

# How Sin Hijacks God's Good Law

## *How a Law that promised Life produced my Death*

Romans Series  
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### **Text: Romans 7:7-13**

*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.*

*<sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

Sometimes laws made with the best intentions to improve safety or quality of life can go badly wrong, leading to worse situations or even causing unintended catastrophic harm. Let me share two examples of how well-intentioned laws resulted in devastating consequences in the countries where they were enacted.

**The Great Chinese Famine** (1959-61) was one of history's deadliest natural disasters, with between 25 and 45 million people dying due to the disastrously poor grain harvest during those years. The cause of the famine was a well-intentioned law made by China's leaders in 1958 called the "Four Pest Campaign," which encouraged citizens to eliminate four pests—rats, flies, mosquitoes, and sparrows—in an effort to improve public health, reduce disease transmission, and increase the annual grain

yield (hence the removal of sparrows, which ate a small amount of grain). What no one realized is that sparrows also ate locusts—and once the sparrows were gone, the locust population exploded into massive swarms that devoured entire grain fields and caused a four-year famine, resulting in the death of 30-45 million people.

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, also known as Prohibition (1920-1933),** became law in the United States on January 17, 1920, and remained in effect until it was repealed on December 5, 1933. This amendment made it illegal to manufacture, sell, or transport intoxicating liquors within the country. However, it did not ban private possession or consumption of these alcoholic beverages. Supporters of and those who introduced the amendment had noble goals—reducing alcoholism, domestic violence, crime, and other related social issues while promoting public morality. Instead, that era saw the rise of organized crime syndicates (such as Al Capone and the Mafia crime families), drove alcohol production underground, boosted illegal sales, and increased alcohol-related crime and violence—over 10,000 deaths were attributed to Prohibition before its repeal in 1933.

A third and even more powerful example is in our text this morning, where Paul explains how **God's good and righteous Law** was hijacked by sin and caused devastating death for the entire human race!

What Paul has been saying about the Law in 7:5 has raised serious questions about its character and the character of the One who gave it – God! ***This is what is behind the massive question being asked: Is the Law sin? This is a big, bold question that needs a clear answer! And Paul gives one – Absolutely Not!!***

Paul is going to spend the rest of the chapter explaining his answer and demonstrating how something God designed as holy, righteous, and good ended up leading those under its jurisdiction to such a horrific end – sin, condemnation, and death.

***Paul's explanation is not simple, but it will be clear!*** And though it will lead through difficult places, it will end in a place of great hope! But for his explanation to make sense, we need to make three important observations from the context and structure Paul uses to frame his explanation in Romans 7.

**Observation 1: Tenses** *Paul, why do you use different verb tenses?*

**1. 7:7-13 – past tense verbs to explain:**

- Life under Adam in the Old Age/Realm of Sin and Death
- Life under Moses in Israel, as God's visible representatives and authorized ambassadors to the World.
- Life as a self-righteous Jewish Rabbi living and striving for righteousness under the crushing, inescapable weight of the Law – and failing miserably and hopelessly under the watchful eye and condemning sentence of Moses.

**2. 7:14-25 – present tense verbs to explain:**

- Life under Christ in the New Age/Realm of Righteousness and Life
- Life under the rule of Grace, as God's visible representatives and authorized ambassadors to the World.
- Life as a justified sinner, made righteous by grace, through faith in the finished work of Christ, who is struggling daily and striving personally to fulfill the righteous demands of the Law by resisting the flesh and mortifying its demands!

**Observation 2: Terms** *Paul, why do you use two different terms for Law?*

1. **Law** – the spiritual and moral will of God for all Mankind written down in the conscience of everyone born under Adam and rewritten on the hearts of all who are born again under Christ, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam.
2. **Commandment** – His express, articulated will first to and through Adam for all humanity and later, to and through Moses for Israel –

and ultimately reiterated and internalized by someone greater than Moses – Jesus Christ for us!

**Observation 3: Moral and Theological Crisis** *Paul, how can you continue to say the Law is good when it has produced such devastating results and led to such horrific consequences for people like me?*

## **I. The Nature of the Law (7:12)**

*So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

A. ***Its Character*** – holy and righteous

B. ***Its Content*** – God’s spiritual demands (ὁ νόμος) and moral requirements (ἡ ἐντολή) for His image-bearers

C. ***Its Form – verbal; written***

- Commandments for life with God,
- Ceremonies for gracious forgiveness, joyful fellowship, and thankful worship, and
- Civic Ordinances for representing God accurately and attractively to the rest of the nations of the World.
  
- ***In the Garden***: a single command given by God Himself and mediated through Adam to his descendants prior to Moses. This command was in essence to reveal who Adam would serve and obey – God or the Serpent. (Note the connection to the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment to have no other god before JHWH!)
- ***In Israel***: many commands, ceremonies, and civic ordinances were given by God and mediated through Moses, the Law-Giver.

D. ***Its intent – good*** (ἀγαθός)

- To express God’s good, acceptable, and righteous (perfect) will for us in order that we might live and thrive as image-bearers!
- To give us an opportunity to validate and express our love for God

- To be God's holy voice and righteous representative in a fallen world filled with sinners who desperately need mercy!

## II. The Reason for the Law – because of transgression (7:7; Gal 3:19)

*Rom 7:7 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."*

*Galatians 3:19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.*

### A. To Protect and Preserve God's People from Sin and Death

- **In the Garden**, evil and death were stalking Adam after the Fall of Satan – hence the responsibility God gave Adam to “guard” (גָּמַר) the Garden (Gen 2:15; cf. 3:24).
- How would Adam protect the Garden and all of creation from this evil? **Answer: By obeying God's righteous and good command – and that is precisely what God gives to Adam in the very next verse (Gen 2:16).**
- **In Israel**, considering the bondage and oppression of their sins in Egypt behind them and the danger of the sins of the Canaanites before them, how could Israel stay safe in God's presence and remain pure as a nation to represent God's name accurately and attractively before the nations? **Answer – God gave them ten gracious words to guide their lives!**

### B. To Provide God's People with an Opportunity to Express their Love and Validate their Loyalty to God. (Dt. 6:5, Mark 12:30)

- **You shall love the Lord with all your heart** – nothing shall take His place or displace your loyalty to Him.
- **You shall obey the Lord with all your strength** – If you love Him, you are to express and confirm that love by obeying His commands and fulfilling His desires for you.

- **Adam** – do you love me more than the pleasures of Eden? More than the treasure you have in Eve? If so, keep my commandment.
- **Israel** – do you love me more than rain? More than idols that others worship to bring that rain? More than the wealth and respect of the nations around you? If so, keep my commandments and let them by your wisdom in the sight of the nations.
- **Jesus** – Why do you call me Lord and do not do the things I command you? If you love me, keep my commandments.

***C. To Provide a Means for ongoing Life and Fellowship with God in a Fallen, Sin-cursed, Death-tasting World.***

***For Adam and his sons and daughters***—teach your children to love and serve me with all their hearts, to live according to my righteous will, to receive mercy and forgiveness through my righteous provision, and to worship and wait joyfully for the fulfillment of my righteous promise. (Note the presence of law, merciful atoning sacrifice, and thankful worship in Gen 3-4). And Adam did so for 930 years, right up to within 125 years of Noah’s birth. There was a righteous line of Adam’s sons and daughters through Seth who listened to Adam and worshipped and served the true God of Heaven alone. This is what it means in the OT to “call upon the name of God” in Gen 4:25-26.

***For Israel and his sons and daughters*** – Moses said, “*See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ <sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*” (Deut. 4:5-8)

And in the willing, diligent keeping of this Law from God, there is the promise of great reward (*Psalm 19:11 – “Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”*)

### III. The Promise of the Law – Life! (7:10a)

*The very commandment that promised life . . .*

- A. ***Implicit in God’s Word to Adam*** – “You shall **surely** eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall **surely** die.” (Gen. 2:16-27).
  
- B. ***Explicit in Moses’ Word to Israel*** – “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.” (Lev. 18:5; cf. Ezek. 20:11)
  
- C. ***Fulfilled in Jesus’ Authoritative Word and Obedient Life*** – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Jesus obeyed it perfectly, embodied its true intent, fulfilled its promises, accomplished its purposes, satisfied its demands, and suffered its penalty – not for himself but for us!

So how did something so righteous and so holy and extended God’s promise of life for obedience – become the instrument of death?

### IV. The Perversion of the Law – Death! (7:10, 13, )

*The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me . . . Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good . . .*

So, how did sin use God’s good Law to produce death in me? By hijacking it its commandments to arouse sinful passion in me!

- A. ***Sin used the Commandment to arouse and expose sinfulness in me through Covetousness. (7:7-9)***

*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.*

- In the Garden -- Adam coveted what Satan offered.
- In Israel – God’s people coveted what the Nations offered
- In Paul – Paul coveted what the Law prohibited: sinful pride, bitter jealousy, and selfish ambition (cf., James 3:14-15).

***B. Sin used the Commandment first to deceive me and then to kill me! (7:10-11)***

*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.*

- Sin here is personified – Satan deceived Eve and convinced Adam to disregard the commandment and the warning that was intended to lead to eternal life in the presence of God in the Garden Kingdom of Eden.
- Satan used the commandment to create doubt in God’s goodness, challenge the authority and accuracy of God’s commandment, and to present an alternative reality that promised a better way to greater things than what God had promised.
- And Satan built all of this deception on one true reality – God had given a command.
- Satan didn’t deny the command – instead, he cast doubt on whether that command was holy, righteous, and good.

*Is this really what God said?*

*Is this really the only right thing to do?*

*Will this really lead to the good you desire?*

But God did not abandon His holy, righteous, and good law to the wicked purpose to which Satan hijacked it and now employs it. He built

into the Law two surprising benefits that, when embraced, will lead us to the life He promised to give us by the Law!

## V. **The Surprising Benefit of the Law (7:13)**

*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.*

### **A. *The Law benefits me by exposing my deeds as sin***

*in order that sin might be shown to be sin*

- Paul said – *“I would not have known sin apart from the Law.”*
- Take the example of coveting – the term means “strong desires to have or do – lusting after something or someone.” Generally the term is used to express a strong desire for something wrong or sinful.
- Maybe Paul used this because it was the one commandment he could not silence his conscience by appeasing it with all of his outward performance of the Law. *(Speculation: He may have been the rich young ruler who met Jesus in Mark 10:17-22).*
- I had desires before there was a commandment and never gave a moment’s thought to the fact that the desire that drove me to want to do wrong actions was displeasing to God – until the commandment came and God said, “Don’t covet.”
- God didn’t just prohibit these actions; He prohibited the desire that drove these actions. And until the command came, I may have felt guilty about certain actions, but I never considered my desire as sinful. In fact, I thought I was safe because I didn’t do the actions that my desires wanted me to fulfill! I never realized that the desire itself (coveting) was sin!!
- And now I have to deal with the fact that sin isn’t just something I do with my hands or my body – it is something deeply embedded in my heart – the desire factory!

- And until the Law came and confronted me with this ugly reality – I never gave a thought that I was a sinner in the sight of God! In fact, I thought I was righteous before God!!
- The Law builds a second benefit on this first reality:

***B. The Law benefits me by making my sin exceedingly sinful and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.***

- When I consider sin as a violation of a commandment, I want to know two things:
  1. Who gave the commandment? God!!!
  2. What is the penalty for disobedience? Execution!!
- And as soon as I really understand these answers, I see sin for what it really is – exceedingly sinful and worthy of death!
- My sin is not just an innocent mistake; it brought about a huge amount of damage and death!

**Conclusion: Why are these two functions of the Law beneficial to me?**

1. They bring me to a place where I can no longer deny the reality or minimize the gravity of my sin. I admit I am a sinner.
2. They bring me to the end of myself and my ability to change my situation or remove my condemnation. I admit I am powerless.
3. They compel me to look for help and salvation outside of myself. I stop attempting to fix my situation on my own or making excuses for my sin.

And when I go to find help from Moses, he points me to another Law-giver greater than Himself – One Who was the center and goal of the Law he mediated to Israel – Jesus Christ! ***(7:25 – Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!) He came to redeem us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 4:5-6)! How did he do this?***

Jesus fulfilled the Law for us! He satisfied its demands and paid its penalty in our place! This is why Moses points to Jesus and urges us to look to Him alone for help, and hope, and life!

Jesus is not just a greater Lawgiver; He is the great Law-Keeper! And because He kept the Law for me by fulfilling its commands, satisfying its demands, and suffering its penalty – He can offer me three incredible benefits the Law could never provide:

- Forgiveness of sin
- Fullness and abundance of eternal life
- The astonishing privilege of full sonship through adoption

***I CAN'T OBEY THE LAW, BUT I CAN OBEY THE GOSPEL!***

And if I obey God's command to accept the gospel – to repent of my sin, turn to Jesus Christ, and place my full trust in His finished work alone for salvation – God will do what the Law could not: declare me righteous and make me His own!