***Have Respect for the Sin Nature
RO86-02***

**© Berean Memorial Church of Irving, Texas, Inc. (1977)**

Our subject is "The Vindication of the Mosaic Law." This is segment number 3 in Romans 7:7-11.

**Control of the Sin Nature in our Daily Experience**

The apostle Paul is now dealing in this section with God's experiential solution for the sin nature – how we can whip this thing in our daily experience. And this comes down right where we live – the sin nature controlling the believer's experience. What is the solution to that? The key to this control, we will find, is the believer's functioning under the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit – divine viewpoint thinking and divine viewpoint decisions. It seems like such a simple little thing for us to say. The solution for experiential sanctification is living under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. And He guides through what is said in the Word of God.

**Church History**

A little reading of church history will give you a little better perspective on such a simple little statement of living by means of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as you read the enormous suffering (the pain) that believers have suffered through the centuries as they sought to turn to this particular principle – that God the Holy Spirit, through the written Scriptures, is our guide.

**Martin Luther**

For centuries, humanity was under darkness – the domination of the Roman Catholic system, which had absorbed the paganism of the ancient world into Christian principles, so that they were neither truly pagan nor truly Christian. And along came a man in 1517 by the name of Martin Luther, who had caught the vision that human beings, from the pope on down, have sin natures, and they do not have a direct line to heaven and to God. The only line we have from us to God is the written Scriptures, the Bible.

Therefore, Martin Luther said, "That is the problem. The sin; the corruption; and, the deceit that we see in the church (in his day – in the medieval time) is due to the fact that we are not functioning on the authority of the Scripture. We are functioning on the teaching authority of the church. So, the pope simply has to sit upon his throne and make any pronouncement and say, 'God has given me this,' and whether it's purgatory or Mary being the access to God (praying to Mary), and all the rest – all that came about just because the pope says it was so." Martin Luther said, "That's not the way it is."

**John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli**

Along came a man named John Calvin, and he went a little better than Luther. He caught some understanding of Scripture that was beyond what Luther understood. Then in Switzerland, came a man named Ulrich Zwingli. And Zwingli went beyond Calvin, because Zwingli grasped even more of an understanding.

**The Anabaptists**

And out of the associations and the teachings of Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland came a small group of believers who are the closest thing out of the Reformation era to the realities of Scripture. You hardly ever hear about them. They were called the Anabaptists. These men, who had gathered together, in studying the Word of God, and who had once been disciples of Ulrich Zwingli, searched the Scriptures, and one day they said to themselves, "There's no such thing like baptizing babies in the Bible." And they said, "The Bible makes it clear that water baptism demonstrates something that has happened in the heart spiritually through God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is only for believers, and an infant cannot be a believer. Therefore, infant baptism is a blasphemy."

From that day, hundreds upon hundreds of the most godly, Bible-believing people went to their graves. They were tortured; they were burned; and, they were beheaded. They had parts of their bodies torn off with red hot tongs as they took them to the place where they were going to burn them alive. And they went there singing the praises of God, because they knew they were on the right track. They had the Bible, and they knew that the literal statements of the Word of God were to be trusted, and they threw out all of those superstitious barnacles that had grown upon the body of Christ (the local body) over the centuries of Roman Catholic benighted teaching. For that, you and I take it for granted, but they paid with their lives again and again with the most unimaginable suffering.

So, now the apostle Paul is going to demonstrate to us, and proclaim that which these people, who were our forerunners in the faith, have demonstrated – what they taught as they read the book of Romans. They said, "Look here. What the apostle Paul says is the way a person goes on with God in godliness and holiness, and a lifestyle that God can bless is through the power of the Holy Spirit: not through keeping rules; and not through setting up some kind of a system like "I'll do this, I won't do that;" but through the direct guidance of the Spirit of God in the application of doctrine to the soul.

**The Mosaic Law**

Well, the apostle Paul declares that the Mosaic Law of God, while not sinful in itself, does bring a deep sense of evil upon the person, and even stimulates him to want to do wrong things. Paul has viewed the Mosaic Law as demanding merely external conformity. But then the tenth commandment hit him right between the eyes, and he realized that the tenth commandment was talking about a mental attitude sin– not an external thing. And suddenly, he was aware that there was within him a sin nature that was shot-through with corrupt, vile, mental concepts. And the result was that he had a whole different understanding concerning himself, and he was no longer so cocky about what a fine person he was.

**The Rebellion of the Sin Nature**

Paul said that the sin nature used the Mosaic Law as a springboard (as a base of operation) to lead Paul into evil. The basic quality of the sin nature is rebellion. So, when God's holy law forbids coveting the sin nature eggs the person on to rebel against this rule as an encroachment against the individual's personal freedom.

So, apart from a code of laws, the sin nature will lie there dormant. It's lying in the bushes, just quietly, as if it were dead. But the moment a set of moral laws comes along, then the sin nature grabs that, and uses this to stir up the rebellion that is in a person, to resist it in order to preserve that person's freedom.

In Romans 7:9 Paul says then, after he discovered this about the Mosaic Law, "For I was alive apart from the law once. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. The word "for" is "de." This would be translated as "but." He is introducing, with this word, an explanation of how the sin nature is inoperative in its rebellion without a code of rules. How can the sin nature not be functioning unless there's a code of rules that it's striking out against?

**Alive**

Then Paul says, "But I." And here's another one of those times in the Bible when the word "I" ("ego in Greek) is written separately in order to emphasize that Paul is talking about himself personally. Paul says, "There was a time when I was alive." That's a Greek word "zao," which is used in the Bible for a condition in contrast to death. This is the condition of life. It's in the imperfect tense, so that Paul says, "In my past, I repeatedly had this condition. I was alive." It is active voice. That means that it was Paul's personal condition. It's indicative – a statement of fact.

**Legal Righteousness**

This word refers to Paul's status of legal righteousness. When Paul says, "He was alive," he meant that he kept the rules of the Mosaic Law. We have this indicated to us in Philippians 3:6, where Paul says, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He could say of himself: "When it comes to keeping the rules of the Law, I was blameless."

That doesn't mean that he was alive in terms of eternal life, because the truth of the matter was he was not saved. But he said, "Relative to the Mosaic Law," he was alive: "For I was alive apart from." This is the Greek word "choris." It means "in the absence of:" "I was alive in the absence of law. That is the word "nomos" again. The word "nomos" does not have "the" in front of it in the Greek. It is not "*the* law." It is just simply "law." So, it's referring to any moral code.

Paul says, "There was a time when I was alive once." The word "once" is the Greek word "pote." "Pote" is a particle. It means "formerly" – in the past. There was a time when Paul was alive: "Apart from the moral code of the Mosaic Law."

The human race, from Eden on, has always had rules from God. There never was a time when that was not so. Adam and Eve immediately had a rule from God when they were told, in the Garden of Eden, "You can eat this. You can't eat that."

Furthermore, Paul, as a Jew, always was under the Mosaic Law. So, this is a rather strange statement for him to make – that he was alive when he was not under law. He was alive when he was apart (when he was separated in some way) from the law. The truth of the matter is that he was always under the law.

**Paul was a Pharisee**

For example, Acts 23:6 reminds us that he was a Pharisee: "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council men: 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee – the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." What Paul was doing was pulling a little debater's trick, because the Sadducees didn't believe in human resurrection. The Pharisees did believe in human resurrection. When he saw that the people who were judging him were made up of these two groups, he decided to say something that would get them fighting each other.

So, he said, "Fellows, I'm a Pharisee. Immediately, the guys over here, who were all Pharisees, all smiled and said, "Wonderful" . . . Therefore, Paul says, "I'm in hope of the resurrection." The Sadducees all looked over here, and they scowled, and they looked at one another, and they said, "You dirty . . . ," and they immediately were indignant.

Well, he created a riot for these people (the Sadducees and the Pharisees) to get sidetracked from judging him, to arguing with each other over whether a human body can be resurrected. But the point here is that Paul was very clearly a Pharisee, and nobody in that group challenged his claim.

Furthermore, as a Pharisee, Paul tells us that he lived strictly according to the Mosaic Law system. Notice Acts 26:5, where Paul says, "Who knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." Paul said, "And anybody who knows me, if they want to tell you the truth about me, will tell you that I was a strict Pharisee. I lived by the rules." And that's why he could say of himself that, relative to the Mosaic Law, he was blameless. He didn't break any of the rules.

Thus, what Paul means when he says, "I was alive, when I was apart from the law," even though he always lived under law, what he meant was that he was alive in that his understanding of the Mosaic Law was such that the law, in effect, didn't exist for him. What he thought about the Mosaic Law, he could feel comfortable about, because all he thought the Mosaic Law required was for him to externally do what it said. He said, "If I do the outside, I've got it made with God."

Therefore, he was very comfortable with the Mosaic Law. Paul had no qualms of conscience about his thoughts and the conduct that those thoughts led to. He was smug in his self-righteousness, and he had no dread of any divine punishment. That was what he meant – that he was alive. He just felt good about himself.

The lost unbeliever today matches himself up to his own standard of conduct, so he has no sense of condemnation about himself. He is blissfully ignorant of his doom. If you know about God's moral standards, and if you know about their mental attitude implications, then you are horrified by what some people do, and by what some people think. But they're not upset about it. You wonder how the unsaved person could do the things they do. You think that they would have great qualms before God. No, because they have set up their own standard, and by their standard, there's no problem. So, they're, as Paul said, "Alive, without any internal condemnation."

However, Paul said that this condition changed. He says, "But." And again, he introduces that with this conjunction "de," indicating a contrast: "But when the commandment came." Here we have that word "entole." "Entole" means a specific moral or religious precept. In the Greek it says, "*the* 'entole,'" indicating the specific commandment of the context; that is, the tenth one relative to the mental attitude of coveting.

He says, "But when the commandment I've been talking about came." And the word "came" is "erchomai." This means "to arrive." And this is rather strange too. By the time Paul was born, the Mosaic Law had been around for more than 1400 years. Now why should he suddenly say that: "Along came the law?" Well what he means is that it came in terms of his becoming conscious of what its true demands were. That tenth commandment messed it all up, because, as he began to catch hold of what that was saying, he realized that it wasn't only what you did outwardly that counted with God, but it was equally, if not more so, a matter of what you did with your thinking.

So, suddenly, he says, "There came a point in my life in the past where I began to experience an awareness of the law." You know, we sometimes experience that. We speak about hearing a Scripture explained, and we'll say, "You know, I've read that Scripture so many times, and I never saw that in it. That's exactly what it's saying, but I never realized it. It never struck me that that's what that was saying." And what we are saying is that suddenly we have become aware of something that was always there in a particular Scripture.

So, Paul is saying, "S suddenly, I've been hit by the significance of the moral law." And he's saying, "But through the commandment (when the commandment came – when I became aware of that), then something happened to me: sin." That is the word "hamartia" again, in the singular, indicating the sin nature. And it has "*the* sin" in the Greek, indicating definitely the sin nature: "The sin nature revived." This is the word "anazao." "Anazao" means "to live again." Here it connotes "to spring into activity." The sin nature suddenly springs into activity.

It has been lying there like a lion in the bushes; just crouching; lying low; and, keeping quiet – this beastly thing, the old sin nature, because Paul thinks that he's got it made with God. So, the sin nature doesn't make any waves. But suddenly, Paul realizes that there is more to righteousness than your external doing. And now the sin nature leaps into activity. It's aorist tense. At some point when Paul realize this, the sin nature came alive. It's active. The sin nature itself was a powerful force. And Paul says, "When that happened, I." And again, he makes it so emphatic: "Me, folks. Paul. I'm the one I'm talking about." So, he uses the personal pronoun separately.

"I died." And the word "died" looks like this: "apothnesko." This is state of death. What Paul is saying is that his self-righteousness was now shot down. It's aorist tense for "apothnesko." At some point, he became aware of the vileness of the sin nature in producing mental attitude sins. And when that happened, his self-righteousness was shot down, and Paul says, "I died. I was alive because I was so pleased with myself. Now I'm deflated. I'm dead." He was in defeat before the reality of his old sin nature.

Paul's self-righteous smugness was based on the letter of the law. He spoke about that very thing on occasion in 2 Corinthians 3:6, where he said, "Who has made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." At one time, Paul, as a devoted Pharisee, had no knowledge of the spiritual implication of the Mosaic Law. So, the Mosaic Law did not strike any fear in his conscience. He felt perfectly at ease. He describes himself as being alive. The sin nature laid dormant, waiting to pounce upon him. And Paul was so spiritually deluded that he thought he was not an evil person. Paul was alive in the sense that he was not aware the power of the sin nature for evil that was within him.

Later on, he learned that all are, in fact, born spiritually dead. In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul writes: "And you has He made alive who were dead (spiritually dead) in trespasses and sins, in which, in times past, you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan), and the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience (we were just like that gang), among whom also we all had our manner of life in time passed, and the lusts of our flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. Paul said, "That's what I really was, just like all the rest of them. That's the kind of evil person I really was. But when I looked at myself, I didn't see myself like that. When I looked at the Mosaic Law, that's not the kind of a picture I got of myself.

Paul once felt good about himself. He felt a sense of power and a sense of self-esteem. He practically broke his arm, patting himself on the back, because he was so true to the Mosaic Law, and such a good person. He was just filled with self-assurance. And you know that when you are in a state of confidence about something, you've got a lot of vigor. When you think you're on top of things, you just feel alive. But when you feel you're under the circumstances, and they're all Paul up on you, you feel dead. That's the thing that Paul is talking about here. In Philippians 3:6, he could call himself blameless relative to the law.

In Galatians 1:14, he tells us when he was alive, apart from the understanding of the law, how he was pleased with his religious zeal. Paul says, "And profited in the Jewish religion above many my equals in my own nation; being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers." Paul said even the young people, who were my own age, could not match up to me in zeal for the legal system of the Mosaic Law. Paul was pleased with himself.

**The Pharisee and the Publican**

The splendid example in the Bible of what Paul is talking about is found in the gospel of Luke 18:9, if you'll turn to that. In the gospel of Luke, this is the story of the Pharisee and the publican. . . . A publican is a tax gatherer (somebody who works for the IRS). And here you have the same picture – this Pharisee alive in his legalism with great self-esteem and great confidence. He feels he's really on top of things. And everything is coming up roses.

Luke 18:9: "And He (Jesus) spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others." That's the crowd who is alive relative to being apart from the reality of what the law said. They felt they were really righteous, and they held their noses when other people came by.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray to one: the one, a Pharisee; and, the other, a tax collector. And the Pharisees stood and prayed thus with himself: 'God, I thank You that I'm not as other men are: extortioners; unjust; adulterers; or, even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, and I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes into heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself, shall be exalted."

Notice what's in this parable. We have the Pharisees, confidently alive in his legalism. He thanked God that he was not a bad person like other people. He said that he was not a thief. That's what the word "extortioner" means in the Authorized Version here. He said he was not an evil doer. That's what the word "unjust" means in the King James Version. He said he was not an adulterer. "And most of all," he says, "he was not anything so low as this guy, this tax collector here."

On the positive side, he had some other things to say. He said that he fasted twice a week, and that he gave tithes of all he possessed. Now we have no reason to believe that he was lying about any of this. He was really expressing his mental outlook and the truth about his conduct. By all accounts, therefore, he saw himself as a fine fellow who needed no forgiveness or anything else. You can just sense how he's brimming with vigor; with self-satisfaction; and, with confidence. He has no problems with God, like the tax collector standing next to him does.

However, the Lord Jesus Christ declares that the Pharisee went home alive in his self-righteousness, but dead in terms of justification. The Pharisee, who was alive, apart from his real grasp of what the law was calling upon him to do internally, was headed for the lake of fire. And he went home from this moment of worship at the temple, full of confidence, heading for the lake of fire.

We are surrounded by people in our society who are in exactly that position – religious systems that are shot-through with people who are brimming with confidence of their association with God, who are going to the lake of fire. The whole nation of Israel today is like that – confident that they have an access to God in a unique way above the nations of the world. And every Jew is going to the lake of fire, because the Bible says, "There is no way to go to heaven apart from Jesus Christ. Without His name stamped upon you, there is no hope."

Now the publican, on the other side, was dead in terms of spiritual pride, but he was alive in terms of justification before God. He grasped the spiritual implications of the Mosaic Law. He knew it wasn't just what you did outside. He knew it was what he was on the inside. Therefore, he knew that he needed forgiveness, and he called upon God to be propitiated to him as a sinner.

Now, mind you, this is before Jesus Christ has died on the cross. And it was fitting then to go to God and say, "God, be propitiated (that is, be satisfied) toward me (your justice to be met toward me as a sinner)." The publican was saying, "I can't do it. I can't satisfy your justice. I'm calling upon you, God, to do something to satisfy Your justice on behalf of me." That's the way it should be done.

It is wrong today to tell people that you're trying to lead into salvation to pray this prayer: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That's blasphemy. Don't do it. It's asking God to do something that has already begun. God is propitiated. God is satisfied. There's no problem with Him. The problem is all with you, the sinner, with accepting what He has given and what He has provided. The price has been paid. Justice has been met. There's no problem with God. Don't call upon him to do something that He's already done. Don't call upon Him to be something that He already is. He is satisfied relative to his justice.

There's another example in the book of Matthew that's very interesting in Matthew 19:16, concerning the rich young ruler: "And behold, one came and said unto Him, 'Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' And He (that is, Jesus) said to him, 'Why do you call me good? There is none good but One, and that is God. But if you will enter into life, keep the commandments.'" This young man wanted to know what he could do to secure eternal life. What good thing can he do to secure eternal life?

The Lord Jesus, first of all, challenged an implication that the young man made by addressing Jesus as good, because the term "good" there implies divine good – not human good, but divine good. And Jesus says, "Why do you call Me divine good. That's a term that you can only apply to God. Are you suggesting that you see Me as deity?" And the point was that if that was true, if he really believed that he was talking to God in Jesus Christ, then what Jesus had to say should absolutely be obeyed. There could be no further question and no debate in answer to the question: "I want to go to heaven. Tell me how to do it."

So, the Lord Jesus said to him, "Keep the commandments," referring to the individual "entole" – the individual, specific, religious, moral precepts of the Mosaic code. And the rich young ruler says, "Well, which ones specifically?" Verse 18: "He said unto to Him, 'Which?' Jesus said, 'You shall do no murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man said, "No sweat. I've done all of those." Verse 20: "The young man said unto Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth up. What else? What do I yet lack? What else do I need? I've done all this." And already you can just begin to feel the self-righteousness in this young man. He is so alive; so confident; and, so vigorous because of his view of himself as being accepted by God. He revealed that he was alive in his self-righteousness. He did not grasp the mental attitude demands of the Mosaic Law. His old sin nature, obviously, is lying dormant in its self-satisfaction. So, he lacks any sense of guilt for evil. He says, "What else? I've done all that."

So, the Lord Jesus then is thinking this way: He's thinking, "I'm going to now tell him to do something that's going to hit him right between the eyes with the fact that the law is not what you do outside, but it is what you do inside. The internal is the problem. So, verse 21: "Jesus said unto him, "If you will be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give to the poor. And you shall have treasured heaven. And come and follow Me.'" So, the Lord says to him, "Go sell your possessions. Give the money to the poor as a divine good work, to be rewarded in heaven someday. Put your money in the Lord's work. You'll be rewarded in heaven for that. And follow Me. Trust in Me in saving faith."

What the Lord Jesus was going to do here was do to him what had happened to Paul. The rich young ruler had indeed not kept all the Mosaic Law. The Lord was going to show him that he was breaking commandment ten internally with his covetousness for his money. He had the mental attitude sin of coveting. And when Jesus says, "Sell what you have, and give it to those who need it," it all came to the front. If he had broken the Mosaic Law, then he had no business for being smugly alive in the idea that he was acceptable to God. The rich young ruler's sin was the sin of covetousness, and that sin did not permit him to invest his money for eternal treasures, and to follow Jesus Christ in faith for salvation.

Verse 22 says, "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions." Because he was breaking the rule of coveting, he could not obey the one whom he had just called God. So, no matter what Jesus had told him, if that was really what he thought, he should have done it, and made himself penniless on the spot. But instead, due to the sin of covetousness, his possessions kept him from being able to respond to the leading of the Spirit of God. The commandment of Jesus caused the sin nature in the rich young ruler to leap to life, and to resist. And he died then in his self-confidence.

He went away sorrowful. When he came, he came rolling up in his big Cadillac chariot. He had a lot of money. He knew how to move around town. He had all those good rags that he was wearing, and he came right up there, and he probably had a servant along with him. And he was just an entrepreneur who was on top of the world. And he had this discussion with this very important Rabbi. And when he was through, he walked away with his tail between his legs like a beaten dog. Why? Because Jesus had put his finger on the spot that revealed to this man that he wasn't on top of the law. He wasn't keeping it. He knew that he was covetous, and he couldn't give up what he possessed.

The apostle Paul describes this same problem for all of us in this age of the church (this age of grace), that we not make the same mistake. 1 Timothy 6:6: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." To be a super grace Christian, and to be satisfied with what you have – that is a marvelous position to possess. That's being on top of things: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and the snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

"But you, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life unto which you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses. I command you in the sight of God, Who makes all things alive, and before Christ Jesus, Who, before Pontius Pilate, witnessed a good confession, that you keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in His time He shall show Who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, Who only has immortality dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Who no man has seen nor can see; to Whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen. Charge them that are rich in this age, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God Who gives us those richly all things to enjoy; that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share; lay up and store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

That's a tremendously illuminating, crystal-clear declaration. That's exactly what the rich young ruler couldn't do. He didn't know how to handle his prosperity. Consequently, his prosperity had deluded him into thinking that he was on top of things, when in point of fact, he was the slave of the whole thing, shot-through with the evil of covetousness.

Jesus pointed out how the mental attitude sin of covetousness keeps rich people from being saved – alive in their autonomous self-esteem, but dead to spiritual regeneration. And as you read through the rest of that passage, Jesus said, "It's so hard for a rich person to go to heaven. It's like putting a camel through the eye of a sewing needle." And the rest of the people standing around said, "Boy, who in the world can go to heaven if that's true." And Jesus says, "With man, it's not possible, but with God, all things are possible."

Paul's position is exactly this. While he's alive in his self-righteousness (the kind of self-righteousness which is expressed in Romans 10:3), speaking about the Jews, says, "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. The Jews being ignorant of God's absolute righteousness, given to them as a grace gift, go about trying to produce their own righteousness by keeping the law. And as long as they think that the externals are all they need, they're just alive, and very confident. They create their own standards. So, they declare that all is well with God. They're not aware that they lack the absolute righteousness which was described by the Mosaic Law. So, they're oblivious to their doom, and to the hell that awaits them.

**The Point of the Ministry of Jesus Christ**

Being dead meant being in a state of misery from a sense of danger of hell and a consciousness of moral guilt. Paul said, "Now I'm dead. I'm in a state of misery. I am conscious of moral guilt. I'm in fear of the lake of fire." He had no more fanciful security. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ exposed people to the fact that they were sinners. That was the point of the ministry of Jesus – to help people to see that indeed they were sinners.

In John 15:22, Jesus said, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sinned, but now they have no cloak for their sin." Verse 24 says, "If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sinned, but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Jesus said, "They were alive in their ignorance because they were ignorant of the nature of their sin. Now they're dead because I have exposed them to the evil."

The apostle Paul died then, in the sense that he saw that the Mosaic Law condemned him – good Pharisee that he was. He died in that he was now in terror of God. You and I, when something goes wrong, we say we die. When I try to tell you a funny story, and I tell you an enormously humorous joke, and everybody sits there looking at me, then I say, "I died telling that joke. It didn't go anywhere, I just died." That means that I'm a loser. It didn't work.

Paul says that that's what happened to him. He was dead in the loss of his confidence. He saw God's holiness in the law. He saw now what was the nature of the law – internal demands. And now he sees the evil of his in nature. He sees the total lack of spiritual vitality, and the condition of death as utterly weak. This is the kind of person that Jesus Christ died for – the kind that Paul finally saw himself to be.

Romans 5:6: "For when we were yet without strength (not strong and alive, but helpless and dead), in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.

So, Paul has established that the Mosaic Law can never justify or sanctify a person. A person's spiritual condition is not judged by his outward actions. Don't make that mistake. The Pharisees did. Good moral people are not alive to the gospel. They don't feel guilty before God, because they are testing themselves by their outward performance. The unsaved moral person is no different than the prostitute; the murderer; or, the drunkard. But the Pharisees hated Jesus for telling them that, because it killed them. The Mosaic Law was not given as an obligation to keep for salvation, but as proof that you can't be saved because you can't keep it.

It's a very dangerous condition to think that you're not a sinner. 1 John 1:10, says, "If you say you're not a sinner, you're a liar." And People who think that they're doing the best they can, and that that is enough with God, and are at ease concerning their eternity, are in for a big surprise. Doing the best you can is not going to excuse you with God.

Many times people have said to me, "But are you saying that if a person is sincerely following what he believes to be what God wants him to do for him to secure eternal life, that God will not take that into account?" You just read Matthew 7:21-23 about a group of people who were confident that they were doing what God wanted them to do, including calling Jesus "Lord," and including reciting their miraculous productions. And Jesus said, "I never knew you." You betcha that He will reject that. You can count on the fact that you will not make it.

However, moral people feel so alive, and so invigorated, and so on top of things, that it's hard for them to understand their mortal danger. People who think that they have no problem with temptation, are alive in their self-conceit. And that gives the evil sin nature an opportunity to sneak up on them, and to slay them.

We close with 1 Corinthians 10:12, where Paul says, "Wherefore, let him that thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall." A good, healthy respect for your sin nature will stand you in good stead. Some people that they are above temptation, and that they are not going to fall into some kind of a sin. They're quite confident that they have matured beyond that. The sin nature comes along, and it gives you a beautiful opportunity to sin, and down you go. That's what Paul means. Those of you who are confident that you're on top of your sin nature, and you're all alive, take heed, because you're going to fall. It is only as God the Holy Spirit gives you the capacity to resist evil that you are on top of it. And that's what Paul is trying to teach us – how in our experience, we indeed can control the sin nature. Get a healthy respect for it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

[**Back to the Romans index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/romans.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)