

About 2,400 years ago humans began building and designating specific places, specific buildings, for the care of those who were sick. Places to pursue the healing of the mind and the body. The first hospitals. We see evidence of these sites in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, ancient India, ancient Persia. They all had centers or temples used for the practice of medicine, for the purpose of wellness. And that early desire for a place specifically set apart for health and healing has resulted in there being about 165,000 hospitals throughout the world today, over 6,000 of the here in the U.S. And there is almost unanimous agreement that these places – in concept and in practice – are good. They are helpful. They are beneficial. They are positive. The world would be worse without them.

But suppose for a second a genocidal terrorist organization took over a hospital. Imagine they hijacked what was intended for good, for health, for healing, and instead used it as a base of operations for evil and death and destruction. That would be terrible. Nearly unthinkable. But that's exactly what has been alleged in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. That Hamas (a militarized terrorist organization that exists for the destruction of the modern state of Israel and the eradication of Jews) commandeers hospitals and uses them to organize, strategize, and carry out its campaign of murder and devastation. It's difficult to conceive that someone could seize control of something fundamentally good and use it for evil.

Well interestingly enough, that idea isn't just a 21st Century military strategy. In Romans 7 the Apostle Paul says that's exactly what has happened between **the law and sin**. And the victims of that terror campaign include all humankind.

From the beginning of Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he has dropped these hints about the role and power of the law, specifically the law of Moses, the OT law: what it is, what it's for, what it can and can't do. But beginning in chapter 5, he begins to sharpen his focus. He says things like this in Romans 5:20 [READ]. The law increases the trespass, the wrong, the sin. There's a connection between the law and sin. In Romans 6:14 he says this [READ]. Sin has no dominion over the Christian because we are not under the law. Again, a connection between the law and sin. In Romans 7:4 (that we read last week) he

says this [READ]. We (Christians, believers) died to the law to be united to Christ.

And Paul concluded the passage we looked at last week with this two-part, before and after, then and now picture in Romans 7:5-6 [READ]. Before/then, we were living in the flesh, sinful passions were at work in us, those desires were aroused by the law, we bore fruit for death. Flesh, sin, law, death. Those were the principles that characterized our life before Christ. After/now, we've been released from the law, we're dead to its captivity, we serve in the new way of the Spirit, we no longer serve in the old way of the written code (the letter of the law). Spirit, freedom, life. Those are the principles that characterize our life now. I believe those two verses serve as sort of a table of contents for what follows. V.5 describes our former

way of life in relation to the law and sin and the flesh and death that gets unpacked in the rest of chapter 7. Paul speaks of how he became aware of the law, how he came under the condemnation of the law, how sin brought spiritual death to him, how as a Pharisee he worked to remedy his guilt and death through trying to keep the law, leading to frustration and defeat and despair. And then v.6 describes his new life in Christ that he unpacks in chapter 8. And let me go ahead and say that there are a number of different views on how to understand these two verses – especially the one's we'll look at next week – but we'll address those as we go. But this morning, we're going to look at Romans 7:7-13 as Paul begins to describe his life apart from Christ and the role that the law and sin played. So if you will go ahead and take your Bible, turn with me to

Romans 7:7 and follow along as I read [READ ROMANS 7:7-13].

The first thing Paul does as he begins this passage is to address a potential misunderstanding. Because he has said what he has about the law – that the desire to sin is aroused by the law so that the law actually provokes sin – some might get the idea that Paul is saying that the law is bad or that the law is evil or that the law itself is actually sin. He had some opponents who accused him of teaching that. So he begins and ends this section by asking and answering that question. In v.7 he asks, “Is the law sin?” And he answers, “By no means!” In fact, the **law is good!** In v.12 he declares that the law is holy. It’s set apart and unique and transcendent and perfect. He says it’s righteous. It’s just and right. He says it’s fundamentally,

essentially, by definition good. In v.13 he asks, “Did the good law bring death to me?” And he answers again, “By no means!” So he makes it crystal clear: the law is NOT sin, the law does NOT bring death, and the law IS holy and righteous and good.

But in what way? How is it good? What good does it accomplish? Well, the law, being holy and righteous and good, is a reflection of the very character of God, who is holy and righteous and good. The law serves as a witness to who God is and what He is like. And as such, it demands what conduct and speech and thoughts and desires and attitudes are holy and righteous and good, what things are godly. And then, as a result, it defines as sin anything that falls short of that. So the law is good in that it defines sin, it brings a knowledge of sin, it shows

what sin is. V.7, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. V.13, the law shows sin to be sin. It reveals and exposes sin for what it is. He gives, as an example, the 10th commandment, you shall not covet. To covet is to desire something that is not yours. To want something that is not for you to have. It's an inward sin, something no one else can see. Some have said that coveting is at the heart of other sins. We steal because we covet. We commit adultery because we covet. We even commit idolatry because we treasure or delight in something else other than God. Paul says he would not have understood that impulse as a specific violation of God's will without the law naming it. That's what the law does for us. It identifies our sin and names them. And it is entirely, 100% honest and accurate in its assessment of us. It shows us exactly where we've failed to meet the

demands of a holy God and where we find ourselves in need of something to atone for that failure. And that's a good thing. It's good that the law does that because without it, we wouldn't fully realize our problem. We might have a vague, nagging sense of guilt, but not a specific diagnosis. The law diagnoses us like a doctor would. One of the worst, most hateful things a doctor could do for a sick person was to tell them he's fine. The most kind, faithful, loving thing a doctor would do, at least as a first step, is to properly identify your illness. And the law fulfills that role perfectly. Any time you see or read or hear God's law, you should come away understanding what it demands of you and knowing your total inability to fulfill it.

So the law is good in that it reflects the character of God, it reveals the will of God, it demands conformity to that will,

and it exposes our failure to keep it. Unfortunately, that's where its ability ends. The law cannot do any more than that. The **law is insufficient** to bring about any change.

The law can reveal righteousness, but it cannot manifest righteousness in the lives of those who hear it. The law can demand obedience, but it cannot deliver obedience to those who hear it. The law can expose our failure, but it cannot remedy that failure. The law is not the source of transformation because those under it can't keep it. The law can show you sin, but it has no power to overcome sin. It's a thermometer, not a thermostat. A thermometer merely reads the temperature; a thermostat changes the climate. The law can't transfer its goodness or holiness or righteousness to us. It is insufficient.

So the law is good, but insufficient. And that's where sin comes in. And when I say sin, I'm not referring primarily to specific acts of sin, but to sin as a power and a force that lives and works and kills. This **sin is opportunistic**. In v.8 Paul says that sin takes advantage of the insufficiency of the law to hijack it and then uses it to magnify and expand and produce MORE sin! Sin commandeers the law and uses it to exacerbate sinful actions and words and thoughts and attitudes in us. Sin as a power uses the law to provoke, to stimulate sinful expressions from us. The law names the sin and defines it as transgression, then sin stirs up the desire for the very thing we were just told not to do, not to say, not to think, not to want. Paul says that apart from the law, sin is dead. He doesn't mean absolutely dead, like non-existent. He said back in chapter 2 that you can sin without the law. He said in chapter 5

that sin was in the world before the law. He's making the point here that, without the law, before the law, sin isn't fully activated. It's like it's latent, hidden, unrealized. Sort of lurking below the surface. But when the law is introduced, that dormant sin springs to life, commandeers the law and uses it to deceive, Paul says in v.11. So how does sin deceive when it comes to the law? Well sin tells us two lies about the law. On the one hand, sin will tell us we can't keep the law, so there's no hope for us, so we may as well quit trying to pursue holiness and just go and get as much pleasure out of life as we can. Or sin will try to convince us that we CAN keep the law if we just try harder, which sends us into a spiral of trying, failing, feeling guilty, and promising to do better next time. Neither of those is true, and neither is how God intends for us to relate to His law. But v.13 tells us that the result of that

deception is that, through the law, sin becomes immeasurably sinful. The sinfulness of sin is magnified beyond calculation. Its true nature and power are shown and they prove themselves in our lives by the very experience of them. The law gave opportunity for that sin lying just under the surface to boil over and spill out into every part of our lives.

Sin takes advantage of the opportunity provided by the law. And we've all known opportunistic people, right? Usually they're just an annoyance. They're the kind of people who will ride someone else's coattails for some small privilege. Or they'll take advantage of someone for some insignificant benefit. But they generally don't pose any real threat to anyone. That's not the way sin works, though. **Sin is deadly**. Sin uses every opportunity to bring

death. Paul illustrates this principle by telling a story. He says in v.9 that he was alive apart from the law, the commandment came, sin came alive, and he died. In v.10 he says the commandment that promised life only brought death. In v.11 he says sin deceived him and killed him. In v.13 he says sin produced death in him through what is good. So the plot of this story is life then law then sin then death.

So who's story is he telling here? Who was alive, got the law, knew sin, and then died? Some Bible scholars say Paul is telling the story of Adam. After all, Adam is the only man who ever began his life spiritually alive. And then, when the commandment not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil came, sin (in the form of the serpent) took advantage, sin came alive and deceived

him, and he died. But the law that Paul has been talking about is the law of Moses, which didn't come until thousands of years later. Other scholars say Paul is telling the story of the nation of Israel. They were alive in the sense that they weren't under God's judgment, the command came at Mt. Sinai in the form of the law of Moses, sin came alive in them, and they immediately disobeyed and came to truly know spiritual death. Others say that Paul is using the story to describe the experience of all people in general. All people start out alive in their own estimation, they come to an awareness of God's demands, sin comes to life in them, and they come to know their true condition of death. Still others take the passage at face value and say Paul is obviously just telling his own story, recounting his own experience. So which is it? Well I'm going to be totally non-committal and say that I

think it's all of them. Sort of. I think Paul is speaking primarily of his own experience but looking back retrospectively and hinting at both Adam and Israel, and also looking forward and suggesting that this is, in some sense, what every person experiences.

So when Paul says that he was alive apart from the law, he's not talking about being alive in an absolute spiritual sense. Remember, only Adam ever fit that description. I think he's saying that by his own estimation, by his own reckoning, according to his own consciousness, he was born with no awareness of being under condemnation, of being under any demand, of having any relationship with the law. But then the commandment came. For Paul that may have been pretty early since he was a Jew, raised in the synagogue, taught by his parents. So maybe in his

childhood, maybe at his coming of age at 12-years-old, maybe in his youth, he became aware of the obligations of the law, the 10 commandments, civil laws, ceremonial laws. And that law promised life. As a Jew, he was most certainly taught that life and peace come through lawkeeping, through Torah observance. Leviticus 18:5 says, "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them..." Or Ezekiel 20:11, "I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live." And that was true in that they gave life if they were perfectly obeyed. But what do we know? No one does; no one can. And so sin came alive. Sin sprang to life and hijacked that law and produced all kinds of sin in his heart, that coveting he mentioned earlier. And when that happened, Paul says he died. He realized his own guilt

and condemnation. The conviction and accusation of the law was brought to bear on his own conscience, and he realized his need for atonement. Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, described Paul's experience this way, "I did not know how sinful I was until God's commandment came to me. Sin seemed to be dead within me, and I thought myself a righteous man; but when the law of God came home to my heart and conscience, and I understood that even a sinful thought would ruin me, that a hasty word had the essence of murder in it, and that the utmost uncleanness might lurk under the cover of what seemed a mere custom of my fellow-men, — when I found out all this, sin did indeed live, but I died so far as righteousness was concerned."

And that's where this section of **the text ends**, with Paul dead due to the sin that used the law to deceive and to kill him. Now next week we're going to look at his attempt to remedy that death, but this part of the story – how sin used the law to bring death – is the story of Adam, the story of Israel, the story of Paul, and the story of you. We are born with no awareness of the demands of God. We start out assuming we're fine. But there comes a point when we are exposed to God's holy requirements, maybe in church, maybe at home, maybe through reading the Bible on our own, maybe through someone sharing the gospel, maybe just through the law of conscience written on our heart. And when that happens, sin comes alive in us, commandeering those demands to magnify and provoke sin, and we come to realize our guilt and our need for something or someone to save us.

That's the role of the law in our salvation. Again, this is Charles Spurgeon, "If men do not understand the law, they will not feel that they are sinners. And if they are not consciously sinners, they will never value the sin offering. There is no healing a man till the law has wounded him, no making him alive till the law has slain him." The law works in our hearts, inwardly, to show and convict us of sin and guilt and need. The law is good in doing that. People who don't know Jesus need first to know why they need Him. The law can help show lost people their guilt before a holy God. Don't be afraid to use the law to show people that, apart from Christ, we are all guilty and under a sentence of death. Help them see that, apart from Christ, we are all murderers and adulterers at heart. We are all idolaters and blasphemers and thieves. It's only when we

see and understand our guilt that we will feel the hopelessness and despair that drives us to Jesus. That's one takeaway.

The other is that I want you to really know and understand and believe that sin is immeasurably deceptive and destructive. We toy with sin like it's some sort of a healthy habit like eating too many cookies. I probably shouldn't, but it's not really THAT bad, right? Sin will go to any length to deceive you, to convince you it isn't that bad. It is so insidious that it will hijack God's law to bring you down. It will attempt to convince you to give up pursuing holiness since you can't keep God's law or to cultivate self-righteousness since you can keep God's law if you just try harder. But the bottom line is that it wants to destroy you. You need to recognize and respect that.

But here's the good news, and I'll finish with this. First, as powerful as sin is, it could not defeat Jesus. He is stronger than sin. He defeated it through His perfect life, His sacrificial death in our place for our sin, and His glorious resurrection. In fact, where sin is able to commandeer God's law and use it for evil, Jesus commandeered sin and death to produce righteousness, salvation, and life for anyone who would trust in him. And second, as good as the law is, Jesus is better. He can do what the law could not. He can save us and keep on saving us and finish saving us by what HE has done, not what we can do. So run to Jesus today. Don't run to the law, which, though good, is insufficient. And certainly don't run to sin, which will kill you. Run to Jesus and find life and peace and

strength and forgiveness and hope. Run to Jesus this morning.