

Four Realities About the Law and Sin

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and open them to Romans chapter 7 and find verse 7, Romans 7, verse 7.

And I'm going to read all the way through verse 13, really a verse over into the next paragraph, as it seems right to divide this part of it.

I think we're going on into it, but I want to bring 13 in as well tonight. Starting with verse 7, what shall we say then? Here's another one of these questions.

Is the law sin? Interesting question. Is it sin? Is the law sin? And, of course, Paul's usual response, the way he's responded to all of these questions from some unnamed antagonist, his answer is 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.

[1:18] But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

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.

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.

That is the law so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. Now, this is an interesting passage.

[2:19] Now, several years ago, a man by the name of Carl Menninger. I'm not sure if it's Menninger or Menninger. I think it's Menninger.

And the name may not be recognizable to most of us. I didn't even know who the guy was. He would be recognizable to students of modern psychology, if that helps you any. But Carl Menninger, Menninger, excuse me.

He wrote a book some 20 years ago entitled Whatever Became of Sin? Kind of an interesting title. I've not read the book. But in that book, Dr. Menninger observed and he quote and I quote the very word sin.

This is what he said. It's interesting how he put this. The very word sin, which seems to have disappeared, was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word.

It described a central point in every civilized human being's life plan and lifestyle. But the word went away.

[3:27] It has almost disappeared. The word along with the notion. And why? He asked. Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin?

And then he goes on to basically argue that in the place of the historic concept of sin. And he's speaking of our culture. In place of the what once was the concept of sin, our concept of sin as a culture.

We now speak of crime or we focus on symptoms. And again, let me quote Menninger.

Whenever you look at sin as either crime or symptoms. Now, listen to this very closely. I think he captures it very well. Whenever you look at sin as either crime or symptoms, you are missing the essence of human right and wrong behavior.

Whenever you take sin and turn it into a crime, what you've done is taken God out of the picture because sin is committed between the person and God.

[4:38] Crime is malfeasance between two human beings. So if you call it crime, you've really defined it downward. Or if you take sin and turn it into symptoms.

That the sin is just a symptom of something. Then you've gone even lower because there you're talking about things like outward indications.

You're talking about heredity. You're talking about environment. You're talking about early life choices and factors that infringe upon the outside.

When you discard the concept of sin and replace it with the concept of symptoms, you've defined it as something that's completely exterior or outside of us.

And that's very serious, isn't it? Dr. Menninger, I think, is right. I have no idea about whether or not he was a believer. However, you know, not many of those who were involved in modern psychology were necessarily, you know, Bible-believing conservative Christians.

[5:48] I don't know anything about his life spiritually, but he's pegged it here. Because we're living today, and you know this is true, in a society and a culture that has basically lost the concept of sin.

We really have. I mean sin for what it really is. We've lost the concept of sin, but we have not, certainly not lost the practice of sin in our culture, have we?

In fact, it has become even more intensified in our day. And, listen, that's why our culture is suffering. And our culture is, I guess, really, we could say is deteriorating right before our very eyes. During the last 30 years, and these are some statistics, there has been, this is in 30 years, most of us in this room can think back and remember back that far.

I can't remember last week, but I can remember, I can't even remember 30 years ago either. But, anyway, during the last 30 years, there has been a 500, now get this, 560% increase in violent crimes.

[6:58] 560%. More than a 400% increase in illegitimate births in this country.

A quadrupling rate in divorce. A tripling of the percentage of children living in single-parent households.

More than 200% increase in teenage suicide. These are just kind of a smattering of statistics.

And I'm sure there are many more that I could list that would be as appalling. At the same time, they say a drop of almost 80 points in the SAT scores. You say, well, how does that figure in with all these sins?

It just reveals the deterioration of our culture. The root problem?

[7:58] I mean, why have we turned away from the concept of sin? At least as sin is defined, correctly defined by the Bible. Why have we turned away from that concept in this country?

Well, there's only one answer to that question. And the answer is that we have rejected the concept of sin because we have done away with the concept of God's moral law.

We've done away with that. And why would we want to do that? And what's the ramifications of that? Well, see, listen. Sin, as it's correctly defined and understood, sin presupposes two things.

Number one, you must have an objective standard against which all human behavior can be judged or measured.

You must have an objective standard, an absolute standard of right and wrong. Right here. You must have that, all right? Sin presupposes that.

[9:05] You must have the standard. And then number two, you must have a divine person against whom a sin can be committed. All right?

Those two things. Sin presupposes those two things. And so now it's simple. You take away God's law and you have taken, you've lost both of these things.

You no longer have an absolute standard and you no longer have a divine person against whom to sin against or the sin is committed.

See? And that's exactly what our culture has been doing for a number of years. Take away God's moral law. Take the Ten Commandments down from the schoolrooms and halls.

Take the Ten Commandments out of our government places and we can't have that anymore. Take that out. And so we remove the moral law.

[10:03] And so then we remove the absolute standard and it's God's standard. And so since it's his standard, we've also at the same time removed the divine person to whom we sin or against whom we sin.

You take away God's law and you have no reason to believe in any concept of sin. It's simple. And that's what has been happening in our culture for a number of years.

And that's why American culture and society is going down. Not just in the areas of morality, but also in every other area as well. It's destroying our culture.

And so we've turned away from the concept of sin because we've turned away from the concept of God's law. Which, by the way, and Paul's going to make the point, is the only thing that will reveal our true spiritual condition.

And so there's a gospel implication here. And therefore we can see the strategy of the enemy, can't we? Take the law away. And because it's the law that reveals our sinfulness.

[11:11] And that's what Paul is going to, the point he's going to make here. Now that's what Paul's talking about. And Paul is addressing, again, this unnamed antagonist, you know, who asks a question.

And he basically says a man can be good without God. Basically the idea. We don't need God to tell us what to do. We don't need his law to tell us what to do.

But Paul answers that with four great realities about the law and sin. Four great realities in this text. And I probably could come up with a few others.

But we'll just consider four that are quite obvious, really, from what Paul has written here. The first one is this. The law reveals the fact of sin.

The law reveals the fact or the reality of sin. That's what he says in verse 7. Look at it again. What shall we say then? Here's the question.

[12:10] Is the law sin? Certainly not. I mean, what a ridiculous notion. On the contrary, he says, I would not have known sin. Or more literally, I would not have known what sin was.

I mean, what is really sin? See, there's a difference between what sin is and a person's concept of what might be wrong or right. We're talking about what sin is.

He said, I would have never known that without the law. Except through the law, he says. And then he gives an illustration or an example. And I personally think, because he uses the personal pronoun, I, I think he's speaking of himself.

He says, and I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said thou shalt not covet.

All right. So sin, or the law, rather, reveals the fact of sin.

Now, according to Paul, then, the purpose of the law is to tell us what is right and what is wrong according to a holy God.

[13:14] The Ten Commandments that God gave Moses so long ago that still are in effect today. Those Ten Commandments cause us to know what is right and what is wrong according to a holy God.

And this here is the truth of things. First, if left to ourselves. We would never, ever naturally think we are sinners.

Did you know that? Now, we've been most of the most of us have been believers so long we have forgotten this. And therefore, we don't think in this way or know this as we ought to know it about the unsaved.

But if left to ourselves, we would never, ever come to the place where we naturally think that we are sinners.

Do you believe that? It's true. Genesis 6, 5 says the Lord saw. This is right before he sent the flood.

[14:20] He said the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart. Now, get a hold of that phrase.

He saw man. And he saw that every, every single inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

That's a description of the unregenerate, unredeemed. That's a description of the lost. Do you think people today believe that to be true?

Romans 3. We can go back to a passage that we looked at a long time ago. Romans 3, verses 10 through 12. There is no one righteous. This is the declaration of God.

It's a quote from the Old Testament. There is no one righteous, not even one. Not even one. There is no one who understands.

[15:25] No one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have all, together all, become worthless. There is no one who does good.

No one. Not even one. That's what Paul said. I didn't add that. That's exactly how he put it. No one. Not even one. Who does good.

Now, listen. Who in our culture today really believes the truth conveyed by those two passages of Scripture? And to suggest such a thing will, I tell you, it'll bring something up inside of people, you know, and the objection and the offense of that, that we would ever suggest.

That you are utterly, utterly sinful. No one would believe that. No one would agree with that.

And that's the point. If left to ourselves, we would never naturally think that we are sinners. Not in the way that the Bible says we are sinners.

[16:34] Now, we might think we've done wrong. And so that's the second thing. Even when we are able, a person is able, to come to the conclusion and to admit that, you know, that we have done bad things.

We are never able, if left to ourselves, to recognize those bad things as sin. You see, there's a difference in a person's way of thinking about what's a bad thing and what is sin.

We don't equate the two. Not in our unredeemed, prior to conversion, prior to salvation. We don't see the same thing. We must be shown then, and this enters the importance of the law.

We must be shown that those bad things we do, wrong things we do, are really transgressions of God's holy law. We must be shown that.

See, it's not enough to have a sense of right and wrong. I mean, most people you meet have a sense of that. As I said last week, there is the natural law that's in all of us. And we have some concept, some sense of what is right and what is wrong.

[17:51] I mean, we don't have to have the commandment that says, thou shalt not murder, to know in our own hearts, even if we're unsaved, to know that murder is wrong. But just having a sense of right and wrong is not enough.

Most lost people have that. What is required is to have a sense of what sin really is, that it is an offense against the holy God.

Offense against Him. We might admit that we've sinned against a person and this person and that person and I've sinned against you or sinned or did wrong to you.

But the difference is coming to grips with the reality that all of our wrongness, all of our bad things we do, those things are all eternal offenses against a holy God.

That's the conclusion we must come to. And then Paul uses a personal illustration. As I said a moment ago, he said, I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said thou shalt not covet.

[19:06] I just wouldn't have known that. Now, Paul, by the way, and you know this by Paul's own testimony, he was well versed in the law, been brought up in the law.

He was, in a sense, a lawyer. He knew the law. In fact, he had known it since he was a child. And I'm sure for all those years, you know, he thought he was keeping all of those laws.

Apparently, at some point in his life, whether it was at his conversion, well, probably prior to his conversion, a conviction began to set into his heart.

And he's giving kind of a testimony about one particular law that he had broken. Covetousness. And I just kind of imagine, you know, that as Paul is learning the law and reconsidering the law, you know, he comes to the first commandment.

And the Bible says, no other gods have no other gods before me. And Paul says, no problem. I've got that one. And then the second commandment, no idols. Check that one off.

[20:06] I have no idols. Third commandment, don't take God's name in vain. And Paul says, I don't ever do that. Can you find yourself maybe making this same checklist?

Fourth commandment, keep the Sabbath. Well, the Jews love the Sabbath. Double check on that one, Paul would say. Fifth commandment, honor your father and mother. I always do that.

Sixth commandment, don't murder. Wouldn't think of it. Paul would say to himself, I can imagine.

Sixth commandment, don't commit adultery.

No way. No way. Eighth commandment, don't steal. I'm okay there. Never stolen anything. Ninth commandment, don't bear false witness. Sixth, check that one off.

I always tell the truth. And then he comes to the tenth commandment. Thou shalt not covet. And I'm just imagining, you know, what may have taken place in Paul's life.

[21:09] And then I add to that kind of the, well, the distinction. This tenth commandment is a little different than the others. At least in the way of thinking of an unredeemed person.

He comes to the tenth commandment. Thou shalt not covet. And in a sense, God says, gotcha. And Paul knew it.

Direct hit, right in the heart. Now, I don't know the substance of his sin of covetousness. But, you know, actually, Paul had likely broken all of the commandments. The point is not that that was the only one he broke.

He probably broke them all. Because, but you see, a person could rationalize. And here's the difference, kind of the difference between that tenth commandment. And I think maybe the point that Paul is making, I'm not sure.

[22 : 11] But there's a difference with that tenth one that you just can't get past. And it is this, that the other nine basically refer to outward behavior.

At least in kind of our fallen nature, the way we think, you know. That all those really apply to outward acts. Well, it really is not true.

But that's kind of our first take on those commandments. The nine commandments that come before this tenth one. That's just outward behavior. But, you know, this tenth one.

Different. And we might say, you know, well, I haven't shot anybody. So I'm not, I'm not guilty of committing murder. We might say, I haven't actually, you know, committed adultery.

I haven't committed the act with anyone. And so I haven't broken that commandment. And so we can kind of rationalize these, these and the other, the others of the nine.

[23 : 14] But you cannot rationalize the tenth commandment. Because it's dealing with what goes on in the heart. I think that's why Paul picked that one.

I don't know if this was his personal experience. Though he does use the word, the pronoun I. But I think he did know that you might be able to explain away the other nine.

But when you get to this one. This is in the heart. And so when Paul was finally confronted with the truth of the tenth commandment. Thou shalt not covet.

I think suddenly he realized, I covet all the time. I do it all the time. I want things. I want things that I shouldn't have.

I want things that I don't have. I'm greedy for things. I see what other people have and I want what they have. And all that that tenth commandment means.

[24 : 15] I believe it means even more than that. I think Paul later understood the link between all the commandments. That to break one is to break them all.

In fact, you might remember that Paul wrote in Colossians 3.5. He says, Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth. Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire.

And then he added this one. Covetousness. But then he adds this to that. Covetousness, which is idolatry. So he certainly broke in that commandment as well.

All right. So the law reveals the fact of sin. Second, the law reveals the power of sin. The power of sin. Verse 8, 9 and 10.

Actually, we'll put all those together. But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment. It produced something in me. He said, produced.

[25 : 17] And this is astounding. All manner of evil desire. That's what it produced in me. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

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.

Now, there's a lot that could be said about that passage. But I want you to pay attention to two concepts, two phrases. In verse 8, at least in this translation, it says, sin taking opportunity.

Taking opportunity. That's actually one word in the Greek language. Another translation has it, sin seizing the opportunity. And in verse 9, this phrase, sin revived.

Or sin sprang to life. Now, these two words that he uses here are really military terms.

[26 : 27] It's kind of interesting. And so, you know, it's the picture of an army or a group of soldiers or an enemy hiding and waiting to ambush you.

And to capture you. That's the idea here. It's the image here that he's conveying. So, Paul says, when I saw the law for what it really says.

And when I realized what it said. Suddenly, sin. Which was already within me. See, the sin is not in the law.

The sin is already in me. That sin sprang to life and ambushed me. That's the idea. The law says, for example, don't covet.

And that's all I want to do. That's what Paul is saying. He says, don't do it. And that's all I want to do. Or the law says, don't do such and such. And that's exactly what I want to do.

[27:28] All the time. Have you noticed that to be true? Don't look so pious. So religious. And we really understand this reality.

And we kind of operate on the. According to this reality. Especially with parents. We like to use reverse psychology. And so sometimes, you know, if we don't want our kids to do a certain thing. We tell them to do it. And we're just sure they won't. That doesn't work all the time. I wouldn't recommend that. Any parent. Not here. But. But it is recognizing that kind of reality. In the human heart. God says, don't, don't, don't, don't, don't. And he says it for our good. But when we hear the word don't. What do we want to do? We want to do. Do, do, do. And when we hear somebody say, do, do, do, do. There's something in us that says, I won't, I won't, I won't, I won't. Have you ever.

[28:29] Experienced that. Sure you have. Because that that is the bent. In our in our nature, our fallen nature, that's the bent towards sin that is in every one of us.

When you see. Just just kind of test your ear. When you see a sign on a fence that says wet paint, don't touch.

And if nobody's looking. Uh huh. I thought I'd get you there. Touch it.

Nobody touches. See if it's wet. But the sign says don't touch. Wet paint. We got to test it out.

Disobey it. When you see a sign that says don't walk on the grass.

What is it you really want to do? I want to set up a picnic right there by the sign. You know. I know I'm exaggerating. But maybe not.

[29:36] Have you ever, ever in your life seen a sign on a shop window? Do not throw rocks through the window. Have you ever seen a sign like that? What if business owners did that?

Put a sign up there. Don't throw a rock through this window. What's going to happen? You know what's going to happen. So, you know. Sin.

Or rather the law. Reveals. The power. Of sin. It's already in us. Number three. The law reveals the deceitfulness.

Of sin. Sin is deceitful. Verse 11. For sin. Taking occasion by the commandment. Deceived me. And by it.

Killed me. There are three ways. That sin. Deceives us. And these. These are just simple. I mean. You know these to be true.

[30:34] The first one is this. Sin. Promises what it can never deliver. And on the front end.

We're just convinced. Sometimes. That it's going to get us. What we want. Or what we think we want. Sin.

Deceives us in that way. Promises what it can never deliver. Sin says go ahead. It'll be fine. And maybe for a while it is. Sin says go ahead.

You'll enjoy it. And maybe for a season you do. But then comes. The payday. Sin says. You'll feel better.

Or you'll be fulfilled. Or you'll get this. Or you'll get that. And it never delivers. It's kind of like those. Beer commercials. A bunch of years ago now.

[31:29] In fact. As I look around. There might be some in here. Don't even remember these commercials. But they were Miller beer commercials. And I'm thinking of one particular commercial.

Where you know. These guys are out there. On the bass boat. Out in this beautiful lake. Beautiful scenery. And they're not fishing really. They're sitting there.

Hoisting up the suds. You know. The beer. And one of them says. It doesn't get any better than this. Remember those commercials?

It doesn't get any better than this. Am I the only one who remembers those commercials?

Remember those? And you know. The commercial is right. It doesn't get any better.

In fact. It doesn't even get that good. Does it? Sin. See. Deceives us. It convinces us. Or promises.

[32:28] What it can never deliver. Second. Sin. Convinces us. That what happens to others. Will never happen to us. Let's just say.

For sake of argument. That ten out of ten. Times. People get caught. When they sin. In fact. We don't have to say that. By way of argument. That's what the Bible says. Just be sure.

Your sin. Will find you out. Let's just say. Ten out of ten. Get caught. You know. When they sin. And yet. Sin. Convinces us.

That somehow. We're going to. Be different. We're going to be the exception. This time. You know. We know. That for two thousand years. People have committed.

This kind of sin. And all of them. Have suffered for it. But then. Sin says. You're going to be different. You're going to get away with it. When no one else has. That's the.

[33 : 27] Deception. Of sin. See. And third. Sin. Creates in us. A desire. For that. Which we know. Can only hurt us. We really know it. But it creates a desire for it. It's that little voice says. Go ahead. And we just stupidly go ahead.

Even though we know. That we're going to have to pay for it. Even though we know. That we're going to suffer for it. I think Eve is a good example. When Eve. Looked at the fruit. Of that tree. That forbidden tree. And she looked. And she saw that it was good. She saw that it was. You know. Good to touch. And good to taste.

And so forth. And so she took it. And she ate it. And guess what. We've been taking. And eating. Ever since. Ever since. She was deceived.

[34 : 21] And we are still deceived. We're no different. Even though we know. That every time. We eat. It will hurt us. Every time. That's the deceitfulness.

Of sin. One more. The law reveals. The fact of sin. The power of sin. And the deceitfulness. Of sin. And then forth. And finally. The law. Reveals. The sinfulness.

Of sin. The. And I might add a word. The utter sinfulness. Of sin. Verse 12. Therefore. The law. Is holy.

And this. By the way. Is. Paul's. Answer. To the original question. That is. The conclusion. He's been answering. It all the way through. But here is his kind of concluding statement.

And then he's going to go a little further. He says. Therefore. The law is holy. It's not sin. It's holy. And the commandment. Holy. And just. And good. Has then. He goes on.

[35 : 17] Has then. What is good. Speaking of the law. Become death to me. Certainly not. But sin. That it might appear sin. Was producing death in me.

Through what is good. That is the law. So. That sin. Now this is the phrase you need to get. So that sin. Through the commandment. Might become exceedingly sinful.

That's an interesting. Thought. Or. Truth. Exceedingly. Not just sinful. But exceedingly sinful. And see.

Verse 12. Again. The answer to the original question. The law is not sin. Rather. To the contrary. The law. Is holy. And righteous. And it's good. But the law. Is like a mirror.

It's a mirror. You've heard the expression. The mirror doesn't lie. Although I'm convinced. In some. Clothing stores. It does lie. For some reason. Somehow.

[36 : 17] But the concept. You know. We understand that. The mirror doesn't lie. And. Sometimes. A person. Who doesn't like. What he. Sees in the mirror. Or she sees in the mirror.

Will take. Off the shoe. Throw it at the mirror. And break the mirror. But. But the mirror. The problem isn't the mirror. Is it? The problem is. Me.

It's in me. Or. It's kind of like. The person who's sick. And goes to the doctor. And. The doctor. Gives an x-ray. And then the x-ray. Shows cancer.

And so. We begin to curse. The x-ray. Machine. But. It's not the fault of the x-ray machine. The machine didn't cause the cancer.

It just revealed what was already there. The law of God is a mirror. Then. A mirror of the soul. Law of God is like an x-ray.

[37 : 15] Of the soul. It brings to light. What is there. But. Paul seems to suggest here. That it brings to light. Much more than we thought was there.

Even. In fact. Here is the. Interesting. Thing. God gave his laws.

Ten commandments. And you can look it up in the Bible. And find it. And. In the space of. Of a chapter. Or two. We have all of God's commandments.

All right there. Just one. Two. Three. Four. Five. On down to ten. Very concise. There are the laws. Don't do this. Don't do that. Don't do this. Don't do that.

Ten commandments. And it's all right there. In a very small part. Portion of the scripture. And yet. All the books. In the world.

[38 : 11] Could not contain. A description. Or chronicle. The ways. Man. Has conceived. To break God's laws.

Think about. Going way beyond. Just the bare commandment. On into all kinds of ways. And. And. To conceive. Of. Of all. Manner of ways. To break God's laws. There seems to be an endless. Number of ways.

That we conceive of. In our hearts. And the law. Of God. Reveals. That. The. Utter sinfulness. Or as Paul put it.

The exceedingly. Sinful. Reality. Of. Of our hearts. Now. That compels.

[39 : 12] Us. Here's the wonder of it. And the. Glory of it. The law. Revealing all of those things. About our sin. Paul.

Was confronted by that. All of us in this room. At some point. Come face to face. With our own. Utter. Sinfulness.

And what did it do. Compelled us. To run to the cross. The only remedy. The only remedy. For our sin. The cross of Christ. Thank you.