

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 3:07-13

Lesson #16

Introduction

This is lesson 16 of our Romans Bible study. In our last lesson we began chapter 7 with Paul's example of our being released from our bondage to the Law through the death of Jesus Christ so that we could legally be joined to another. To Him who was raised from the dead. The Lord Jesus Christ paid in full the price of our redemption from that ownership and transferred us to His own ownership. He went on to explain what this means, and what it doesn't mean, and in these verses we're examining now, verses 7-13 he continues with that explanation. The Law had killed us by our own disobedience, and Paul is clarifying how this happens in these next verses. I've titled this lesson:

Killed by the Law

7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Romans 7:7-13 (NASB)

Verse 7:

7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."

After the example that he used in verses 1-3, and the conclusion that: *4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another*, Paul continues with some further explanation of the purpose and character of the law itself. First, let's make sure we don't misinterpret what Paul means by saying that we have died to the Law. By that he does **not** mean that we are no longer obligated to observe it, as some try to suggest, but rather that we are no longer slaves to it as our only means of justification. I probably should have covered this more thoroughly in that verse, but I didn't want to stray off track at the time. Our death to the Law is not a release from our obligation to obey God and follow His commandments.

Now, having said that, we can examine what Paul is saying in these verses. He asks the anticipated question - *What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?* And answers that question with a resounding *May it never be!* The fact is that sin is both defined and exposed by the Law. As an example, Paul says *for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."* It's the Law that establishes the dividing line and the boundaries between sin and righteousness. It's only possible to obey God if we know what He has said, and it's only possible to disobey when we know what He's prohibited. It's the Law that conveys to us the righteous nature and character of God. But we, as human beings aren't capable of following it perfectly as God is. So, for us, the Law that defines God's righteousness, at the same time reveals our sinful nature and inabilities. It is the Law that uncovers our sins and our shortcomings. Not because the Law is sin, but because we can't keep the Law, and by that failure the Law exposes us as being sinful. It's the Law of God that defines the righteous nature of God and explains it to us in understandable terms that we can relate to personally. Paul goes on to explain:

Verse 8:

8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead

Using coveting as an example, Paul says that it's the Law that prohibits coveting that sin uses to produce in us coveting of every kind. Sin uses the Law as its means to implement disobedience in us. Were it not for the Law, what would sin

use as its tools? How can one disobey God if God hasn't said anything? How can one break God's rules if He hasn't made any? In our society we make laws for the protection of our citizens, but those same laws also work toward the incarceration of those who disobey them. For those who follow them they are a protection, but for those who disobey them they result in harm.

We don't make laws for the purpose of harming criminals, we make laws for the purpose of protecting the law-abiding citizens. Any harm that results isn't because of the laws themselves but because of intentional disobedience of some people to those laws. God gives us His Laws that will protect us and make our lives pleasant if we keep them, but at the same time it can condemn us as criminals if we don't keep them. And this is exactly the point Paul is making. God's Law was given for the purpose of guiding our lives on the path of righteousness, which will result in blessings, but what we find is that our own sinful nature prevents us from keeping those Laws, so we all become criminals because of the sin that dwells in us. Sin uses the Law to make us criminals and condemn us to incarceration and death. If a society chose to abolish all of its laws then there could be no more criminals in that society. Obviously this wouldn't stop the actions, it would just decriminalize them, and society would be at the mercy of the most savage and brutal members. The behaviors would be the same they just wouldn't be breaking any laws.

God's Law serves to establish behaviors that are acceptable and behaviors that are not, and by this brings an element of order, and an element of some safety and security to all humanity. Without this there would be anarchy, and the survival of the fittest. So, we see that the Law is good and necessary and desirable for a peaceful and productive society. Without laws our lives would be chaos. But for those who desire to live lives contrary to those laws, those who will not observe them, those laws end up being the instrument of their incarceration and sometimes even death. On a human scale we all understand this perfectly well, but it also applies on God's cosmic scale for all creation. It is God, and His righteous standard that turns cosmic chaos into orderly and productive existence. The first law of thermodynamics can be readily extrapolated from the understanding of what God did in the first few verses of Genesis chapter one. The Law of God is good, it is necessary, even essential to sustain any order in our lives, our societies or even in the universe. But, at the same time, it is that very same Law that also exposes us as violators. Sin's only weapon is the Law of God, without that sin would have nothing with which to charge us and no way to condemn us. The Law is good, but violating that Law is sin. Now, having established the necessity and the good of the Law, let's move on to Paul's next verses:

Verses 9-11:

9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

This is an interesting verse. What's Paul's meaning by this statement? What would he mean by saying *I was once alive apart from the Law*. The logical interpretation is that he is speaking of the time in his life before he was regenerated. The time when he actually thought that he was not a sinner, and his own righteousness was sufficient for his salvation. At that time he was, in his own mind at least, alive, because he was not aware of his own depravity and sinful nature. He didn't rightly understand the intent or extent of God's moral Laws, and was fully deceived into a false sense of security. This is what he means by the statement that he *was once alive apart from the Law*. But then came the work of God. That effectual work that shines the light of truth on our own condition and exposes our illusions of security. It convicts us of sin, when we rightly understand what sin is, which is what the Law does through the work of the Holy Spirit. The recognition that we are sinners, condemned to eternal destruction, is the starting point of every genuine conversion.

We start out thinking we're alive, because we don't really understand sin, but when the understanding of sin is granted, through the comprehension of the moral Law of God, we realize that we are, in fact, dead in our sins and trespasses. When the right understanding of God's true level of moral and behavioral perfection is grasped, which is what the Law does, then we know that we are not alive at all, we are very much dead. But, with the knowledge of sin, comes the knowledge of our own true condition, and that produces the desperate desire for repentance and forgiveness in those who are being effectually called by God the Father. (Jn 6:44,65; Rom 8:29-30; 1Pet 1:2)

Paul goes on to say in verse 10: *and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me.* Now we can understand his meaning. The Law of God, meaning His commandments, was given as the means for mankind's blessing, but what happened is our innate fallen nature made us all violators. So, what could have resulted in life, if kept and observed, instead turned out to result in death to all those who disobeyed it. This is a universal truth that applies to all humanity. If man could and would perfectly obey all God's Laws then he would be saved by so doing. The problem is, there's only been one human who ever could or would do that, Jesus Christ, and this is fully God's intention.

Then Paul continues this same thought in verse 11 saying: *for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* Here Paul puts the previous pieces together. He says that sin has perpetrated a deception, and that deception afforded the opportunity to utilize the Law of God as an instrument of death. So what was the deception? He's already spoken of it when he said that there was once a time when he thought he was alive. A time before he really understood the true extent of God's commandments. He was deceived into thinking that he was following those commandments close enough to make it into heaven. And this is by far the greatest deception ever perpetrated and the longest running as well. To this very day fallen humanity is deceived into thinking they are not really true sinners. They'll usually confess that they aren't perfect, but they somehow think that even with their imperfections they still aren't really sufficiently sinful to be sentenced to condemnation. Satan has convinced the world that a little sin is not really a big deal, and a loving God will surely overlook it. I remember to this day the first time I read Matthew chapter 5, verse 48. I was shocked to the core and frightened to near death, because I was still very young in the faith and didn't yet fully understand the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. For those who may not be familiar with this verse it says: *"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Through the deceit of Satan, mankind thinks that God's standard for entry into His eternal kingdom is based on a relative curve. That those who "sort of" keep the commandments will be okay, because God will simply overlook any sins we commit if we offset them with other good things. The general ignorance of mankind as to the extent of God's enforcement of His moral standards is what sin uses to condemn the vast majority of humanity. In this case ignorance does seem to be bliss, but only for a little while, because the ultimate wages of sin, any sin and all sin, is exactly the same, it is death. (Rom 6:23; 1Co 15:56)

Satan has never been granted any authority to make judgements or establish or enforce any rules. His only weapon is to use God's own provisions, and implement them against those whom he seeks to destroy. That's why he's called "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev 20:10) He accuses them of sin and unrighteousness, but, to his dismay, it is Jesus Christ who justified all of those brethren, and imputes His perfect righteousness to every one of them. Case closed, verdict, "justified." Now I want to clarify something. We often hear preachers say that we are declared "not guilty", or that we were issued a pardon for our sins, but this kind of terminology fails to convey the proper respect to Jesus Christ and the proper humility of humanity. We are nowhere ever declared "not guilty", in fact just the opposite. (Rom 3:10,23) What we are declared is "guilty as charged" but "justified" by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. This isn't just semantics, this reflects a very substantial difference of understanding and perspective. To say that we are declared not guilty, or to imply that we were simply pardoned, is to ignore the very substantial price that had to be paid for our justification, because we are not innocent, we are as guilty as hell is guilty. No sin is ever pardoned or ignored, every sin, ever committed by every being, is either paid for in hell or paid for on the cross of Jesus Christ, not one sin will ever be ignored. There is only One in all creation who is "not guilty" and that position has been purposely reserved by the Father for the Lord, Jesus Christ. All others are guilty as charged. The only question is, have they been justified by the one and only Justifier?

Verse 12:

12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Paul wants to make it clear that the Law is not the problem, it's sinning against the Law that's the problem. The Law is a set of verbal commandments that tell us about God. If we had no commandments from God what would we know about Him? Oh yes, we would know that He's powerful from His creation, but what would we know about His character and nature? God's Law is His statement to us about who He is and how He thinks and how He feels. All that we know about His holiness and His righteousness is summed up in the Laws and Statutes that He's provided us. The law is holy and good because it's simply the explanation of God's very own nature and character. The Law is good because God is good.

While the Law is a set of instruction for humanity to live by, at the same time it is very much more than just that. It's a description of the very nature of God. And for this reason Jesus stated publically:

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:17-19 (NASB)

Paul is making it clear that the Law is always good and righteous even though it is the very tool used by Satan for the destruction of humanity. He goes on to say:

Verse 13:

13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Again here Paul poses an anticipated question. He realizes that some will say that the Law was the cause of mankind's destruction, therefore the Law really wasn't good but evil, because it results in death for mankind. This is a typical oversimplification that we see all the time. It intentionally ignores the distinction between the intent and the result. God gave the law with the intent that mankind would know what is good and productive and healthy. It is mankind that chose to ignore those Laws and incur the consequences, so to say that the Law is the cause, rather than man's own flagrant disregard for it, is to knowingly shift the blame from man back to God. Paul says *May it never be!*

Then Paul goes on to say that it wasn't the Law that caused his death, but *Rather it was sin*. No criminal is likely to be acquitted by claiming it was the law that made him commit his crimes. It is the law that's used to convict him, but it's his own disobedience to those laws that's the **cause** of his arrest and the **reason** for his incarceration. It's absolutely true that if there were no laws then there would be no grounds to charge or convict anyone, but there are laws, and we are required to live by them for the good of society. The average law abiding citizens do not want to live in a society that has no law and order, and no authorities of enforcement. Why not? Because we know there are some who will take advantage of this situation and make life a nightmare for everyone in their path. Why would they do such a thing? That's Paul's point in this verse, that sin permeates humanity. Obviously some are more obvious and brutal than others but all humanity is infected to some degree. So we have come to accept the fact that we must have laws and law enforcement authorities to protect us, and they do this by enforcing those laws. It's the laws that define crime, meaning sin, and set the boundaries for living, and it's violating those laws that tell us who are the criminals, and gives us the legal authority to arrest and incarcerate them.

For those who keep the laws, those laws are a protection, but for those who violate them, they are the legal and authoritative means to bring about their judgement. The law serves to identify crimes (meaning sin) by using what is good as a standard of comparison for the establishment of what is evil and prohibited. I've been speaking in human terms because we're all familiar with this situation, and we understand how it works. And it's no different in principle from the Law of God. Paul is explaining that sin, and its effect, which is death, is shown to be what it is (evil) by the existence of the Law that is good. So, sin uses the legal provisions of the Law to effect death upon those who are enticed to disobey those Laws of God. The effect is that the Law exposes the nature of sin (disobedience) as being *utterly sinful*. It is the perfect and righteous and holy Law of God that serves to show us what the nature and character of sin actually is, as well as its final result, death. The Law is the protector of humanity, sin is the destroyer that acts through the legal provisions of that Law.

At this point I want to take a few moments to explain a basic underlying principle regarding the Law of God. We've just mentioned that the Law of God is a statement made by God to humanity, and perhaps all creation, as to the nature and character of God himself. The Law describes to us God's mindset, His likes and dislikes, His standards and priorities, and how He thinks and evaluates things. This is information of priceless value to any who seeks to know Him and understand how to please Him and live in His good graces. This knowledge is essential to worship, because our worship is based

entirely on what we know to be true about Him. And our heartfelt gratitude to Him for being Who and What we understand Him to be. (Jn 4:23-24) What does it mean that God is holy and righteous? That He is compassionate and forgiving? The truth is that we wouldn't know what this meant at all except that we came to know what sin and unrighteousness is. It is our knowledge of good and evil that establishes the means of making that distinction. What would it mean to worship God for His righteousness if we had no idea what that meant? We understand holiness and righteousness, and appreciate them because we know that there is an alternative, and that alternative is horrible. We know this because we've lived with it first hand, so now when we fall down at His feet and worship Him for His holy righteousness, we know exactly what we mean by doing so.

The presence of sin has provided the necessary perspective to appreciate and seek righteousness, and realize the infinite value of it. God created Adam and Eve without this capability, but His intention was that His human creatures would eventually have to have this understanding to ever become the suitable eternal worshipers that He created us to become. Unfortunately, this knowledge has repercussions, just like human laws have repercussions. When we make laws we realize that some will disobey them, and when they do they will have to suffer the consequences, this is an unavoidable part of that process. It isn't that we're looking for a way to punish people so we make laws to give us an excuse, but rather it's that the establishment of laws must include effectual means of enforcement and consequences for disobedience, or else they have no meaning and they serve no purpose at all. We all accept the fact that the establishment of laws will inevitably result in the incarceration and even execution of a portion of society, but we have decided that it is nonetheless essential to have these laws, even though we regret the necessary costs.

When God placed that Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the midst of the Garden of Eden, He did so knowing full well what the inevitable benefits and consequences would be. It's quite significant that God did not create Adam and Eve with this knowledge, He created them sinless and innocent, and then they themselves made the decision to eat from that tree and plunge themselves and all their subsequent offspring into the world of good and evil. By doing it this way, God has placed the responsibility for the consequences of disobedience on humanity and not on Himself. That act of Adam and Eve set into motion the forces that could either destroy mankind or educate him in the nature and ways of God. Mankind would now live his whole life on a cursed planet, among cursed people, who are indwelt by the knowledge and even worse the innate desire for sin. For some this will result in their incarceration and death, but for others it will provide the intended background from which to truly grasp the rarity and infinite value of the righteousness and holiness of Almighty God.

And this is what's going on behind the scenes of the whole lifelong struggle that humanity is having with sin. It's not that God takes any pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, (Eze 18:22; 33:11) any more than we take pleasure in seeing criminals incarcerated, but sin was introduced into humanity entirely for the purpose of showing us what righteousness is, specifically God's righteousness, because this knowledge is essential for the development of what God himself is seeking, those who will eternally worship Him in spirit and in truth. (Jn 4:24) No creature that worships God in spirit and in truth can be void of the knowledge of the alternatives that God could have been. There is none who can force Him to do anything, and none to whom He answers, so we understand that His holiness, His compassion, and His righteousness is His very own nature and His very own choosing. And for this we can appreciate Him for who and what He is, because we have Satan as a display of the alternative. Please don't misunderstand, I'm not implying that God just arbitrarily chose to be righteous, that would be close to blasphemous, He is by His very innate nature pure and holy and righteous, but that only means something to us because we have seen an alternative, and the death and destruction that it reeks. Knowledge of that alternative provides the essential perspective and background to know and appreciate God in spirit and in truth.

Example. When we walk into our house late at night we immediately turn on the lights, and we greatly appreciate what they do. But what if it never got dark at all, ever? We could still have the lights, but what use would we see for them? Of how much value would they be to us? The lights are valuable only because there is such a thing as darkness, and having been in the dark, the light can be rightly appreciated. Our church is associated with a very precious denomination that sees salvation alone as the be all and end all of the plan of God. But that's a very serious oversimplification of what the plan of God has revealed to us. Yes, salvation is wonderful and marvelous, but it is not the ultimate fulfillment of the plan of God, it is only one step in a much broader process. Which process is the ultimate production of acceptable eternal

worshippers of God. **Salvation is for the purpose of producing worship**, true and acceptable worship, not just for saving some people from hell as so many seem to think. If our profession of faith isn't producing repentance and sanctification then our worship isn't acceptable, and we're going nowhere near the eternal kingdom of God. (Mat 7:21-23, Rom 2:13)

To sum this up, The knowledge of good and evil was essential to mankind's coming to understand the meaning of God's holiness and righteousness. And understanding that is essential to becoming the acceptable worshiper that God has planned for us to be in His eternal kingdom. Authentic worship demands that we know **Who, what, and why** we are doing it, otherwise it's simply meaningless ritual. The Law of God provides the standards for establishing these distinctions.

It's by the Law of God that we come to know what sin is, and it's the knowledge of what sin is by which we come to see and appreciate the value of righteousness. Each is defined by its comparison to the other, as light is defined by its comparison to darkness. God has provided the means for mankind to see and understand His righteousness, but that knowledge comes at a significant cost. By it some will be saved and made worshipers, but others will be condemned and sentenced to eternal punishment, that's simply the way it has to be.

Now, I've said all that I think I need to say on this group of verses, at least for now, and I'm faced with either beginning the next group, verses 14-25 or ending this lesson here. That will probably make this lesson a little shorter than normal, but the next group of verses will surely need their own full lesson, so I'll end this lesson here and we'll resume with the next verses in lesson 17. To God be the glory for now and forevermore. Amen.

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