

20. Learning Why the Law Does Not Make Us Holy

In our last topic, we saw that we want to illustrate to our physical and spiritual children the fact that we are united with Christ. We saw that the law of sin is like a husband that has died. As a result, the wife is no longer under the law of her dead husband. Instead, she is free to marry a new husband. We saw that in the same way we are now dead to the law of sin and are able to enjoy the freedom that Christ gives as He leads us by His love. In this topic, we are going to see why the law cannot make any person holy.

Romans 7:7-8 says, “What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of evil* desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead.” The law shows the character of God and so it is good. As a result, the law is not sin. Instead, the law helps us to know the things that are sin. Before we became Christians, we were slaves to sin. Now, we have been set free from sin and are free to choose to do those things that are pleasing to God.

What we see here is that the law helped us to know the things that are sin. One of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not covet.” Before we became a Christian, that statement caused us to covet because of the fact that we had a sin nature that was in rebellion against God. The very fact that the law was there caused us to begin to covet many things because of our rebellion against God. Those evil desires arose because our sin nature showed us that these were some specific ways that we could rebel against God. In contrast, we are now dead to the law of sin and alive to Christ. We have a new nature that desires to please Christ and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to please Christ as we yield to Him.

However, the law can also cause true Christians to covet. When we look at the world around us instead of looking at Christ, we open our lives to coveting because we are still tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. That is why 1 Timothy 6:6-8 says, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.” As we ask the Lord to give us His strength to live godly lives, the Lord gives us the things that we need. As we grow in love and in our desire to serve others, the Lord helps us to learn to be content.

Romans 7:9-12 goes on to say, “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me*. Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” Before we started to think about fellowship with God, we thought that we were enjoying life. We satisfied our sinful desires and thought nothing of it. In fact, Paul thought that he lived a very good life without Christ. Philippians 3:4-6 says, “Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Paul thought that he

could depend on his own efforts to be right with God.

Then, Paul was stopped by Christ on the road to Damascus. Suddenly, he had to look at the commandments of God from the viewpoint of God instead of from the viewpoint of a Pharisee. He suddenly saw himself as a sinner. 1 Timothy 1:15 says, “This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” In addition, as Paul sat in darkness for three days, he also realized that he was spiritually dead. As a result, he was prepared when Ananias came to visit him. Acts 9:17-18 says, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.” Paul realized that only Christ could give him spiritual life.

Paul had thought that the commandments in the law were the source that gave him life. The reason he thought this was because he thought that he was keeping the law perfectly. In his case, he had been deceived by his own pride. He was like the rich young ruler who after Christ reminded him of the commandments that deal with man’s relationship to man said in Luke 18:21, “And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’” Like the rich young ruler, Paul thought that he could earn eternal life by keeping the law. That would have been true if he really could have kept the law perfectly. However, when Christ spoke to him on the road to Damascus, Paul realized that he was sinning against God. As a result, he found that the law actually brought death because the law showed that he was guilty of sin.

In fact, Paul realized that he had been deceived by his own sin. The fact that Paul thought that he had kept the commandments showed the pride that was controlling his life. That caused him to realize the true nature of sin in his life. 1 Timothy 1:12-13 says, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.” When Paul saw the law from the viewpoint of God, he realized that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man. This caused him to realize that he was spiritually dead. As we begin to understand the true nature of sin, we all realize that we are guilty before God.

That is why the law is not sin. In fact, we see here that the law is holy. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:16, “Because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” That is a quotation from Leviticus 11:44. First, the law is holy because it shows that God is holy. Second, the law is holy because it shows that all have sinned and are guilty before God. As a result, the commandment is holy. Paul also points out the fact that because the law is holy, it is also just and good. The law is just because it requires that the penalty for sin be paid. The law is good because it is upright and honorable. That is why 1 John 1:9 is so important for every Christian to understand when that verse says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The fact that Christ paid our penalty and the Father is satisfied makes God both just and merciful and makes us righteous in the sight of God.

Romans 7:13-14 goes on to say, “Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.” The law is good but Paul said that it had become death to him. That is a reminder of the fact that sin separated all of us from God and that is spiritual death. When we came to the point where we repented our sin and placed our faith in Christ, we were given spiritual life.

However, we saw in Romans 6:13 and 6:16 that we can still choose to yield to sin even though we are dead to sin. When we choose to yield to sin, it produces a different kind of death. Romans 7:24 says, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The word that is translated “wretched” means *a life that is filled with toils and troubles*. Here, we see that a Christian that is trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength will experience toils and troubles in his or her life. John 15:5 says, “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Many Christians experience the life described in Romans 7:14-25, because they are trying to live the Christian life in their own strength.

The law reflects the character of God because it is spiritual. In contrast, a Christian that is trying to live the Christian life in his own strength is carnal. A carnal Christian is described in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 where we read, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere men*?” In many ways, carnal Christians live and act like those who are not even Christians.

In contrast, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk in the Spirit because Galatians 5:16 says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” As we show our children how to walk in the Spirit by our example, we are showing them what it means to yield to God instead of yielding to sin. We help them to realize that when we depend on our own strength, we make the natural response and yield to sin. We show them that when we yield to God, we are making the supernatural response and the Lord gives us the power to carry out the will of God. Philippians 2:12-13 says, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.” We show them that when we yield to God, He is able to carry out His will through our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of yielding to God moment by moment.