

• *In Christ – no longer law-centred*

### Paul's explanation of 'the law'

• *Nothing wrong with the law in itself*

• *The tenth commandment – impossible to keep*

• *When you are not trying to keep God's law, there is no great struggle*

• *The struggle begins when we try to keep God's law*

• *Paul's conclusion is: there is nothing wrong with the law. There was simply a lot wrong with him*

Paul is explaining that we have 'died' to the Mosaic law. We are risen with Christ. We do not live in a nationalistic manner (as if we were like the Jewish people of old). We do not live in a law-centred manner (as if the 2000 verses of Mosaic legislation related to us). We live on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Paul is eager to explain that there is nothing wrong with the law in itself. He asks: <sup>7</sup>*What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Let it not be!* There is nothing wrong with the law in itself. It was given by God and God's intention in giving it was wholly good. The law intensified and deepened Paul's experience of the power of sin. *But I would not have experienced sin if it had not been for the law.* He goes on to explain what he means: *For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'* It would be possible to keep the Mosaic law if it were not for the tenth commandment. Externally the law can be kept, but as soon as you try not even to covet – to want anything sinful – you discover how impossible it is to change your own heart. When you try to live up to the tenth commandment, the battle with sin becomes terrible. <sup>8</sup>*And sin taking opportunity through this command worked in me all kinds of covetousness.* A person trying to keep the tenth commandment finds that the more he tries not to want to sin, the more he **does** want to sin. It produces an intense desire for things that are wicked. *For without the law sin is dead.* When you are not trying to keep God's law, there is no great struggle. 'Sin lies dead'. Paul gives the testimony of this kind of person – the unconverted person not thinking of Jesus and trying to keep the tenth commandment. <sup>9</sup>*And I was alive without the law at one time . . .* He means he was complacent, carefree, living happily with no special feelings of guilt. But then there came a time in his life when he wanted to keep the tenth commandment. *And I was alive without the law at one time, but when the command came . . .* There was a time when he wanted to keep God's law because it had 'come' to him. He had woken up to the need to live a godly life. But then he was in trouble! *And I was alive without the law at one time, but when the command came, sin came to life <sup>10</sup>and I died.* He found out how powerful sin is. He fell into deep despair ('I died'). In the days of Moses, keeping the Mosaic law brought national life and prosperity to Israel. But when one individual tries to keep the tenth commandment, his attempts bring not life but death. *And the very command which was promising to give life was found to be leading me into death.* Sin used even the holy law of God. <sup>11</sup>*For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through the law it killed me.* Paul's conclusion is: there is nothing wrong with the law. There was simply a lot wrong with him. <sup>12</sup>*So then, on the one hand, the law is holy and the command is holy and righteous and good.* It is designed to bring national life. Its tenth commandment demands inner purity. The problem is not in the law of God. The problem is in you and me and the power of sin. The next paragraph (a controversial one!) goes over the same ground again. The structure of the two paragraphs<sup>1</sup> is clear and should be noted.

<sup>1</sup> 7:7-12 and 13-25

**The same ground repeated**

Question. Is the law sin? ¶<sup>1</sup>  
 Answer. May it not be! ¶<sup>2</sup>  
 Counter-proposal ¶<sup>3</sup>  
 Development ¶<sup>4</sup>  
 Conclusion ¶<sup>5</sup>

¶<sup>1</sup> 7:7a  
 ¶<sup>2</sup> 7:7b  
 ¶<sup>3</sup> 7:7c  
 ¶<sup>4</sup> 7:7d-11  
 ¶<sup>5</sup> 7:12

Then once again:

Question. Is the law sin? ¶<sup>1</sup>  
 Answer. May it not be! ¶<sup>2</sup>  
 Counter-proposal ¶<sup>3</sup>  
 Development ¶<sup>4</sup>  
 Conclusion ¶<sup>5</sup>

¶<sup>1</sup> 7:13a  
 ¶<sup>2</sup> 7:13b  
 ¶<sup>3</sup> 7:13c  
 ¶<sup>4</sup> 7:14-25a  
 ¶<sup>5</sup> 7:25b

• *Begin with a similar question – Is the law being used for evil?*

It is important to see that verses 7–12 and 13–25 go over the same ground twice. Romans 7:13 starts a new paragraph. It is a question similar to verse 7 but not exactly the same. <sup>13</sup> *Then did this good thing become death to me?* It is a question similar to verse 7 but now he asks: is the law on the side of sin and death? Is it a case of a good thing being used for evil? Is the law itself a conveyer of death? The answer is still no. *Let it not be!*



*Absolutely not!*

• *The commandment is good*

Paul explains God's purpose. The law was not sinful. *On the contrary, it was sin working death to me through what is good in order that sin might be shewn to be sin, and this was in order that sin might become exceedingly sinful through the commandment.* This is the crucial statement of the paragraph. It was not the law that brought death to the unconverted Paul. It was sin that killed him. It brought such covetousness, such increased wickedness, such guilt and shame that any relationship with God was impossible. The agony of defeat and intensified shame that some unconverted people go through is allowed by God. But the tenth commandment is one way God has (not the only one) of teaching anyone who seeks salvation and holiness 'in the flesh' how wicked he or she is. We must 'die to the law' because the law cannot help us. Living under it only makes sin more powerful.

• *God uses it to show us how wicked we truly are*

• *The law cannot help us*

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