

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 7:1-12
“A New Way To Live”

November 20, 2016
(Last Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

ROMANS 7:1-12 "A NEW WAY TO LIVE"

Rom. 7 = A Classic Of Christian Anthropology

A. vv.1-6 A CHANGE OF ALLEGIANCES/COVENANTS: QUESTION AND ANSWER.

Sin & Evil, Law/Death Are Intertwined, 4:2 Ring, Hard To Follow

1) v.1 Question: Direct Address: Law Binding Only During Life. Widowed From Law/Joined To Christ

1 OR, DO YOU NOT KNOW, **brethren**, 1:13, Formula, D.A.* Agreement: Temporal Limits Of Law's Rule, //6:3
(for I am speaking to those who know the law), Aside, Truism/Jew & Gentile Believers, Law Of Moses, Formula
Q that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Temporary, Jews + Gentile Proselytes, Both Baptized
Analogy: Law/Marriage As Exclusive Covenants, Issue = Duration Of Authority

2) v.2 Answer: Analogy 1, Death Ends A Marriage.

2 A1 a For a married woman is bound by law to her husband Jewish Law, Death Ends Covenant
b as long as he lives; Bound Dt. 24:1-4, Analogy 1
b' but if her husband dies Lives Death Dissolves
a' she is discharged from the law binding her to the husband. Dies 1 Cor. 7:39
Discharged Free To Remarry
Law Has Limited Jurisdiction, m. Quid. 1:1

2) v.3 Answer: Analogy 2, Death Allows Remarriage.

3 A2 a Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress Issue = Is The Husband Dead Or Alive? Adulteress Analogy 2
b if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. Alive
b' But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, Dies Key Comparison
a' and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Not Adulteress
Marriage Imagery Applies To Whole Law/New Way In Christ

1') v.4-6 Analogy Applied, Direct Address: Law Binding Only During Life

4 a So then, **my brethren**, D.A.*, Conclusion Drawn, Change Covenants, Application Of The Analogy
you have died to the law through the body of Christ, p.v. //v.6, Thesis + Purpose, D.A. //4:2 Ring, Gal. 2:19, 4:4-5
so that you may belong to another, 6:14a, Shift Of Covenant Loyalty, Belonging, A New Realm
Links = *hoste* (v.4), *hote* (v.5), *nyni* (v.6)
b to 'him who has been raised from the dead' Creedal, Euphemism For Jesus, Living Lord, Fruitful Life
in order that we may *bear fruit for God*. //6:22, Gal. 5:22-23, Jn. 15:1ff., New Ethical Life, Not Antinomian
b/b' = Mt. 7:18, *bear fruit for God*//*bear fruit for death*
5 b' For while (when) *we* were living in the flesh, *Flesh (Sarx)* = Bondage, Fallen Nature, Fallen Loyalties, Past
our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to *bear fruit for death*. Bridge, v.6
Old/New Covenants, //v.4, Thesis + Purpose
6 a' *But now* we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, p.v. Eph. 2:15, Present Freedom
so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. 2 Cor. 3:6, 5:5: God, Risen One, Spirit
Belong To Jesus = *New Life In The Spirit*

B. vv.7-12 FALSE INFERENCE: IS THE LAW SIN?

Goal = Free To Obey God

Law (i.e. truth from God) Reveals Sin And Is Holy

1) v.7a-c 2 Questions: Diatribe Transition, False Inference About The Law Refuted.

7a Q1 What then shall we say? //6:1-2a, Law Is Vigorously Defended In A Limited Role, Opponent, Diatribe
b Q2 That the **law is Sin**? Jewish, //v.12 = Answer, Law Is Holy, Just, Good, False Inference From v.5
c A By no means! Law's True Function (vv.7-11), The Culprit Is Sin/Rebellion, Not The Law
The Self's First Encounter With The Law, Paul As Rhetorical Example

2) vv.7d-12 Answer 1: Paul's Reasoning About The Law's Function.

d a Yet, if it had not been for the law, v.5 Law Reveals Sin As God's Right Standard, Stirs Passions
I should not have known Sin. Rhetorical I, *Speech In Character*; Law Is Diagnostic, Not Therapeutic
For I should not have known what it is to covet (desire), 6:12, Analogy //Physician To Illness
if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." Ex. 20:17, Dt. 5:21, No. 10: Prohibits Inward Desire
Passionate Desires, Shows What's Wrong, Plumb Line: 10 Commandments
8a b *But Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment*, Sin = Personified Character // Cancer, Hate
wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. //3:20, 5:13, Revealed What Was Already Within
We Are Free From Using The Law As A Means Of Salvation
b a' For apart from the law, Sin lies dead. Latent/Hibernation, vv.8b-9a (a-b//b'-a'), Ignorance
9a I was once alive apart from the law, Rhetorical I, Adult Encounter, Circumcised On Day 8? How Is This?
b but when the commandment came (i.e. *to me*), Sin revived and I died; vv.9b-10a (a-b//a'-b')
10 the very commandment which promised life/ proved to be death to me. //2 Cor. 11:3, Gen. 3:3, 13
11 b' *For Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment*, deceived me and by it killed me. Real Culprit!
12 So the **law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good**. Provisional, 3 Functions

A Brief Treatment Of Romans 7:1-6, 7-12

The larger section is 7:1-8:2 which is arranged in a 4:2 concentric pattern: A. 7:1-6, B. 7:7-12 // B' 7:13-25, A' 8:1-2 with the words *free* (7:6//8:2), *Spirit* (7:6, 8:2) and *death* (7:5, 8:2) as inclusions for the section as a whole. The central components (B//B') share the same basic outline: 1) Question and negative answer (v.7a//v.13), 2) Elaboration in one (vv.7b-11) or two paragraphs (vv.14-21, 22-25), and 3) Conclusion(s) (v.12//vv.21, 25b). The issue is the right function of the law in the new understanding of how God saves us in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The first thought unit of the new section (A. 7:1-6) is arranged in a 4:2 concentric pattern (1-2//2'-1'). Paul begins with a negative knowledge formula, "Do you not know," followed by direct address, "brethren," and leading to an internal footnote concerning the audience, "for I am speaking to those who know the law," and a question, "that the law is binding on a person only during his life?" The answer is given in two parts in 2//2' using the analogy of a Jewish marriage where the wife is bound to husband as long as he lives, but at his death is discharged from the marriage. Verse 2 is a 4:2 chiasm with *bound/discharged* in the frames and *lives/dies* at the center. Verse 3 has the same pattern with *adulteress* in the frames and *alive/dies* at the center. Death ends a marriage (v.2), and allows remarriage (v.3) with adultery marked as an illegitimate choice since the old covenant is still in force, but to remarry after a husband's death is not adultery. This sets the audience up for the application of the analogy in 1' vv.4-6 where a second direct address, "my brethren" forms an inclusion with "brethren" in v.1a. The structure of these verses is a 4:2 chiasm (a-b//b'-a') with "died to the law"// "discharged from the law," "so that," and the time signatures "So then"// "But now" in the frames with a contrast between "fruit for God" and "fruit for death" at the center. In our identification with Jesus Christ we have died to the old way of relating to God and— on the analogy of the death of a spouse— are now free to belong to another, to "him who has been raised from the dead" in order to "bear fruit for God." In verse 5 this is contrasted to the old arrangement where God's law did not heal us but only identified and energized our rebel passions to sinful deeds, i.e. "to bear fruit for death." Christ has done what the law could not, which is heal our relationship with God. Good and useful as it was, the law was limited and preparatory for something better.

The second thought unit (B. vv.7-12) has two parts: 1) Two questions and a negative answer (v.7a-c), 2) A positive answer (vv.7d-11) and conclusion (v.12). The initial question, "What then shall we say?" serves as a rhetorical bridge after the abrupt "By no means" (v.7c). A question from an imaginary opponent, "that the law is sin?" draws a negative answer, "By no means!" So, if the law is not Sin, what is it? Paul's answer is given in vv.7d-12. The form is a stair step parallelism (a-b//a'-b') with the a//a' components (v.7d//vv.8b-10) lining out the function of the law and the b//b' components (v.8a//v.11) lining out the consequences of sin's identification in the phrases "But Sin" (v.8a) and "For Sin" (v.11). God's law identifies our failings, and this is especially true of the tenth command not to covet which moves from outward action to inward desire. God wants the heart to be rightly aligned as well. Paul's testimony is that the awareness of coveting only made things worse by multiplying desires for what he did not have (v.8a). Without divine standards in place, the notion of Sin as rebellion against a clear command is not present; there is no boundary to cross. Ignorance is bliss, says Paul, "I was alive once apart from the law." But when God dropped a plumb line in the midst, his own people saw how crooked they were. All are now guilty and know it, or as Paul personalizes the insight, "Sin revived and I died." God's commands, with their call for outward and inward obedience, reveal what reprobates we are. Sin used the good Law of God to put to death a false view of the self as innocent and thus make us miserable. God's law is what it should be: *holy and just and good*. The problem is not God's standards; it's the alien power in us all- Sin!

A NEW WAY TO LIVE

*“So then, my brothers and sisters,
you have died to the law through the body of Christ,
that you may belong to another.”*

There’s been a regime change for the good.

R O M A N S 7 : 4

In 1927 the famous film director Cecil B. DeMille cast British-born actor H. B. Warner as Jesus in his famous silent film *King of Kings*. Warner, who 19 years later played the druggist in *It's a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart, was kept on a short leash during the filming. DeMille was concerned any behavior by the lead actor deemed inconsistent with his image of Christ would result in negative publicity and hurt the film.

As a result, DeMille enforced strict measures to ensure Warner kept up a good *Christ-image*, or— rather— what DeMille thought would be a good representation. Both Warner and his co-star Dorothy Cumming, who played Mother Mary, had to sign agreements that barred them for five years from appearing in film roles that might compromise their *holy* screen images. Warner was driven to the lot with blinds drawn and wore a black veil as he was delivered to the set. DeMille kept Warner from the other cast members, forcing him to eat alone every day. He couldn't play cards, go to ball games, ride in a convertible, or go swimming. Jesus the kill-joy.

Unfortunately, the regimen of regulations didn't make Warner more holy. Instead, all the pressure to be more Christlike without having the power or forgiveness of Jesus drove Warner over the edge. During the filming, rather than act more like Jesus, Warner relapsed into alcoholism.¹

¹ "The King of Kings (1927): Did You Know?" www.imdb.com/title/tt0018054/trivia.

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The story is sad for two reasons. The first is Mr. DeMille’s distorted view of Jesus and what it means to be holy. Isolated, inhuman, without joy, brooding and mysterious, constricted. Hardly like the robust, engaging Jesus of the four gospels.

The second is what DeMille’s distorted vision meant for H.B. Warner. When he signed the contract for the biggest film yet imagined, he was placed under a heavy regime of external controls that revealed the worst that was already in him. The standards did not give life. His image on the screen did not match life off the screen, and in his misery he drank.

Now make no mistake. We all need external controls and genuine consequences. An unregulated human being is not a pleasant thing to encounter. We have clinical names for such persons who do as they please without regard for others; a conscience— it seems— was not downloaded onto their hard disks, or else it was destroyed somewhere along the way. Sociopaths and psychopaths. Driven by impulses, no empathy for how it effects others, a human monster. It’s much easier to live with people with higher levels of self-regulation.

We all need boundaries, firm ones with consequences because of who we are and the world in which we live. And the first place we hopefully learn them is in a family as we are corrected and disciplined, and with it comes the idea, “There are some things I’m not permitted to do. And when I do them, big people get angry and punish me.” We internalize the rules as an inner compass.

School is another venue for learning about laws and consequences. As is the culture outside the home with blue lights and police and courts and jails and death sentences. Reality, they say, is what you bump into when you do something wrong. Laws and limits: we can’t live without them.

But the really big one, if you grow up in and around the church, is God’s law as summarized in Ten Commandments.² *You shall* and *You shall not*,

² For a thorough treatment, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2009), and on the last command

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positive duties and negative prohibitions dictated from above. The Lord God who saved the Hebrews from the cruelties of Egyptian bondage through Moses and mighty miracles now isolates them in the wilderness and from the fireworks atop Mt. Sinai sends down Moses with two tablets on which are inscribed ten firm limits for what it means for them to live in relationship to their new God. It's a divine marriage contract.

Now, on my read, the commands of God have a surprise beginning and a surprise ending.³ They start not with a *do* or a *don't* but with a reminder of the good thing God recently did, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." That's not a command or a demand but a statement of salvation, "I rescued you and am about to give you a new mission as my people, my display case in a lost world, so listen up, because this is what the new life looks like!" Law is not first; grace and kindness and mercy and rescue and divine power are first. Relationship is first, then the good boundaries for living within the new relationship.

Part two consists of four commands about God's nature because in the right ordering of our loves, God comes first. "No polytheism or paganism, no other gods or goddesses get your loyalty, only me, Yahweh the LORD, the one God above all the lesser spiritual powers. And no physical representations since I'm not part of creation and as Spirit have no body; I live in relation to you but beyond your control, so all images are distortions. No rivals and no pictures as in Egypt. I'm not that kind of God."

The divine name is to be revered and not attached to anything unworthy, and the Sabbath is a day for former slaves to be God's free people, no work, but rest and worship and peace and play for all. A strong work ethic and a strong rest ethic are here woven together. No rivals, no pictures, no slander of God's good name, no reducing people to merely productivity, no

against coveting (Paul's specific concern in Romans 7:7-12), 387-402.

³ Exodus 19:16-20:20.

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24/7.⁴ My people are not machines, and I give them a day in seven to disengage, to punch *Pause*, to focus on worship and family, culture and rest and recovery.

Part three contains five commands about right human relationships, and the first is an inter-generational obligation not to abandon mom and dad since it's through their marriage God gave you life, thus, "Honor you father and mother," and that is not a statement about their character but your duty. Jews and Christians find creative ways to honor their elderly.

Then comes no murder and no adultery. Life and marriage are guarded as sacred. As is personal property, "You shall not steal," and the ability of the courts to discover the truth in disputes, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." One positive command, honor parents, plus four prohibitions: no murder or tribal revenge killings, no compromise of marriage, no stealing, and no perjury, all of which are actions, things to do and not to do. But the last negative command is different in kind, so different it belongs in a category all its own, as Paul indicates.

The last commandments, "You shall not covet," is followed by a list of examples of misplaced desires which are the roots of wrong actions: wanting my neighbor's house or his wife or his slaves or his livestock, and if obeyed from the heart it's the death of greed and envy and conspiracy and adultery and possible murder and complicating the courts and corrupting God's new experiment with the Hebrews. Do's and don'ts are about behavior, but this last one goes *inside the self*, down to the center, into my desires, and so it demands a whole new level of obedience from the heart. No stealing is about wrong action; no coveting is about wrong desire and a thought. They work at different levels, and that's just the point.

⁴ See Dan Allender, Phyllis Tickle, *Sabbath: The Ancient Practices* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2010); Matthew Sleeth, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* (Tyndale House, 2012); Keri Wyatt Kent, "My Top Five Books On Sabbath Rest, www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/june/18.52.

So what we have are Ten Commands in four sections: I saved you and showed my love, so I'm first: no rivals, no images, no slander, and a day in seven that's different. Then five to show respect for each other: honor parents and their marriages; honor your own, so no fooling around; be consistently pro-life; people's stuff is an extension of their person and not to be violated; guard the integrity of the courts to find the truth, and finally, so you know I aim at more than outward compliance, I want your inner life as well, so no desiring what's not yours. Be content with me. Let me reorder your unruly inner life and lead you into a good life. Let me have the very core of who you are in utter loyalty and love. I want your heart, the factory of all your desiring, and the fact that you cannot obey the last commandment in your current corrupted state of being will always be a reminder something's wrong with you and between us. This last command about the heart and its desires will slay you again and again, and we will know there's more work to be done on the inside.

Now when the LORD set up these careful arrangements for the rescue and rehabilitation of a nation of slaves to be his own, it was with the full awareness, what we call *divine omniscience*— which means God knows all reality fully and intimately, including all unrealized possibilities— that every one of the slaves he rescued, including Moses and the other leaders, had a common problem, one— in fact— they shared with the Egyptians their cruel oppressors.

They were all morally and spiritually compromised; they were bent out of shape; their perceptions were corrupted, their mental faculties distorted, and the single syllable name for this systemic illness that touches and compromises every person and human capacity is *Sin*, which is first not a wrong action but a condition of being alienated and separated from God at the deepest level.

I'm not a sinner because I sin; I sin because I'm a sinner. No one starts with a clean slate. The inherited and inherent condition precedes the multiple evidences. The symptoms, which are easy to watch in the media or read in your own heart, are signs something deeper is wrong with us. We act just like our ancient parents in the garden. We distrust God; we believe the lie that God is holding something good back from us, so we go after it on our own and in the process are first deceived, then lured, then infected with something we cannot cure, a disease of the very center of the self that opens us to Evil and leads

finally to Death.

We were never meant to live independently of God, and that’s the root of our problem. We forfeited our living connection with real consequences. Something is now rotten and rebellious on the inside of each person, and no amount of conforming to external laws and restraints and warnings, even if they come from God and are each wise and good— say the Ten Commandments— has the power to change my heart, my core, the center of the self in all its ugly desires and imaginings and give me life.⁵

Law remains external to the self and the heart. It regulates what we do and don’t do with its sanctions, but it cannot change the heart and its deep loyalties. And that is issue Paul deals with the first half of Romans chapter 7. How is God going to get a group of people to have a changed heart and not just outwardly conforming behavior? How is God going to change us on the inside, in the depths of who we are?

In God’s covenant with his Jewish people, the law was part of the package, and the only way to exit the relationship was to die. So verse 1 is not hard to understand since it restates the obvious, “Or, do you not know, brothers and sisters, for I am speaking to those who know the law, *that the law is binding on a person only during his life?*” No speeding tickets after your funeral.

“Well, Paul,” someone might ask, “can you give us a word picture, something concrete to help us understand?”

⁵ United Methodist official teaching is found in our Articles of Religion, Article VII: Of Original or Birth Sin, “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, *whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually*” (ital. ad, *The U.M. Book of Discipline* 2102: 65).

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“Of course,” he replies, “it’s like our Jewish marriages, a human to human covenant that’s also binding. As long as he lives, a wife is bound to her husband, but if he dies, she’s free to marry another. One exclusive loyalty ends; another exclusive loyalty begins. If she takes another man while married, she violates the adultery command, but if he dies, she’s free to remarry. Death both ends a marriage and allows remarriage. Happens all the time.”

And here is the pivot point of the analogy. When someone come to trust in Jesus Christ, to surrender all they are to him, a death occurs, a death acted out in baptism. Their identification with Jesus Christ is a death to the old way of relating to God based on keeping the law and the beginning of a new relationship with Triune God based on the living Jesus welcoming me and his Spirit taking up residence in the control center of my being so there is now new life within. A living Jesus can now change me from the inside out because the divine life has been restored inside the self. The lights are back on. This is the outworking of verse 4, and it is not a theoretical but an experiential move:

“So then, brother and sisters,
you have died to the law through the body of Christ,
so that you may belong to another,
to ‘him who has been raised from the dead’
in order that you may bear fruit for God.”

The wife of a husband who dies may now belong to another, and since we have died to the old way of relating to God, we now belong to the risen Jesus who sends his Spirit into us as a life-giver and a law-keeper. We are now reconnected to the life of God at the center of the self. And this is to be taken very concretely. Someone new is living inside you. Think about it. Not a tumor, not an alien, but God the Holy Spirit within. You are now a temple.

In the old scheme with an unchanged heart, all the law did was tell me what was wrong as it named my internal rebellion and stirred up my opposing desires. But now, I’m free from an old regime of words written on stone for something much better, an obedience supported inwardly by the life and light of the Holy Spirit in my control room. External demand has given way to internal enablement. The new life of the Holy Spirit is now within me. Elyze

Fitzpatrick gives us a contemporary analogy when she writes:

“Just in case you're unaware, identity theft occurs when someone steals your name and personal information for fraudulent use. Most of us... wouldn't assume that the theft of another person's identity is acceptable.... The surprising reality, however, is that Christian's are, by definition, people who have someone else's identity. They're called ‘Christians’.... Not only have you been given an identity you weren't born with or that you didn't earn the right to use, but you're invited ... to use all the benefits this identity brings! This is much better than identity theft; it's an identity gift!”⁶

You were not meant to live alone as an isolated individual all cooped up in yourself. You were designed to be indwelt by God as a vital and living internal presence and power. We are all born without that inward presence because of the displacing powers of Sin, and that emptiness has a nasty habit of filling itself with all sorts of unwelcome guests, some of whom can become quite powerful and pesky. But at the point of surrender, at the person's Yes to the risen Jesus, the Holy Spirit is sent into the depths of the person to set up a fountain of interior life and to give a *want to* that fulfills the law of God.

The law still remains as a plumb line and straight edge for what's good and right, but I no longer try to use it as a means of being right with God, because I can't. Being good and keeping all the laws, holy and right as they are— and even if I could— is not a path to a healed relationship with God. A healed relationship is the gift of Jesus Christ, and it is accompanied by a new inward reality as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the vacancy that was your inward life. Squatters are evicted, the vacuum filled, the great rehab project begun. God on the inside makes the difference, and the genius is that it is testable and verifiable. The Word of God open before us and the Spirit of God within us work together to keep us in sync with Christ who leads us into a new

⁶ *Because He Loves Me: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life* (Wheaton ILL: Crossway, 2008), 51.

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life of honoring God and loving people, which is what the Ten Commandments are all about. We fulfill the law indirectly as the fruit of a new relationship.

Now if God uses his holy and just and good law not to save us but to always be pointing out our failings, then could it be that the law itself is Sin, that it's an evil thing because it delights to reveal the evil within us? This is the question some raised with Paul, and his answer in verse 7 is, "By no means."

The function of the Ten Commandments is not therapeutic but diagnostic. It cannot heal us; only the risen Jesus can do that, but it can point out what's wrong, just as a rapid-strep test tells the pediatrician whether your child has a throat infection or not. Now the test is not the strep, and neither is the test the antibiotic, so it's not the cure. So if the test is neither the disease or the cure, then what is it? It is a truth-finder and a truth-teller; it's diagnostic.⁷

Now the story I'm about to use is a tad gross, but it carries the freight, and so here goes. It's from Steve Kingsley who owns a carpet cleaning business in Craigmont, Idaho:

"In our family business we offer a special service for pet odors. To show customers their need, I darken the room, then turn on a powerful black light which causes urine crystals to glow brightly. To the horror of the homeowner, every drop and dribble is seen, not only on the carpet, but on walls, drapes, furniture, even lamp shades. One woman begged me to shut off the light: 'I can't bear to see anymore. I don't care what it costs. Clean it up!'"

He continues:

"The offense was there all the time, but it was invisible until the right light exposed it. It would be cruel to show customers the

⁷ On John Wesley's strategy of preaching the law before preaching the gospel, see his *Letter to Ebenezer Blackwell*, wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-letters-of-john-wesley/wesleys-letters-1751.

problem and then say, ‘Too bad for you’ and walk away.” Then this great line, “I brought the light so that they might desperately want my cleaning services.”⁸

In the same way, God shines the light of his commandments not just to make us feel guilty and leave us there. The black light is the Ten Commandments as wielded by the Holy Spirit, and the deep cleaning service is Jesus Christ. The conviction of sin, the knowledge that I am truly in the wrong, sounds a lot like Kingsley’s disgusted customer, “I can’t bear to see anymore. I don’t care what it costs. Clean it up!” Clean me up!

Now if you were as skilled in the ancient arts of persuasion as Paul was, you’d notice his creative move in the second half verse 7 as he changes characters and puts on a mask of sorts.⁹ He becomes not Paul but the typical man or woman who— upon first exposure to God’s law— finds it painful because it so accurately exposes the inward state of sin.

You see, if there is no standard, there are no offenses, and if no straight edge, then crooked has no meaning. If no forbidding of adultery, then it’s only an indoor sport; and if no command forbidding coveting, then it’s thought to be normal. But when the Spirit of God take the Commands of God and uses them as a inward searchlight, no one is innocent. God’s good standards expose my wicked conduct, outer and inner, and I stand properly diagnosed as guilty.

⁸ Edited, PreachingToday.com search under Romans 7:1-12.

⁹ The rhetorical trope is a “speech in character,” in which the speaker assumes a character other than himself for dramatic effect, typically speaking in the first person *I*. It is likely that ancient audiences (i.e. the audience of the epistle in Rome) recognized the form and would not mistake it for simple autobiography. On the debate and the options, see Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth Helwys, 2002), 186, and Michael L. Bird, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 233, on *prosopopoia* (Greek for *putting on a mask*).

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It is not that God’s standards are in error; it’s that the perverse power of Sin rebels against the law and stirs up in me a rebellion against God’s demands. Being told not to covet, I covet all the more. When told something is off limits, I want it all the more.

Before the law came, I thought I was OK, just an average man living in the world, but that was before God’s law began howling at me about how out of line I was. And while there may be an argument from church and state separation for not displaying the Ten Commandments in public buildings, the reason beneath the reasons is that sinners do not want to be exposed and told they are wicked and that God is not pleased. And this is precisely why we often use the commandments in our opening of worship, that the Spirit of God may have raw materials to expose us and tell us the truth. Frederick Buechner wrote:

“If there is a terror about darkness because we cannot see, there is also a terror about light because we can see. There is a terror about light because much of what we see in the light about ourselves and our world we would rather not see, would rather not have be seen.”¹⁰

The grace and kindness of God is not earned by keeping the commandments. You can’t keep the whole of them because you have a moral disease called Sin which disables and corrupts you at every turn. It’s a spiritual power so much stronger and smarter than you are, and it’s always accompanied by Evil and Death in all their disguises, and it always wins over good intentions.

The only answer is to lay yourself, the whole of who you are, before Jesus Christ, the Living One, who will both welcome you and set up a new power station within, complete with new desires courtesy of the Holy Spirit. You can never be good enough. You can only be available for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to work within. And that, my dear friends, is the Christian life, someone else living out their life through me. The new goodness that comes is a byproduct.

¹⁰ *The Hungering Dark* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1985), 50.

Romans 7:1-6, 7-12. 15

So when you feel the twinge of conscience and that deep awareness that something deep within is wrong and dark, do not run away from or evade it or cover it up with activities or dull it with thrills or intoxicants. Run towards it. It is the Holy Spirit shining light within to see if you notice. True guilt and the awful feelings that attend it is not something to run from or explain away. It is an inward invitation to turn to God and be introduced to a whole new life and to the best friend you'll ever have, the risen Savior Jesus Christ. That's Paul's testimony, and it's mine as well. I need him, and he won't let me go. I think he wants to save me to the uttermost. What an amazing idea.

