

The Law and The Flesh

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[0 : 0 0] You guys, if you have your Bibles with you, then I want to encourage you to open up your Bibles to the book of Romans.

We are in Romans chapter 7 this morning. We have been for a couple of weeks now. And we are going to cover more ground than we usually cover this morning. We are going to begin in verse 13 and read all the way down to the end of Romans chapter 7, verse 25.

I know it is unusual for us to cover more than three or four verses at a time, but we are covering this passage because you need to see it all together. There is no really effective way to break down these verses into smaller units.

And so we are going to read this entire passage this morning and pray that God will give us insight. So you guys, if you found your place in Romans 7, I want to ask you to stand as we read together. Verse 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.

[1 : 1 7] For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh.

For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now, if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law, waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

[2 : 3 9] Father, we give you great thanks for this word from the Apostle Paul. And we ask this morning that you would sanctify us and draw us nearer through it.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I'm not sure if you all are aware of it, because as a church we don't typically follow what is often known as the church calendar.

Many churches do, and so they have a lot of days that they mark down on the calendar, a lot of holidays that we don't really make a big deal of. We don't often make mention of. We recognize Easter, of course, on Easter Sunday, and normally Palm Sunday, the Sunday before that.

We, of course, at Christmastime pause to consider the birth of Christ. We have added our own Reformation Day at the end of October to that church calendar. But we typically, as the Baptist churches, as is typical of most Baptist churches, we don't recognize all the days that are put down in the church calendar.

But if you come from a background in which, if you come from a tradition in which you recognize those, then you might be aware that today is actually Pentecost Sunday. Today is marked on the Christian calendar as the day in which we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which is recorded for us in Acts chapter 2.

[4 : 01] The prophets of the Old Testament had promised centuries before that there would be a time in which God would pour out His Spirit upon all of His people.

In fact, the prophet Joel speaks of a time when the Spirit would be poured out on men and women, slave and free, that all God's people would receive the Spirit. And yet, for centuries, Israel waited for that promise to be fulfilled.

Oh, there were significant individuals in the history of Israel that were filled with God's Spirit. So you think of the prophets, many of them. You think of some of the kings of Israel. Or you think of the judges from the book of Judges like Samson or Samuel or Gideon, men upon whom the Spirit came and led them as they led Israel.

But we do not see in the Old Testament all Israel receiving the Spirit, every member of the covenant people being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What we see is a promise of a day to come when all of God's people would be indwelt by the Spirit.

And that promise, the New Testament tells us, was fulfilled in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon Christ's disciples.

[5 : 14] They began to preach the gospel in languages they had never spoken. In subsequent days and weeks and months, they began to perform miracles that were similar to the miracles that Christ performed in His earthly ministry.

And we see a record in the book of Acts of the early days of the filling of all of God's people with the Spirit of God. But throughout the entire church age, throughout the entire period that we refer to the New Covenant period, as opposed to the Old Covenant period of the Old Testament before the coming of Christ, throughout the entire church age, we see in Scripture that all of Jesus' followers are, in fact, filled with and dwelt by the Holy Spirit.

And that's a significant difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. But it's more important, not simply for understanding the ways in which various epics of time relate to one another in the Old Testament.

It's significant for us in understanding how do we, as followers of Christ, go about becoming righteous and holy people in our everyday lives.

Paul argues in Romans 7 and Romans 8 that the means by which we can actually produce righteousness in our own lives, the means by which we might actually walk in righteous deeds and holiness, is not through our own strength.

[6 : 33] And even more importantly, Paul says, It is not through attempting to obey the law of Moses, but rather it is directly through the power of the Holy Spirit who indwells now all of God's people.

And that's significant because Paul, throughout the book of Romans, has been teaching us that we don't get right with God. We're not declared righteous by God and therefore saved and rescued from hell by the acts of righteousness that we perform.

We're not justified by obeying the law of Moses, so that Paul has to deal with objections to that teaching. Well, Paul, if you're saying that we're saved by grace and not by our works that we perform in obedience to the law, then why would we not respond by continuing to live sinful lives?

If our obedience doesn't contribute to our standing before you on Judgment Day, then why should we have any obedience whatsoever? And Paul begins to answer that objection as we have seen at the very beginning of chapter 6 of Romans.

And in chapter 6, he provides part 1 of his answer to the question, How can Christians who are saved by grace actually become righteous people? In fact, how is it guaranteed that those who have been saved by grace through faith will in fact increase in righteousness and holiness throughout their life?

[7 : 57] And part 1 of the answer Paul gives us in Romans chapter 6 is that if we have trusted in Christ, then we have been united to Christ by faith, and we have died with Christ, and therefore by dying with Christ, we have died to sin, Paul says.

Paul says that in his death, Jesus was not only conquering the penalty of sin that is owed to us, that is, he was not only receiving the wrath of God that we deserve, and conquering the punishing power of sin through the law, but Christ was also taking away the power of sin to hold us in bondage.

So that we died with Christ, and we were set free from the power of sin, so that Paul was able to say in Romans chapter 6, that sin shall not have dominion over you.

That's guaranteed. Ultimately, in the life of a Christian, we will see increasing victory over sin, because Christ has won that victory for us on the cross.

Not one merely our release from the punishment we deserve, but one our release from the power the sin holds over us in our everyday lives. But that's only half of the answer.

[9 : 07] If you leave it there, if you say the power of sin, the ruling and reigning power of sin over our lives as fallen people has been broken by Christ, then you have only dealt with half the issue.

Because now we know we're set free from sin, but how do we go about actually becoming righteous people? In other words, that's the negative aspect, no longer under the power of sin, but where is the positive aspect?

How can we, as Paul says in Romans 6, how do we actually become slaves of righteousness and slaves of God? What is it about God's work in saving us that not only frees us from the enslaving power of sin, but also enslaves us to the righteousness of God worked out in our lives?

And part two of that answer is provided for us primarily in Romans chapter 8, but it's given to us at the beginning of Romans chapter 7. And the answer is that we now have the Spirit of God living within us.

In fact, take a look back up toward the beginning of chapter 7, where Paul contrasts two approaches to righteous living.

[10 : 17] He says in verse 5, While we were living in the flesh, so before we were Christians, before we were followers of Christ, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

But now that we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we may serve in a new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. So the two ways to practical righteousness in our lives that Paul contrasts here are the letter that is the written code, obedience to the law of Moses, seeking by our own strength and power to actually obey all of those commandments, or on the other hand, he says that we might serve God in another way.

We might serve God through the Spirit or by the power that the Holy Spirit supplies. And in fact, he tells us that the attempt to achieve righteousness by obeying the law, by checking off all the boxes on all the various commandments given to us through Moses, will only lead not to life, not to righteousness, but will only lead to death.

Paul says it bears the fruit of death. So that's not a way that's open to us as fallen sinful people. It was open to Adam before he ate the fruit. Adam could have simply obeyed God's command, maintained the life that he had, and lived forever in that state, we must assume.

But it's not a way that's open to people who come into the world already dead in trespasses and sins. With a fallen sinful nature, we don't possess the ability to perfectly obey the law of God.

[11 : 58] Therefore, that's not a means to life, not a means to eternal life, and not a means to the life of righteousness that we desire to live in this world now. That way is cut off from us, so we are left now with only one way, and that is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And Paul tells us at the beginning of Romans chapter 8 exactly how that works. Turn over a page or so in your Bibles where Paul says in verse 2 of Romans 8 that the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

He says, because God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemns sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

So now that's practical righteousness fulfilled in us. How? Those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. There is a new way to righteousness, practical, everyday righteousness.

It is not the way of merely checking off all the boxes that we find in the law of Moses. We have seen in past weeks, I encourage you to go back and listen to the sermons online, we have seen that the law does have a role to play in the Christian life.

[13 : 18] It has a teaching function for us, but the primary aim of the Christian life in terms of living in a holy way is that we are led by the Spirit into the fulfilling of the commandment of love.

Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the means now, the Spirit making us into loving people who obey those commands, that is the means now of practical righteousness in the life of a follower of Jesus.

In Romans chapter 7 and the first 17 verses of chapter 8 play out like an extended description of those two ways of trying to be a righteous person.

So we see in verse 6 of Romans chapter 7 the two ways contrasted briefly. There is the way of the law which bears the fruit of death in the lives of fallen people or there is the way of the Spirit.

You can serve God in the Spirit or you can serve God by trying to obey the law. Those are the two options. One is cut off, we know, but what happens if you do attempt to do things that way?

[14 : 22] What would happen if you did attempt to be a righteous person simply by obeying the details of the law of Moses? Well, the rest of chapter 7 is devoted to showing us what that would actually look like.

And then we turn a major corner when we get to chapter 8 and in chapter 8 Paul begins to unfold what it looks like to pursue righteousness through or by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so we spent last week looking and seeing in the middle of chapter 7 what the law actually does in the life of a sinful fallen person.

Real quickly in review, take a look at the middle of chapter 7. Paul says, first off, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. So he says the law has a positive function of showing us what sin is.

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

[15 : 27] So here's the problem with attempting to become a righteous and holy person on the basis of obeying the law. You and I are fallen. We are sinful. And the law, far from motivating us to be righteous, does just the opposite.

And the law in fallen sinful people actually pushes us further toward sin. And Paul says that there's a purpose in all of this.

There's a reason that God gave the law. He says nothing's wrong with the law. In verse 12 he says the law is holy and righteous and good. But God had a reason for giving the law through Moses to Israel without giving them the Spirit and therefore the ability to obey it.

There was a reason for that. He tells us in verse 13 exactly what it is. The death which is good. That's the law of Moses. The death which is good then bring death to me.

By no means. It was sin producing in 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.

[16 : 34] So the purpose of God giving us the law even though He knows we cannot obey it and even though He knows it will in fact cause us to become even more sinful is very clear here.

It is twofold. First of all so that sin might be shown to be sin so you can see it for what it really is and then secondly so that through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond all measure.

to exacerbate the problem so that we see just how big our problem is. You see we tend to think that oh sure we're sinful.

Yes we all make mistakes. Yes we all stumble at times. But that's not the defining characteristic of who I am is it? I mean surely there are better things about me.

Surely that's just a flaw that we all have that can be overcome by placing things on the other side of the scale. Paul says no. No in fact your sinfulness your fallenness is so great that even when you come into contact with a good and holy and righteous law that law only makes you more sinful.

[17 : 47] And Paul goes further and he says that's what God wanted to do. Because God wanted to show you He wanted to show us all exactly how bad the problem is so that sin might become sinful beyond measure and our eyes are open to just how futile our situation is apart from Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now verse 13 actually serves as sort of a bridge between verses 7 through 12 in which Paul tells us what the law does in the life of non-Christians and verses 14 through 25.

but before we can actually begin to look at verses 14 through 25 this morning we have to sort of chase a rabbit here. We have to chase a rabbit because there are two varying interpretations!

of the second half of Romans chapter 7 and depending upon which interpretation you follow which one you find to be more convincing that will determine how you read this entire passage.

So let me just as briefly as I'm able to outline what these two positions are and what the arguments in favor of them are because there are some who would argue that Romans 7 14 through 25 are Paul's description of a Christian's struggle with sin.

[19 : 11] There are others who would argue that verses 14 through 25 of Romans 7 is Paul continuing from the previous verses to show what the life of a non-Christian looks like when it comes into contact with the law.

So the issue now before us is alright listen carefully is Romans 7 14 through 25 describing a Christian's struggle with sin or is Romans 7 14 through 25 describing a non-Christian that is someone who's not yet trusted in Christ is it describing their struggle with the flesh and sin and the law.

Let me show you why this is not quite as simple an issue as you might initially assume it to be. I'll try to boil down the arguments for each of you to their most basic components.

So first let me show you the arguments in favor of taking this passage as describing a non-Christian alright because there are statements in here that are very difficult especially in light of Romans 6 they are very difficult to square with what Paul has said about the nature of a person who has been saved by Christ who has died to the law who has died to sin and is no longer under sin there are some statements in here that are very difficult to square with someone who is a Christian.

Take a look at the passage I'll show you start in verse 14 Paul describes himself as being of the flesh and sold under sin.

[20 : 46] Well Paul has said in Romans chapter 6 that we have died to sin so in what sense are we now sold under sin? Paul has said that we are no longer slaves of sin and yet this language indicates being sold into slavery to someone.

So the question is how can Paul say in Romans 6 that we are free from the power of sin sin is no longer our slave master and then if he is describing the life of a Christian how can he say here in chapter 7 that a Christian is sold into slavery under sin?

It is very difficult to square. There are more statements though I am of the flesh and then he goes down to verse 17 he says in verse 17 that sin dwells in me and then he says also that there is nothing good dwells in me in verse 18 and then at the end of verse 18 that though he knows the law he says he doesn't have the ability to carry out what the law says which sounds very much like Paul's description of lost people in chapter 8 in fact turn over to chapter 8 real quickly where Paul describes those who do not know Christ he talks about them as those who are in the flesh verse 7 the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God for it does not submit to God's law indeed it cannot those who are in the flesh cannot please God and so the argument is here Paul says in Romans 8 that it's lost people it's people in the flesh who can't please God so therefore when he says in Romans 7 that we don't have the ability to carry out obedience to the law it must be describing non-Christians and then moving further on

Paul says two more times in verse 20 that sin dwells within me and then he says in verse 23 that sin dwells in his members and in fact that he has become captive to the law of sin again slave language used to describe Paul's condition so if in fact Paul is saying that he is a slave to sin that he is of the flesh that sin dwells within him and that he cannot obey the law how can it be that he is describing his life as a Christian if the enslaving power of sin has been broken in his life those are the primary arguments in favor of taking this passage as describing Paul's life before he became a Christian and I think they are pretty strong arguments but I think there are equally strong arguments on the other side that is the view that says no Paul is here now arguing and showing what his life as a follower of Christ looks like he is showing his present struggle with sin in his life and I will put these under two basic categories number one which is the easiest for us all to see is that Paul switches between verses 7 through 11 and now in verse 14

Paul switches from using the past tense to the present tense you can look down and see it fairly easily in your Bible Paul in verse 7 using the past tense if it had not been for the law I would not have known sin or verse 9 I was once alive apart from the law but when the commandment came sin came alive and I died verse 10 the commandment promised life proved to be death for me so this is all past tense in these verses but suddenly in verse 14 we switch to the present tense look down at verse 14 for we know that the law is spiritual but I am of flesh sold under sin verse 15 I do not understand my own actions and on and on throughout the passage it goes present tense all the way to the end of this chapter and so the first argument for taking this as Paul describing his life as a Christian is to say that it's in verses 7 through 11 that Paul describes his pre-conversion state in the past tense he switches to the present tense now so that he can show us what he's like in the present that's a pretty powerful argument for understanding this passage to be a reference to Paul's experience as a

[24 : 57] Christian it's present tense so it must describe Paul's present experience of course those on the other side would point out that there are many cases in the New Testament in which you see present tense verbs used to describe events that take place in the past weakening that argument slightly but nevertheless it's not something that we should just put on the back shelf now the second category is similar to the descriptions I gave the arguments I gave you in favor of taking this to describe Paul's pre-Christian life and that is there are statements made in this passage a handful of them that are very difficult to square with the life of a non-Christian for instance in verse 16 Paul confesses he says I agree with the law that it is good and so many would say it doesn't seem like a non-Christian would say that the law is good and Paul's saying I agree the law is good this sounds like a Christian talking and then he says in verse 18 though he's already said that nothing good dwells in me he qualifies it by saying that is in my flesh and so many would say yes Paul says some things that sound like he's talking about a non-Christian but he qualifies them by saying that is in my flesh he's saying there's more to it than meets the eye initially and then he says that he has a desire to do what is right in verse 18 and many would say do non-Christians have any desires to do what is right do they and then finally what I think may be the most powerful argument in this entire passage for taking this as referencing Paul's present life as a

Christian is what he says in verse 22 he says for I delight in the law of God in my inner being so that many interpreters of this passage would say how could Paul describe himself prior to becoming a Christian as someone who delights in God's law so there we have it what I think are strong arguments in favor saying this passage is Paul continuing to describe his life before he became a Christian and therefore continuing to describe what happens when a fleshly lost person comes into contact with the law and then there are strong arguments saying no Paul switches gears at verse 14 and he begins to describe his life and his struggle with sin as a Christian so which is it well if you're just going to tally up the names of people great Christian thinkers and great preachers and great theologians that won't solve your problem because there are great minds on either side of this debate so that currently today you have

John Piper you can go online encourage you to listen to his series through Romans he spent I think five sermons on just these verses you're getting one so don't assume I'm taking forever to go through Romans he took five sermons to go through these verses we're doing it in one all right and he argues extensively for taking this passage as a reference to the Christian life and so other great minds in the past John Calvin John Owen it seems like most of the Johns are aligned with saying that this passage is about Christians not about non-Christians but then of course there are others on the other side there's John Wesley there's another John there's someone who's on the other side of the argument there are those like Augustine who began earlier in his life as he commented on this passage and he argued at one time that this was about non-Christians and then later on he changed his mind and he said it was about Christians so there are those great minds that we find flopping flip-flopping back and forth and I find myself this morning or have over the last couple of weeks as I have wrestled with this second half of chapter seven I find myself much like Augustine changing my position today to what I once held before about this passage in fact I once preached a sermon arguing for the exact opposite of what I think is the meaning of this passage this morning it happens all right God continues to sharpen us and change us so that today I would argue and I believe that this passage is talking about is continuing to talk about Paul's life prior to coming to Christ I think that verses 14 through 25 are continuing Paul's description of what happens when a person in the flesh a person who's not yet trusted in Christ tries to produce their own obedience by the letter now if I say that there are equally strong arguments within the passage for both views why am I now today tending towards that interpretation of the passage why have I changed it if five six I can't remember how long ago five or six years ago I preached a sermon arguing that this was about a Christian experience what has changed have the commentaries changed no I'm looking at the same commentaries now as I did five or six years ago I don't have any new ones on my shelf from then what has changed what has changed my mind and I'll tell you this is what it is that this time this sermon comes in the context of an entire series through Romans and I'm confronting now the second half of Romans chapter 7 as someone who has spent significant time dealing with Romans chapter 6 and the beginning of Romans chapter 7 and who's already begun to look ahead and study Romans chapter 8 so this time I am more aware of the context the broader context in which this passage falls and for in my mind the deciding factor between these two interpretations is the broader context of Romans 6 7 and 8 so let me just briefly try to show you without going into all of the reasons from the context but let me briefly try to show you why I think that in these verses Paul is describing his experience before he came to Christ then we'll quickly walk through the verses themselves see what Paul says but my main reason is because as I've said several times over the last couple of weeks in Romans chapter 7 I believe that verses 5 and 6 of

Romans chapter 7 provide for us an outline of everything from Romans 7 7 all the way to Romans 8 verse 17 all right I think especially verse 6 provides for us a snapshot of everything that's to come so that in my view the rest of Romans chapter 7 verse 7 all the way down through verse 25 are Paul's unpacking of what it means to try to serve God in the old way of the written code or an unpacking of what Paul means when he says in verse 5 while we were in the flesh our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death he's unpacking those kinds of statements how does that work how does a good holy righteous law how does sin use it to create death in us how can that happen and what does it look like when a person a fleshly person attempts to have be a holy and righteous person by obeying

God's law I think Romans the rest of Romans 7 is all written by Paul to give us a picture of that and then Romans 8 turns the corner therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ and Paul goes on through the first 17 verses of Romans chapter 8 to describe for us what it looks like for those who are in Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to pursue righteousness and in fact fulfill the law through the power of the Holy Spirit within them so that we have Romans chapter 7 verses 5 and 6 explained for us Romans 7 explains life in the flesh when it comes into contact with the law Romans 8 describes for us life in the spirit and how through the spirit and the law is fulfilled in the lives of God's people so that being said for me the context Rome of Romans chapter 7 for me the bigger picture of this passage causes me to lean toward taking the second half of Romans 7 as continuing to describe life in the flesh that is life apart from faith in Jesus now if I haven't lost you guys just yet let's actually get into our verses really quickly with the time that we have left and see Paul's description of a person who is not yet trusted in Christ and yet who comes into contact with God's law let's see this all right diving back in verse 13 tells us that the point of

[33 : 53] God giving the law was so that through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond measure in verse 14 begins with the word for in other words now here's how it happens here's how sin through the law becomes sinful beyond measure you want to know how that process works here it is Paul says because or for we know the law is spiritual he just said that holy righteous and good we know that but I am of the flesh I am sold under sin so he's continuing to highlight the fact that the problem is not with God's law the problem is with us the problem is with us lost people apart from Jesus and apart from the power of the spirit we're fleshly people and we've seen throughout Romans 6 and 7 that the flesh for Paul does not merely refer to our skin and bones the flesh for Paul refers to our fallen sinful nature so Paul says the law is spiritual yes but I'm not I'm fleshly I'm fallen I'm sinful I'm sold as a slave under sin and as a slave of sin something happens when I come into contact with God's law verse 15 for I do not understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing that I hate he reiterates that in verse 19 for I do not do the good that I want but the evil that I do not want is what I keep on doing

Paul says I have I've come into contact with the law I've learned the law I've heard its commandments and I agree you should not murder people you should not lie you should not commit adultery children should honor their mothers and fathers we shouldn't have idols we should worship only God I agree that we should not covet he agrees with the law it's good it's spiritual he wants to be a person who obeys the law but he finds that because he's sold under sin and because he's fleshly even though he says the law is good I want to do that he finds that he doesn't actually obey the law in his everyday life he finds that despite his desire to obey God's law he finds the exact opposite happening within his life and then he draws a further conclusion from that he says now if I agree with the law that it is good this is verse 16 okay I agree with the law that it is good I agree with it that's true but if I agree with the law he goes on to say then I confess that it's a good thing if I if I if I agree with the law and want to do what the law says even though I can't do it if my desire is to say I want to do this then I'm saying that this is good so he's bolstering his argument earlier to say that the law is holy the law is good even he says even those outside of Christ even those still in the flesh because they show a desire to obey the law they prove the goodness of the law I agree with the law therefore it's good it's a good thing because I want to obey it Paul's problem apart from Christ and the power of the spirit is that he can not obey the law he just cannot do it verse 20 now if I do not do what I want is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells in me you see the problem for

Paul is that though he might with his mind want to do one thing he finds that sin dwells within him as an overwhelming power bending his will and forcing him in a direction that initially he did not want to go verse 21 I find it to be a law that is a principle that when I want to do right evil lies close at hand and even though he delights in God's law he says in verse 22 he says in verse 23 I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members Paul has a major major problem here I delight in the law of God I confess that the law is good my very desire not to be a murderer not to be a liar not to be a covetous or is proof that the law is good and yet I can't do it I cannot do it and

I think this picture of Paul's desire to fulfill the law on the one hand and his inability to fulfill the law I think it fits with Paul's descriptions of his life before he came to Christ in other parts of scripture because Paul pictures himself as someone who is who was prior to coming to Christ zealous for the law that he was trying with all his might to obey the law and he had great reverence for God's law and for the traditions that have been handed down to him by his forefathers and yet he also confesses himself to have been the chiefest of all sinners in fact let's look at a couple of those descriptions I want you to hold your place in Romans and turn over to Philippians chapter 3 where Paul describes himself we might say as a zealot for the law someone who you could say yeah there's a guy who delights in the law verse beginning in verse 4 Paul says though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence I have more now here's his claim to law loving that he was circumcised on the eighth day he's of the people of Israel he's of the tribe of Benjamin he's a Hebrew of Hebrews and as to the law so here's his attitude toward the law before coming to faith in Christ as to the law a Pharisee Pharisee we think of the

Pharisee Pharisee only negatively because Jesus has such negative things to say about the Pharisees but Jesus has negative things to say about the Pharisees because they're hypocrites because they preach the law they teach the law they proclaim their love for the law and yet they miss the heart of the law he says you tithe mint and dill and cumin but you neglect the weightier matters of the law you're not merciful you're not loving to people he says so that when Paul describes himself as a Pharisee Paul has in mind that attitude of zeal for the law one who taught the law one who proclaimed the law one who loved the law and all that it required he says as the law I was a Pharisee but as to zeal a persecutor of the church as to righteousness under the law blameless he doesn't mean that he never broke the law but he means that in his own eyes prior to his conversion to Christ in his own eyes he saw himself as blameless he saw himself as a zealot for the law he saw himself as someone fulfilling the law but now as a Christian he looks back and he sees himself not in that light but as a persecutor of the church zealous for the law yes fulfilling the law ultimately no because I persecuted the people of God turn back from Philippians to Galatians we'll see this clearly there as well in Galatians chapter 1

[41 : 44] Paul gives an extensive extensive description of his life before he came to Christ verse 13 we'll jump in sort of in the middle of it in verse 13 Paul says you have heard of my former life in Judaism how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers he's zealous for their traditions zealous for the law passed down to him and yet he now as a follower of Christ looks back and sees himself not as righteous in those days zealous for the law on one level yeah zealous for the law but on the other level oh persecuted the church tried to destroy God's people one more passage first Corinthians chapter 15 verse 9 Paul says I am the least of the apostles unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God you see Paul's view of his former life before he came to Christ before that great moment on the road to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him and changed everything about his life Paul's perspective is that on the one hand as to the righteous in the law blameless zealous for the traditions of my father but on the other hand the worst of sinners I shouldn't even be an apostle I was so bad I tried to destroy God's people so

Paul is able to hold those two things together as he recounts his life in these various passages I did love the law I did on one hand delight in God's law but on the other hand I was the worst violator of his law because I tried to kill his people I was a murderer even while telling people they should not commit murder it helps you to understand why Paul says in Romans chapter 2 he says you have no excuse so man every one of you who judges for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourselves because you the judge practice the very same things that's how Paul saw himself a judge yes zealous for the law yes a Pharisee even but I didn't even practice the things that I preach not really and not truly because he tried to destroy God's people I think that background in that perspective helps us to understand how in Romans 7 if Paul is describing his life before he came to Christ he could say

I believe the law is good and I delight in the law of God and with my mind I serve the law of God I think we can see that but how on the other hand he finds himself he finds himself confronted at every turn by the power of sin he finds himself confronted at every turn with the reality that though he may love the law of God though he may in a sense delight in the law of God he is of flesh and sold under sin that's who he is so that he gets he reaches the high point of this chapter really right near the end where this is his conclusion about himself verse 24 wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death when Paul cast himself in the light of who he used to be when Paul describes his life before he came to Christ his only conclusion is

I am a wretch I am a wretched man what hope do I have who could possibly deliver me I can't do it every time I try to do what's right evil's right there every time I try to obey God's law I find my flesh rising up and preventing me from doing that I can't do it I'm unable I am just a wretch who could possibly deliver me from this body of death and his answer is thanks thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord he can't help himself he jumps ahead here verse 24 he jumps ahead to chapter 8 really he cannot help himself as he laments his own sinfulness he cannot help but remind us and remind himself wretch though I was thanks be to God thanks be to God through Jesus Christ who can deliver me Jesus which is why he says in chapter 8 verse 1 there's therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ his conclusion in verse 25 so then I myself serve the law of God with my mind but with my flesh serve the law of sin that sound like the middle of chapter 7 the law come the law confronts us the law even shows us what our sins are but rather than respond in obedience the law produces more sin in us we just become greater sinners until verse 13 we become sinful beyond measure

I think probably for for many of us here this morning if we see this passage as a description of Paul's life before conversion we think okay fine then that's what it is it's different than I thought it was perhaps maybe you're convinced by my arguments maybe you're not but you think well okay but if that's the case then what relevance does this passage have to my life as a Christian if indeed Paul was describing who we once were but now I'm a follower of Christ what relevance does this passage has to my life I would say this I would say that those of us who know Christ though we are now filled with the spirit and that we are empowered by the spirit to actually fulfill the law by loving others and loving God though that is a reality there is another reality and that is the fact that as followers of Christ as spirit indwelt people we are still often tempted to go back to our old ways of pursuing obedience we are still tempted to think when we face sin and when we give in to temptation the way to defeat temptation the next time is to buckle down to remember the law better than to try harder

