

CHAPTER 12

LAW: GOOD & BAD

Often as a young boy, I would go with my father to pick up the mail. I remember the well-manicured, thick, green grass on both sides of the steps leading into the Post Office. It called to me: “Come and enjoy.” Apparently others had had the same thought for numerous signs were posted. They read, “Stay Off the Grass!” You know my next thought. Those signs became a signal to do just what they warned me not to do. Rules have a way of making us want to break them. As we will see later in this chapter, this is exactly what Paul came face-to-face with in his discussion in Romans 7.

Here’s a thought. If we just eliminated all the rules we could enjoy the grass or lots of other things covered under “Do Not _____!” Except, we would no doubt make a mess of everything including the lives of many others. That is always what happens when everyone does “what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6). Pretty much life would be all about “me,” about what I want. So are rules actually helpful for living in community with others and in fellowship with God? Could it be that the problem is our rebellious response rather than the rules themselves?

ESCAPE

Law in Perspective

Rules are not necessarily wrong or bad. The issue is the intent! While you may dispute the amount of taxes you pay to the government, Paul teaches that we are to be “in subjection to governing authorities” (Rom 13:1) for they are “a minister of God...for good” (v 4). As “servants of God” they provide services for the protection and wellbeing of its citizens, so we are to pay taxes (vv 6-7). There is a corresponding benefit to our responsibility to keep any rule.

When I attended Georgia Tech, they had a pesky rule in Atlanta. If you received three moving traffic violations within one year, you forfeited your driving license. After receiving my second violation within three months, it dawned on me that the privilege of driving would end with the next ticket. The local authorities intended to maintain safety on the streets and I needed to shape up if I wanted to drive.

Rules are also found in contracts. If not followed, the contract is voided. Living in Florida, I had my car windows tinted to reduce the impact from the summer heat. Prior to the actual work, the service adviser at the dealership said, “Don’t role down your car windows for four days after the tint is applied.” He went on to say that doing so would damage the tinting material and it would need to be replaced at my expense. Clearly getting the message, I followed his instructions.

You can think of the many rules your parents gave you. Don’t touch a hot burner on the stove. Don’t hit your brother. Get home by 11:30 pm. In each case the responsibility had a corresponding benefit. Keeping or not keeping the rule determined the gain or loss.

Laws in New Testament

Three laws should be carefully considered and distinguished in the New Testament (see chart 12-1). *First*, men have a *natural law* within that is governed by their conscience. While not having a law directly provided by God, they are aware instinctively of the principle of right and wrong (Rom 2:14-15). This formed inner law becomes the standard people use when passing judgment on themselves and

LAW: GOOD & BAD

12-1 LAWS in NEW TESTAMENT		
LAW	RECIPIENT	TEXT
Natural Law	All	Romans 2:14-15
Law of Moses	Israel	Exodus 20-23 Deuteronomy 4-26
Law of Christ	Christians	Galatians 6:2 James 1:25

on others. Nevertheless, this is not the law that should concern the Christian's walk.

Second, the *Mosaic Law* is the designated culprit in both Romans and Galatians. It is this yoke, the yoke of the Law Paul addressed concerning legalism.¹ The Law given to Moses at Mount Sinai was the written code of conduct for Israel. After leaving Egypt as a redeemed nation, evidenced by placing blood on their doorposts, God gave the Law to His chosen people. The Mosaic Law was never intended as a means of salvation (i.e., relationship with God).² Instead the Law was the way the nation could experience fellowship with God. Obedience to the Mosaic Law provided the path for Israel's communion, not union, with God. In Romans writing to believers, Paul taught "we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound" (7:6). Paul argued that the Mosaic code is no longer valid since Christ has come to provide a new way by the Spirit (Gal 3:19-25), a new way of living in fellowship with God. Because of this important change, he wrote, "If you are led (or walk) by the Spirit, you are not under Law" (5:18), at least not the Mosaic Law.

ESCAPE

While the Mosaic Law is no longer the basis for Christian living, a *third* law, the *law of Christ*, emerges in the New Testament. Paul addresses the “law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) and James called it the “law of liberty” (Jam 1:25; 2:12).³ Though not codified in the same manner as the law to Moses, nevertheless the substance of this law can be found throughout the New Testament. These are the instructions of Christ and the apostles given to the Church in order that believers may live in harmony with God and express the life of Christ to the world. In Christ’s instructions in the “Great Commission” at the end of His earthly ministry (Matt 28:19-20), His followers were to make disciples following the pattern He had set. Passing on what they had experienced to the next generation who were in turn to do the same, the process would continue until Christ returns. Notice that the disciple making involves “teaching them to observe [keep] all that I commanded you” (v 20). Obviously, being a follower of Christ necessitates knowing in order to keep His commands. As with any law, the benefit is only experienced if the commands of the law are kept.

Good and Bad Choices

After its introduction in the 1870s, the Colt .45 revolver became known as the “peacemaker.” Used by lawmen in the Wild West to keep the peace, it is known as “the gun that won the west.” While misused by some for villainous pursuits, this handgun served a good purpose in the hands of those protecting life. The same can be said for the rules and laws God gives to His people.

Adam and Eve

After creation, Adam was placed in the Garden “to cultivate [work] it and keep [guard] it” (Gen 2:5, 15). Those were his vocational responsibilities, the required *dos*. God told Adam the only thing that was off limits: “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (vv 16b-17). It’s day one for you on earth and you find yourself in the Garden. Someone says, “Good morning, I have some things for you to do and one thing

LAW: GOOD & BAD

not to do!” What would be your response? Out of gratitude for your existence and perfect environment you would gladly agree with the terms. At least that is how Adam responded.

What started so good in Genesis 2 now turns ugly in Genesis 3. Having been created as Adam’s companion, Eve had a conversation with the serpent. You remember how the exchange went. First, the serpent planted doubt in God’s goodness and loving-kindness. He implied that *limits were wrong*: “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall *not eat from any tree* of the garden’?” (v 3:1b, italics added). He then undermined her confidence in God’s trustworthiness. He hinted that God was holding something back and that *satisfaction was available* apart from God: “You surely will *not die!*” but “you will *be like God, knowing good and evil*” (vv 4b, 5b, italics added). Like an ad on TV: “You should have it!” “You deserve it!” “Just come and take it!” Consequently she ate the fruit and gave it “to her *husband with her*, and he ate” (v 6c, italics added). During her chat with the serpent, Adam, the “Guardian of the Garden,” sat by and agreed. She was deceived and chose the fruit; Adam, not deceived, deliberately chose Eve. Both failed to trust in God’s character.

Rules were given for their good, but once violated the women (v 16) and the man were judged (vv 17-19), and sent from the Garden (v 23). Choices transformed peace into hostility, forfeiting the intimacy they once experienced with God.

Nation of Israel

Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was based on faith by placing the lamb’s blood on their doorposts (Exod 12:13). God swept away the Egyptian forces by means of the sea as Israel crossed onto dry land. “When Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses” (14:31). They trusted in God, who through mighty power and loving-kindness delivered them.

Then God said to Israel,

5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the

ESCAPE

peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (19:5-6a).

Israel responded by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” (v 8b, cf. 24:3). The nation obligated itself to their Deliverer.⁴ Already possessing a relationship with God, He gives the Law to Israel so they might give witness to their special bond with Him. God provided a *summary* of the Mosaic Law in the Ten Commandments (20:3-17). These commandments explained the way fellowship between God and man was to be experienced. While the first four commandments reference the vertical association between man and God, the last six dealt with the horizontal between men.

A further *development* of the Law is found in Exodus 21–23 and again in Deuteronomy 4–26 at the second giving of the Law. In some 613 itemized stipulations, the Law laid out the way and means for worship and sacrifices, the rules for governance, and how His people were to live together in community. The Law included the course for rectifying wayward behavior, both for them individually as well as for the Nation, but it also warned of curses for failing to observe the commandments and statutes as opposed to blessings for keeping them (ch 28).

During the final week of Christ’s earthly ministry prior to His crucifixion, a religious leader came to test Jesus, asking for Him to provide clarity to the Mosaic Law (Matt 22:36-40). He asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” (v 36). You remember the response. Not one, but two commandments represent the *essence* of the Law. Jesus’ response takes us right back to Exodus 20. First, “You shall love...your God” (v 37) which corresponded to commandments 1 through 4 of the Ten Commandments, the vertical connection between man and God. Second, “You shall love our neighbor” (v 39) which coincided with the horizontal feature of the Law, commandments 5 through 10. Needless to say, the overriding principle of the Law is *love*, which is directed both toward God and toward others.

The Mosaic Law was established with the nation of Israel in order that they would be a witness to the world of God’s blessings. Disobedience resulted not only in the loss of fellowship with God but

LAW: GOOD & BAD

also a failure to demonstrate the purpose for which God had chosen them.

New Testament Church

The numerous commands throughout the New Testament gives specific dos and don'ts for the Christian life. Once again God's loving-kindness was manifest in sending His Son to provide the way of salvation by faith in Christ (Rom 3:21-26) and also how those who are now *righteous by faith shall live* in fellowship with Christ.⁵ In chapter 5, we discussed that Christians have two ways of walking (Rom 8:4), thinking (vv 5-8), and living (vv 12-13) with two different outcomes. In every case, the consequence of disobedience was lost fellowship. On the other hand, obedience lead to fullness of life in close companionship with Christ.

In Romans 8, Paul gave us the way to experience abundant living. In Romans 7, he shared the difficulty that he personally faced when seeing the Law through the wrong lens.

What Did Paul Know? And When Did He Know It?

Before we look at Paul's perspective concerning to the Law and the Christian life, we need to briefly review three major viewpoints used to address the Law in relation to the Christian life.

It is uncontested that the Mosaic Law, and arguably the law of liberty, shows God's character and will for His people.⁶ It is "holy" and represents that which is "holy and righteous and good" (Rom 7:12). In so doing, it exposes the "knowledge of sin" (3:20; 7:7). Nevertheless, there are a variety of ways how the Law is viewed.

Trivialized Law-Keeping

Proponents of this view correctly believe that Christians "are not under law" (6:14; cf. Heb 10:4a) and "were made to die to the Law" (Rom 7:4). They also rightly believe that the Mosaic Law was never the means of gaining salvation. Explaining their thought process a

ESCAPE

spokesman for this view wrote, “God didn’t give the Law because He believed that the people would keep it. He gave them the Law to prove that man cannot earn God’s blessings.”⁷ Continuing he said, “God blesses nobody on the basis of merit,”⁸ since “God’s blessings aren’t the result of my faithfulness, but because of Him.”⁹ Consequently, “God isn’t interested in what we can do for Him,” rather “He just wants us!”¹⁰ He desires a growing intimacy and fellowship with us and any action or work “should be the result of intimacy with Christ, not a *means* for achieving intimacy.”¹¹

The position of this trivializing view is, while understanding salvation is not by works but only through faith alone, that “many [Christians] seem to believe that the rules change *after* they are saved,” assuming “that keeping certain rules will help them grow in the Christian life.”¹² Consequently, these misinformed believers unfortunately focus on rules keeping, “trying to do something for God,”¹³ seeking to gain God’s acceptance and blessings.¹⁴ Nevertheless this pursuit for God’s blessings is legalism, since “the essence of legalism is the effort to gain God’s blessing by what we do.”¹⁵

Notice that the trivializing way of thinking is based on the belief that “the core of the Christian life doesn’t revolve around *doing*, but is grounded in *being*,” with the result that “godly action is the consequence of His life flowing from us.”¹⁶ His life emanates *through* the Christian, providing deliverance “from sin’s power”¹⁷ and producing good works *through* the believer by “His faithful empowerment within [the believer].”¹⁸ By necessity their position is that in order to experience the victorious Christian life, believers must “let go of self-sufficiency,”¹⁹ giving up their feeble self-efforts in trying to obey God, and just “let [Christ] do it *through* [them].”²⁰ As a result, “rules tend to take care of themselves”²¹ because God is the one taking care of the rules through the believer.

While intimacy with Christ should be reflected in the believer’s life, it should be evident in the believer’s behavior because of a proper focus on Christ. Since concentrating exclusively on rules leads to error, the solution isn’t to move to a “Let Go; Let God” understanding, which cannot be supported from Scripture. No doubt this view is popular and held by many since God is allegedly doing everything for the Christian.

LAW: GOOD & BAD

It, however, nullifies any commands as being applicable to and the responsibility of the believer. Nevertheless in several chapters of this book we discuss the biblical flaws integrated into this view: (1) the Spirit “causes” obedient living, (2) the Spirit produces obedience “through” the believer, (3) a “power of sin” perspective, (4) the lack of Christian responsibility to keep the commands in the New Testament, and (5) the Old Testament saint’s inability to obey the Law and be blessed.

Mosaic Law-Keeping

Contrasted to the trivializing view, God expected the Mosaic Law to be obeyed by His people. Nevertheless, there are four different views explaining the purpose of the Mosaic Law, whether for salvation or for sanctification.

Old Testament Law-Keeping

In Old Testament times, obeying the Law was Israel’s responsibility and obligation. Already having a saving relationship with God based on faith, the Mosaic Law spelled out specific ways individuals and the nation as a whole could experience fellowship with their Deliverer. As discussed above, blessing resulted from adherence to the Law and judgment was the result of ignoring or disobeying God. Sanctification, rather than salvation, was the purpose of the Mosaic Law.

Experiencing the blessings as the result of obedience to the Mosaic Law is clearly seen in the Scriptures. Leviticus 18:5 instructed, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them.” “May live” or *may experience enriched living* in this verse “is a promise of reward for obedience.”²² “‘Life’ in this sense is dependent on the faithful observance of the law.”²³ On the other hand, disobedience brought expulsion from the community of God’s people (v 29).²⁴ Rebelliousness resulted in loss of fellowship with God and with His covenant people.

Pharisaical Law-Keeping

Law keeping, particularly in the Gospels and Acts, encompassed

ESCAPE

a distorted, first-century Pharisaical version the Law, including added rules for clarity. They misused the Law to determine how a person obtained and maintained a relationship with God (salvation) as well as devising a barometer for evaluating a person's devotion to the Law (sanctification).

These are the religious leaders Christ addressed Matthew 23. They were the ones who had "seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (v 2) and who He call out as "hypocrites" (vv 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29) for teaching what was contrary to the Law. While imposing "heavy burdens" (v 4) on others, they "outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly [they] are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (v 28). Their position came center stage in Acts 15:1 regarding the way of salvation for the Gentiles. They taught, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Consequently, the Council at Jerusalem addressed this error and rectified the position for the Church, declaring that salvation was by grace through faith alone (vv 7-11).

Judaizer Law-Keeping

This is the issue addressed in the book of Galatians. When zealous Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem (2:11-14), they were insistent that Gentile Christians should embrace the Law in order to fully experience the Christian life.²⁵ Even Peter was caught up in the melee and separated himself from the Gentile Christians, fearing what the Judaizers would think if he continued to fellowship with them. That is when Paul confronted Peter regarding his inconsistency in "the truth of the gospel" (v 5).

In Acts 15, the Council at Jerusalem also centered their discussion on this subject. A second topic was raised by "some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed" (v 5). These were Jewish Christians whose concern for Gentile believers was not salvation. Rather they said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses" (v 5). They accepted the Gentiles in Galatia to be saved. Like the believing Pharisees in Jerusalem, the Judaizers or Jewish Christians who had created the confusion in Galatia expected all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, to embrace the Mosaic Law for Christian living.

LAW: GOOD & BAD

After coming to a conclusion, a letter was sent to Galatia with the Council's solution. Addressing the issue it read,

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: **29** that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell (Acts 15:28-29).

The Council confirmed that the Mosaic Law does not apply to Gentile Christians. Paul likewise affirmed that believers in Christ have "died to the Law" (Rom 7:4). It was settled.

But not for all. Jewish Christians, at least some of them, continued to live by the Mosaic Law. The accounts in Galatians and Acts 15 indicate that was the case. How does that work for some and not for all? The answer is found in appreciating the transitional circumstances of the first-century church. Even after Christ's return to the Father, the Jerusalem Church continued to meet at the Temple (Acts 2:46). Jewish Christians observed the Law in "expressing their Christian convictions in their lifestyle in ways compatible with Jewish tradition."²⁶ This is consistent with the discussions and conclusion of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Note, however, that their lifestyle should not necessarily be considered legalistic (see chapter 14). Nevertheless, legalism would result if keeping rules was necessary to gain God's favor.²⁷ That was the issue of concern for the Gentile believers in the book of Galatians.

Moral Law-Keeping

Moral law-keeping stems from the understanding that the Mosaic Law was composed of three major divisions: moral, civil, and ceremonial.²⁸ The civil related to the government of the nation, while the ceremonial addressed worship. Finally, the moral section primarily covered interrelationships between people. While agreeing that salvation is not earned by keeping the Law, the moral portion is assumed to continue to be the guideline for living the Christian life. As such the "moral" laws are the responsibility of the Christian to obey.

Those that hold this view must defend three theological problems. First, they must assume the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council as

ESCAPE

well as Paul's teaching that Christians "are not under law" (6:14) only apply to the civil and ceremonial portions of the Law. Second, since the Mosaic Law was given only to Israel, the Church must be presumed to replace Israel in the biblical timeline of history, which has critical implications affecting future events. All the Old Testament promises to Israel are seen as presently fulfilled in the Church (see Appendix B). Third, the "law of liberty" or "law of Christ" is thought to correspond to the "moral" law.

New Testament Law-Keeping

Having died to the Law, being released from the bondage of the Law (Rom 7:4, 6), it no longer has authority over Christians and they are not subject to it. The Law was given to Israel for living in harmony with God and in community, that they might make His name known to the unbelieving world, being a holy people set apart to Him. It was never entrusted to Israel as the means for salvation (Gal 3:21); rather the Mosaic Law laid out the basis for fellowship with God and between people within the nation. Applying only to Israel, Christians are not accountable to the Law. So the tension in Galatians and Romans regarding Christian obedience to the Mosaic Law needs clarification.

First, though believers are "freed from sin" *positionally* in Christ (Rom 6:7, 18), that freedom can be *potentially* nullified in their everyday life if they sin (v 6, 20). That was exactly why Paul wrote to believers, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (v 12). The same was true for the Mosaic Law. Christians have been "released from the Law" (7:6), but can choose to place themselves under Law. Isn't this precisely what Paul did in Romans 7:15-24. His behavior did not match his position, leading to frustration and defeat. This was the same problem in Galatians 2, when Paul confronted Peter.

Second, while the Mosaic Law brought the "knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20), its purpose was *not* "to lead us to Christ" (Gal 3:24, NASB). However, that is the usual implication in the translation of Galatians 3:24: "The Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*" (NASB, and similarly in NIV and NKJV). Disputing that interpretation, an author correctly addressing the context wrote,

LAW: GOOD & BAD

Temporal statements surround v. 24: “before faith came” (v. 23); “now that faith has come” (v. 25). These make it likely that εἰς [preposition preceding “Christ” translated by *to lead us to* NASB] in v. 24 also has a temporal meaning; “the law was our custodian *until* Christ came” (RSV, italics his).²⁹

He therefore correctly concluded,

Galatians 3:24, then, is asserting that the Mosaic law functioned among the people of Israel to direct their behavior *until* the time of their maturity, when the promised Messiah would be revealed (cf. Gal. 4:1-7) (italics added).³⁰

The temporary nature of the Law, being valid only “until” Christ’s first coming, invalidates any Mosaic law-keeping view presented above. The Mosaic Law is no longer applicable for believers in Christ.

Third, with Jesus’ coming the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2) or “law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12) replaces what was given to Israel. Christ and the Apostles gave instructions from God for believers. While not in a list-like format as in the Law, the law of liberty is delineated in the many commands throughout the New Testament. Many of the laws in the Mosaic code are also included in the law of liberty. This would naturally be anticipated since they come from the same source. In fact, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. Only the fourth, “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” is excluded, as would also be expected.

Fourth, as with the Mosaic Law, God’s approval comes from obedience to the law of liberty. Vividly illustrating the example of serving others when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:4-16), He said, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (v 17). Doing or obeying the will of God leads to blessing. Likewise, James wrote,

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does (Jam 1:25).

ESCAPE

The law of liberty or freedom rightly followed and consistently embraced brings blessings. On the other hand, blessings vanish and fellowship ceases to exist when we decide to do it our way.

What Paul Knew! And When He Knew It!

Looking at Paul's life as a Jewish Christian, Romans 7 may seem disturbing since the Apostle himself wrote, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (v 24).³¹ If Paul had a struggle living the Christian life, what should we expect? That is exactly why we need to review the context of Romans 7. Why did he write those words?

The book of Romans flows from the introduction, with the *theme* "the righteous by faith shall live" (1:1-17), to receiving God's disapproval and judgment (1:18-3:20), to obtaining righteousness by faith (3:21-5:11), and then to experiencing righteous living (5:12-8:39). The short version: introduction, man's problem, God's solution (eternal life), and man's potential (abundant life). In the fourth section addressing the opportunity for believers to live life to the fullest, Romans 6 lays out the argument that Christians are no longer under the bondage of sin (vv 2, 6, 11, 18, 22). Nevertheless, having been freed from sin, they can again choose to be under its sway (vv 6; 16). Romans 7 stated that Christians are not bound the Mosaic Law (vv 3, 4, 6); yet, they can place themselves under its authority (vv 9-11, 14, 19-20, 23).

Galatians 5 is the parallel account to Romans 6-8, with both passages addressing the believer's "freedom in Christ." "It was for freedom that Christ set us free" (Gal 5:1). The major topics in both accounts are "sin" and "Law." Addressing sin Paul penned, "*Do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh" (v 13). To give "an opportunity for the flesh" or sin is to be captive to sin, leading to *libertinism*, unrestricted liberty or lawlessness (cf. 1 John 3:4).³² On the other hand, choosing *legalism* is to be "subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1) and being "under obligation to keep the whole Law" (v 3). Not only do both Romans and Galatians address fleshly desires/libertinism and Law/legalism, but also interestingly both state God's remedy. The solution depends on the Christian's positive choice to

LAW: GOOD & BAD

“walk with respect to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16). The full answer is discussed in chapter 13.

In this chapter our focus is what did Paul know when his rollercoaster experience took place in Romans 7? Coming from his pharisaical heritage (cf. Phil 3:5-6), he would naturally be influenced by his background. Nevertheless, from the content of Romans and Galatians it is obvious that Paul understood and taught that the Mosaic Law was inadequate for both justification and Christian living. That was his point in each of his letters. So why was Paul himself struggling with the Law in Romans 7:7-25?

I suggest that the key is not found in the assumption that Paul was an unbeliever at that point in time. Rather Paul was young in his faith and his personal illustration sets forth the dilemma when confronted by the Law without a clear understanding of Christian living. Consider Paul’s words in verses 7-11:

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.

Being made aware of sin by the Law (v 7), which uses every opportunity to overtake the believer (vv 8, 11), can result in sinful behavior and nullify fellowship with Christ (vv 10-11). In verse 10, “death” does not refer to eternal separation from God, rather frustration and defeat.

At the time of Paul’s conversion, he was given an inner person, with an illumined mind and godly human spirit, enabling him to respond to God.³³ Nevertheless, the inner person must be continually renewed and developed (cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 4:16;

ESCAPE

Col 3:10). The believer's inclination to sin is still intact. As a new believer not knowing how to experience a closer walk with Christ, Paul's struggle illustrated that his focus on the Law encouraged sinful enticements that in turn ended in bad decisions and behavior. Even though "at the level of his innermost self (his 'inward man'), [Paul] is in complete harmony with God's will" (cf. Rom 7:17, 22),³⁴ his inclination to sin and unwise choices result in doing what his inner person did not want to do. Paul wrote, "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want" (v 19; cf. 15, 17, 20). "Paul found the situation he described intolerable. The total disconnect between his inward, holy desires and the impulses/actions of his physical body left him 'wretched'" (v 24).³⁵

Using his personal example, Paul taught that when the letter of the Mosaic Law, or any rule, becomes the predominate focus and the basis of obedience, the intended spirit of that law is the casualty. The consequence for the Christian is disaster.

Law Needs Perspective

Over the years our family has had a dog or two. These have been the fluffy, in-door pets—the kind that want to sit in your lap and follow you around. We supplied all their needs. They didn't lack for food, water, exercise, a warm place to sleep, medical care, grooming, or personal attention. In reality they had no responsibilities.

When they wanted to go outside, there was a fence that limited how far they could go. The fence squelched their desire to roam and explore. Sometimes the fence and freedom became their complete focus. Yet, it was purposefully erected to keep them from the postman, the dog next door, and the cars in the street. However, this barrier didn't remind them of the people who lovingly had it installed for their safety. Rather it was a constant reminder that it limited their ability to experience life to the fullest, at least in their dog mind.

Adam and Eve probably felt the same way about boundaries. So did Paul. And so can we if we keep our focus on the fence and not on our Provider and Protector. In our quest to take hold of life on our own

LAW: GOOD & BAD

terms, we can often lose sight of the Rule-maker's love and tender heart in providing the way to full and abundant living.

Remember, a rule isn't necessarily wrong or bad.
The issue is the intent and how you respond!

