very, very broad range of commandments. And, of course, they had been embellished somewhat by rabbinical tradition, even beyond the intention of God. The rabbis divided them into two parts. First were the mandatory things to be done. Second, the prohibitory things not to be done.

They said there were 248 things you had to do. And for some strange reason they said it corresponds to the number of limbs on the body. I don't know what kind of body they had in mind, or maybe a sort of an octopus kind of thing, or else they counted a lot of other things as limbs than we normally think of. But these laws, these 248 mandatory things you had to do related to God, to the temple, sacrifices, vows, rituals, donations, sabbaths, animals for consumption, festivals, community, idolatry, war, social issues, family, judicial matters, legal rights, and slavery.

And then they had 365 prohibitionatory laws, in other words, things you couldn't do. And there was one of those for every solar day of the year. They related to idolatry, lessons from history, blasphemy, temple worship, sacrifices, priests, diet, vows, agriculture, loans, business, slaves, justice, and relationships. And so they had this vast amount of laws and these laws, by the way, had all kinds of nuances, and all kinds of rabbinical interpretations, and all kinds of corollaries and adjunct laws, and laws, upon laws, upon laws, until it was a literally consuming way of life, where you had to go through life with a little thing in your hand so you'd be reading all the time and you wouldn't muff up because you couldn't even remember all the stuff.

That's why it says in Acts 15:10 that it was a yoke upon the neck of Israel "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." But they knew that the law in its original giving was divine, you see, that God had given these laws. And that God had given them for a reason, and so they were circumscribed to these laws as the laws of God and they believed that since God gave them, they needed to follow their leading.

In fact, there was even more than that to drive them to obey the law. Turn back to almost the end of the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 27. And let me tell you, if I can, why it was so important for them to keep the law. Deuteronomy 27:26. That's the last verse in the chapter. And again, this is the Word of God to them, given them by the agent of God who was Moses, their leader. And in Deuteronomy 27:26, it says, "Cursed *be* he who confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them." In other words, if you don't do all this law that's been given, you will be cursed.

And just to sort of outline the severity of that, all you need to do is follow into 28:15. “But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.” Now that’s a very strong statement. If you don’t do all of this, you’re going to be cursed. “Cursed *will* you *be* in the city, and cursed *will* you *be* in the field. Cursed *will be* your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed *will be* the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, the increase of your cows, and the flocks of your sheep. Cursed *shalt* thou *be* when thou comest in and cursed *shalt* thou *be* when thou goest out.” That’s a fairly comprehensive curse, isn’t it?

And if that’s not enough, verse 20 says, “The Lord will send you crusing, vexation, rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand to do, until thou be destroyed, until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doing, whereby thou hast forsaken Me. And then the Lord will make the pestilence cling to thee, until you He has consumed thee from off the land, to which thou go to possess it. He’ll smite you with consumption, with a fever, with an inflammation, with an extreme burning, with the sword, with blight, with mildew; and they'll pursue thee until thou perish.” And, friends, I really don’t want to read the whole thing, but it goes on all the way through the chapter. And it just keeps cursing, and cursing, and cursing, and cursing. And the curse works its way through every conceivable dimension of life. If you don’t keep all the law of God, you’re cursed.

Now let’s come into the New Testament. And as we come back to where we belong in the book of Romans, we have a little bit of an understanding about why the Jew felt so bound to the law of God. It was, after all, the law of God, and God was God. And you didn’t quibble about God being God. And then you have all of this tremendous word relative to the fact if you don’t keep all of this stuff you’re going to be cursed. Now this is a very heavy burden.

Paul alludes to this burden, and he must have borne it because he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees and totally zealous of the law. And in Galatians 3:10 he says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” As many people as are still under the law, as are trying to please God by keeping all of His laws, are under a curse. Why? Because you can’t keep the law perfectly, can you? And so it says in Galatians 3:10, and he quotes from Deuteronomy, “Cursed *is* everyone that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”

Now that tells us that Paul as a Jew understood what Deuteronomy was saying, that if you don’t do all this stuff, and you don’t keep all these laws all the time, you are cursed. Now that’s what God said. You’re cursed. So the Jews were zealous of the law. And when it came to the message of the apostle Paul and he said, “Works are no issue. By the deeds of the law shall not flesh be justified.” Boy, he was really stomping on their theological toes. They found that very, very difficult to handle.

But Paul makes a great point in his message in Galatians chapter 3, because he points out the utter futility of such an approach. “Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” And then he goes on to say, “That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God.” And he even goes a step further and says and that’s evident also from the Old Testament, because it is in the Old Testament where it says the just shall live by - what? - faith. That’s Habakkuk. So the Old Testament - now listen to me - the Old Testament on the one hand said if you don’t keep all the law all the time with all of your life and you break it in one place, you’re cursed. That’s right.

James knew that. James 2:10 says, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one *point*, he is - ” what? “ - guilty of all.” You say, “Well, why in the world did God give them a law they couldn’t keep?” Very simple. To show them how sinful they were, and to drive them to the place where they would realize that to be just you have to come to God by - what? - by faith.

But they didn’t want to come by faith, they thought in their self-righteousness they could earn their way, and so they hung on to the system of works righteousness and ignored the faith principle. And so they were all under a curse. You see, to break one law of God is not like breaking one spoke in a bicycle wheel. You can break one spoke and keep riding. It’s like breaking a pane of glass. You shatter it in one spot and the whole thing comes down. And so they were all cursed. And that is the bondage of the law.

The bondage of the law is that you’re cursed by it because you can’t keep it. And yet they tried, and they tried, and they tried, and they had tried so long, and they were so utterly committed to it that when Paul comes along and preaches a message about salvation by grace through faith, they just cannot handle it. And so it is very important that he is careful in explaining to them all of the things needful for them to see the truth about the law.

Now we saw that in 6:14 there’s a key verse of Romans. “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you’re not under the law, but under grace.” He says here you’re not under the law, but under grace. That’s a wonderful statement. We know what that means, don’t we? We’re no longer under law in what sense? The curse of it. The curse of it. Because, “Christ,” says Paul, Galatians 3, “was made a curse for us” that we might be set free from the curse of the law.

So, in the message here, Paul says, “Look, we’re not under the law anymore. We’re under grace. We’re out from under that curse.” Now at this point any thinking Jew is going to say, “Well, if the law can’t save us, and the law can’t sanctify us, and we want to get out from under the law, which can only curse us, then what good is the law? Right? I mean, you’re just saying, Paul, you’re just picking up the whole law of God and dumping it, and saying, just get rid of that old thing. It’s useless. It’s meaningless. Is that what you’re saying?”

I mean, if we can't be saved by the law - we saw that in chapters 3 and 4 - we can't be sanctified by the law - in chapters 5 and 6 - that has to come through faith in Jesus Christ. If we're saved by our union with Christ, if we're made holy by our union with Christ, then what in the world place has the law? And why did God go to such tremendous extreme to give such a complex law? And when you say that we're supposed to get out from under the law and be free from the law, aren't you obviating the place of the law? Well, Paul wants to explain all this, so he does in chapter 7.

Now listen carefully, and I'll give you an overview. He gives us in chapter 7 a very good explanation of the place of the law, and it is a very important chapter. But he's been warming up to this for a long time, since chapter 3, when he first mentioned that the law couldn't save us. He's been moving in this direction. And if you just take chapter 3 through chapter 8, you get a comprehensive view of the law and its role. Now listen carefully and I'll give you an outline of that whole section.

First, what the law can't do for us. It can't save us. That's chapters 3, 4 and 5. What the law can't do for us. It can't save us. Secondly, Paul shows what the law can't do with us. It can't sanctify us. Chapter 6. It can't make us holy. Thirdly, what the law can't do to us. If we're in Christ, 7:1-6. It can't condemn us. Then what the law can do for us, 7:7-13. We're going to look at tonight, it can convict us of sin. Then, what the law can't do in us, 7:14-25. It can't deliver us from sin. And, finally, what the law can do by us, 8:1-4. It can be fulfilled.

Let me run that by you again. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, what the law can't do for us. It can't - what? - can't save us. Chapter 6, what the law can't do with us. It can't sanctify us or make us holy. Chapter 7, verses 1-6, what the law can't do to us. It can't - what? - condemn us. Chapter 7, verses 7-13, what the law can do for us. It can convict us of sin. Chapter 7 verses 14-25, what the law can't do in us. It can't deliver us from sin. And finally, 8:1-4, what the law can do by us. It can be fulfilled in the power of the indwelling Spirit. So you have really, from Romans chapter 3 to Romans chapter 8, an absolutely comprehensive picture of the law.

Now let me tell you something about the genius of Paul. And Romans is a genius - is a masterpiece - of both human genius and the genius of God. You can trace from chapter 3 the theme of faith. You can trace the theme of grace. You can trace the theme of justification. You can trace the theme of sin. You can trace the theme of righteousness. You can trace the theme of law. You can trace all those themes through that same passage. It is so rich that it staggers the mind. But among all of the grandiose themes that are here, none is more gripping than the comprehensive treatment of the law and its role.

Now we've already learned from chapters 3 to 5 that it can't save us. We've already learned from chapter 6 that it can't sanctify us. And last week we learned from 7:1-6 that it can't condemn us. And now we're going to learn what it can do in verses 7-13. It can convict us. It can convict us.

And may I just tell you this? That is exactly why God gave it in the first place. In the second place, He gave it in order to be fulfilled and it can be fulfilled by us, but we'll get to that when we get to chapter 8 and the power of the Holy Spirit. So you have a comprehensive presentation of the law.

Now we saw last week in those first 6 verses that the law can no longer condemn us. Why? Because in Christ we are - what? - dead to the law. And when you die, the law has no power over you, right? Remember that principle there in verse 1? Law is only good as long as you're alive. We died in Christ, the law has no power on us. And we have a new husband, a new authority, a new master, Jesus Christ.

You say, "Now are we free from ever doing right?" No, no. Verse 6 says we still serve. But we don't serve in a mechanical, legalistic, external way in the oldest of the letter, we serve from the heart in the newness of - what? - Spirit. And so lest you think that a Christian is free to do whatever he wants, no so. You were saved for the purpose of serving God. And if you're really born again, there will be holiness in your life, there will be fruitfulness in your life, there will be service to Christ in your life. You're still under the law only it's the new covenant law, it's the New Testament law. It's the moral law taken into the New Testament. We're not under the ceremonial law of Israel because we're not Israel. We're not under the social laws of Israel. We're not Israel. But God's character hasn't changed, and we're still under His moral mandates that are given us in the New Testament, only we don't in our own strength try to carry them out. We carry them out out of a new living relationship with Jesus Christ in the newness of spirit from the heart rather than the oldness of letter on the outside.

And we still serve. In fact, when you lead someone to Christ, it says in Matthew 28, you go to them and you baptize them in the name of Jesus Christ. And then you "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Right? We're not free to disobey. We are, for the first time, free to obey, and to do so from the heart, because we have a new heart which can obey from the inside, whereas the old obedience was superficial and external alone. So, yes, we're under God's law but we serve from the heart.

Now that brings us to 7:7-13. If the law can't save us and the law can't sanctify us, what in the world good is the law? And the answer comes. It's good because it can convict us. It can convict us. Four elements of that conviction are in the text. And I'm not going to try to unload the whole thing on you, we'll just see how far we go. I want you to learn what's here because it's so great.

First point. I'll give you four. You have them on your outline if you want to follow along. Here's the first one. The law reveals sin. That's the first element of its convicting power. The law reveals sin. Look at verse 7. "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I have not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

And again he imagines this Jewish antagonist who's going to say, "Boy, you've just said we're dead to the law and the law is set aside. It can't save us. It can't sanctify us. It was trying to condemn us. We just need to get rid of the law. Now we're out from under it. We're free from its authority. Are you saying that the law is evil? Are you saying the holy law of God, which God gave to His people, which was a manifestation of His heart, and His mind, and His will, and His nature, and His purpose, are you saying that is evil? I mean, if you say we're not under the law, and the law can't save us, and the law can't redeem us, and the law can't do this and that for us, then the law must be evil?"

And Paul's answer is, again, the strongest negative in the language. "God forbid" is how it's translated. It's *m genoito*. It cannot become that. No, no, no. No way. Under no circumstances, outrageous thought, utter absurdity. No, the law of God is not sin. It is not sin.

And then he goes on to say, "I had not known sin, but by the law." On the contrary, it is not sin. It reveals sin. You see that? I mean, if there wasn't any law, there couldn't be any sin, true? I mean, if the sign doesn't say "Keep off the grass" and you're on the grass, you haven't broken any law. If there's no law about going a certain speed and you don't go a certain speed, you haven't broken any law because there isn't any law. So he says the law reveals sin. In other words, you put the standard up and you know what sin is.

Now this makes it very clear to me that he's not talking about ceremonial issues. He's not talking about social issues. He's talking about the moral law of God. And so when you see law here, Paul is using it in the sense of God's moral standards, God's moral law. We are called to the law not to be saved by it, but to be judged by it. Romans 3:20 says this. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: - " listen to what it says " - for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin."

It's a very important truth. The law simply shows us what sin is by God's definition. In Romans 4:15, we find it there. "Where no law is, *there is* no transgression." Verse 13 of chapter 5. "But sin is not imputed when there is no law." That's three times: Chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5, said the same thing. Without a law you haven't got any sin. So when God reveals the law, immediately men are measured by the standard and they are found to be sinners.

Now listen. Look at the phrase in verse 7, "I had not known sin, but by the law." I don't think that he has in mind here in terms of knowing some sort of theoretical, theological, factual, dictionary definition of the nature and fact and existence of sin. I think what he's saying is, "I really never knew the depth of sin and I never knew the full extent of sin, until I really understood the full extent of the law."

What he is saying here is, "The law, when I really understood it convicted me." And would you notice that the word "I" appears here? And all of a sudden, Paul is giving a personal testimony. All of a

sudden he's speaking in the first person singular and he's telling you what is going on in his own heart. This is Paul's own personal sinfulness. He's giving a testimony of his conviction. And I believe this was part of his coming to the Savior. This was part of the convicting work of the Spirit of God that culminated in the Damascus Road, and the days that followed in his blindness, when he came to grips with his own life, and the need of a Savior, and embraced Jesus Christ, and was transformed from Saul the persecutor into Paul the preacher.

And I think it's so important that you have this part of his spiritual journey because if you just have the Damascus Road, you might think that he was saved by God apart from his own will. Because there's such a sovereign act of God on the Damascus Road that you wonder whether he had anything going on in his own heart at all, right? I mean, he's walking down the road killing Christians, the next thing you know he's buried in the dirt and ordained to the ministry. And you don't know whether he ever even got involved in the action himself, in terms of his own heart, until you know here in Romans that he did indeed. And at the same time, God was bringing upon the man's heart a mounting kind of conviction about his sin as he began to see the law of God for what it really was.

Now, for a long time he thought he knew what the law of God really said. I mean, after all, he was a Pharisee. He was a Jew. He could read you the law as well as anybody could read the law. He could interpret the law in terms of the rabbinic traditions. He had spent his life trying to keep the law. He was very religious. He would have fallen into the category of people described in Romans 10:3 where it says, "They have a zeal for God, not according to knowledge however." They think they know but they don't. "They are ignorant of God's righteousness, so they go about to establish their own righteousness." That's right where he was. He was very busy being like the guy in Luke 18 who was saying, "Lord, I thank Thee that I'm not as other men." "I give tithes of all that I possess, I fast." And I do all this and it's so wonderful to be me, and You must be thrilled to have me around. I mean, he was self-righteous. He felt that he was earning his way in.

In Galatians 1:13, he says in writing to the Galatians, "For ye have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion." I mean, his reputation as a zealous Jew was far and wide. Everybody knew about this zealous Jew by the name of Saul. He said in Galatians 1:14, "I profited in the Jews' religion many of my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers." I was the most Jewish Jew there was. I was the most zealous lawkeeper there was.

He gives a similar testimony with even more detail in Philippians chapter 3. And all of this is very germane to what we're seeing in Romans. Philippians 3:5. "I was circumcised the eighth day," and that's the day you're supposed to be. He can thank his parents for that, not him. But nonetheless it was part and parcel of that whole tradition. He was "of the stock of Israel, he was *of* the tribe of Benjamin, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, he was a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church - " get this " - touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." You've got to be kidding? By whose definition?

You want to know how he could say that? The same way the rich young man could come and have the Lord say, “Well, have you kept the law?” “Since my youth, I’ve kept all the law.” How in the world could a person ever say that? Here’s how. Because they had pushed the law of God totally to the external dimension, and it was only a question of what you did or didn’t do. And they had reinterpreted it to accommodate their sinfulness. So they had reinterpreted the law and they’d made it totally external. It was only a matter of the outside, and they never really dealt with inside, and that’s where the garbage is. They had circumscribed the outside of their life to look good, and as long as the law of God was only related to the outside, they thought they were fine.

And, of course, later on in that same chapter, Philippians 3, he says, “When I really got a look at my inside, I saw all the stuff that was in my life, and you know what? It all turned out to be dung.” That’s what he says, manure. Once he got a view of where the real problem was on the inside and where the law really wanted to apply itself on the inside, he saw what he was.

So, go back to Romans then, in chapter 7, and what you see there is Paul’s pre-salvation conviction experience. Somehow along the way as the Lord was bringing him to the transformation of salvation, there was not only the sovereign act of God on the Damascus Road, but there was an internal working by the same sovereign God, bringing Paul to a tremendous awareness of the truth of the law itself. And that is that the law was not just external but the law was internal. Did you get that? That the law was internal.

You say, “How do you know that?” I know that because of the particular element of the law which Paul picks out. Notice it. “For I had not known - ” what? “ - coveting, or lusting - ” it’s the word *epithumia* “ - or evil desires, except the law had said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’ ” He picks out the tenth of the Ten Commandments, the commandment to covet.

And covet isn’t something you do on the outside, is it? Covet is something you do where? On the inside. And of all the Ten Commandments, this is the one that is internal. Of all the Ten Commandments, this is the one that speaks of the inside, about lust and desire. And Paul is saying, “When I saw that what the law of God was saying had to do not just with my acts, but with my attitudes, that it had to do with my lusting, and my desiring, and my wanting what wasn’t mine, I saw that all of the stuff that I was doing on the outside amounted to dung because I was filled with vile desires on the inside.”

Now that’s the conviction of the real stuff. That’s the real stuff. You might have somebody come along as I did and say to me, “You know, I’ve got to get my life right because I’ve noticed that I lie.” Or “I’ve noticed that I drink too much.” Or, “I have a temper and it’s bothering me, and I’ve got to get my life right.” Well, that’s fine but you don’t still understand the real issue of sin. The issue of sin is not external. You might be able to control that on the outside through means other than the means of

grace, right? I mean, you might be able to stop your drinking on the outside just by going to AA. You might be able to stop lying just by going to psychological counseling, getting hypnotized so that every time you told a lie something weird happened to you because of some kind of subliminal things that have been planted in your psyche while you were under hypnosis. I mean, you might control your behavior because you want to be accepted by a bunch of religious people who don't lie, or whatever. There are other ways to do it. But the only way you will ever clean up the evil desire of your heart is by a transformation by God.

And so that's what the law is intended to do. And that's why there aren't just external commands, but there are internal ones. And the one that hits with the greatest impact, the one that just devastates is the one about lusting or coveting because it speaks about the heart.

Now this is Paul's experience, but not only his experience. I think he speaks for all who come to true conviction. I believe that when you come to Jesus Christ, you come to the conviction that not only do you have trouble controlling the outside, but you've got worse trouble controlling the inside. All the unsaved who come to Christ come this way. They see the reality of the depth of their sin. Not only that they do wrong things, but that there is an inner corruption in their nature.

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