

## INTRODUCTION

Have you reached the age of accountability? As you are reading through Romans, and as we're doing it verse after verse, sometimes it gets a little confusing because we forget that the apostle Paul is like a brilliant attorney and he's developing an argument, and the argument develops over 3 or 4 chapters. Sometimes when you hear lawyers today, you must think they're really smart because you can't understand what they are saying! Sometimes it's a little confusing to read what Paul is saying, unless you keep it in the entire context. In Chapter 7 he's talking about the law. He uses the word 'law' 28 times—and when we're using the word law, we're talking about the Old Testament.

Last week we learned about how before a person becomes a Christian it's like they are "married to the law." Remember Mr. Law is a tough husband because he demands perfection—he never forgives. Christians have been released and delivered from the law and we have a wonderful union with Jesus that is like a marriage. Today we are going to talk about a person who is still dominated by the law, controlled by sin. This is the passage where Paul says, "The things I want to do I don't do, and the things I don't want to do, I find myself doing them." So this whole chapter is how we relate to the law.

Let's begin reading in Chapter 7, verse 7:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Well, certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, 'do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me and put me to death. So then, the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become *utterly sinful*."

The problem we have is not with God's law. God's law is perfect—there is no fault there—the problem is no one of us can live up to it. There's an old Chinese proverb that says, "To an ugly man, every mirror is an enemy!" Now the problem is not with the mirror, it's with the man! And the problem with the word of God is not with the word, it's with us, because this Bible is like a mirror, and whenever we look into this mirror of the law of God, we see reflected every blemish, every stain, every blur upon our character, and we realize we cannot live up to God's standards. That's what Paul is talking about here. So in this passage, I think we can discover three spiritual conditions and everybody in this room is in one of these three spiritual conditions this morning.

### Three spiritual conditions:

#### I. SAFE—A CHILD IS INNOCENT UNTIL HE RECOGNIZES THE LAW

A child is innocent until they recognize the law, meaning the difference between right and wrong. You say, "I've heard that term, 'age of accountability' before, where do you get that?" Well, we actually get it from Romans 7:9. Paul says, "there was a time when I was experiencing spiritual life because I was not aware of the law. But when the commandment (or the law) came (in other words when he received and understood it) sin sprang to life, and I died!"

Have you ever wondered what happens to a child when they die? What happens to newborns or 2 or 3-year-olds? I believe, and we as Baptists generally believe, that a little child like that who dies is safe. They don't have to be saved because they've never been lost—they're simply safe in the arms of Jesus and the soul and spirit of those children immediately goes to be with Jesus as if they were a born again Christian. You know why? Because they have not reached the age of accountability.

My sister is a Catholic Christian. She married a Catholic Christian and so she converted over to Catholicism and I remember several years ago she was pregnant and developed some complications late in her pregnancy and was rushed to the hospital. I drove over to where she was to be there with her and she delivered twins, but they were stillborn, they were dead when they were born. I just remember being there to comfort my sister, but her husband—true to their Catholic faith—left her to find a Catholic priest. He brought the priest back to the hospital and the Catholic priest christened (baptized) those children and then performed last rites. Because they believe that was something that needed to happen for the souls of those children to be in Heaven. I found myself saying I knew they were sincere and genuine in their faith, but I'm so glad I have a faith that's different than that. I am so glad I've been able to tell parents through the years, who have experienced the death of a child, "Listen. Before your child reaches this age of accountability, when the law comes alive in their personality, they are safe with Jesus."

## **1. We are born with a sin nature**

Now when I say they are innocent, I don't mean they don't sin. In fact there's something very important you need to write down and remember: we are all born with a sin nature. Every one of us is a sinner from the very start! Look at Psalm 58:3. It says even from birth the wicked go astray from the womb they are wayward and they speak lies. Now. A little child does sin. I know that some of you grandparents don't think your grandbabies are sinners but I'm here to tell you they are! They are sinners by birth. We all are—it's part of our nature. We inherited it from Adam!

One of our members recently told me about her four-year-old daughter. She said her daughter got frustrated doing something in her bedroom and suddenly she let out an expletive! A curse word! And the mother was appalled. She said, "Sweetheart, who taught you to talk like that! We didn't teach you that!" Her little daughter bowed up real big and said, "No you didn't. I taught myself." You don't have to teach a child to lie—they develop it on their own, have you noticed? You don't have to teach a child to grab those toys and say, "Mine!" You don't have to teach a child to hurt somebody. No, you have to teach a child not to do those things because we are all born with a sinful nature.

A few years ago, before I moved to Texas, I was visiting a friend of mine. We were watching football and his 4- or 5-year-old boy was playing with the television control knobs. His father got upset and said, "Son stop that—don't you do that." And the kid kept on until his father said, "Now son, if you touch that television one more time I'm going to send you to your room." The child reacted like all little sinners do: he made a face at his dad. He looked at his dad and looked at the television. Looked at his dad and looked at the television and started easing closer and closer to the television, knowing his daddy said not to touch the television. Finally, in one act of utter defiance he just reached out and just put his hand on the television!

Why do kids do that? I'll tell you why. It's because we are all sinners from the time we are born, the Bible says we are sinners. Before we get too tough on the children we still are that way all of our lives, actually. The University of Chicago conducted a sociological experiment a few years ago where they painted all of the benches in Lincoln Park with fresh paint and put signs on the benches that read, "Wet Paint. Do not touch." They put those benches under surveillance and 82% of the people walked up, read the sign, and touched the bench. Why can't we just go by the rules? It's because we are all sinners by nature, but what I'm trying to say is these little children, when they sin by nature, are innocent before God because the law has not come alive yet for them.

## **2. We are "accountable" when we know we are choosing to sin**

We become accountable when we know we are choosing to sin. When we know it's right or wrong, that's when the law has come alive and that's when as he says in Verse 9 "Sin springs to life and that person dies spiritually."

Parents often ask me, "How old is a child when they reach the age of accountability?" I can't answer that because children develop at different stages, emotionally and spiritually, and this development is not always attached to a biological age. But it has been my observation most children reach that age around 7, 8, 9, 10, when they know what the rules are, but then they knowingly and willfully choose to break the rules. You've got to understand the Bible teaches we are sinners by nature from when we are born, but we also become sinners by choice when we choose to break the rules and that's when we are held accountable.

I like to play golf and I've enjoyed playing golf for a number of years, but for many of those years I played but I didn't know the rules! For instance, when I used to stand on the tee box and tee a golf ball up and I would hit it and it would go out into the woods and it would be lost and I couldn't find it, you know what I'd do? I'd do what most people do, you just take another ball out of your bag, drop it back on the course and just keep on playing. You say, "Okay, one in the woods, two here, I'm hitting number three!" Well, that sounds good, but it's breaking the rules. For years, I didn't know it. Until somebody gave me a book called "The Rules of Golf" and I read that the rules say if you hit a ball and it's lost, or you hit it out of bounds, you can't bring one in and just drop it right there! You are penalized what's called "stroke and distance," and you have to go back to the tee and you have to re-tee another ball. Now, this is the point I'm trying to make. For years, I didn't even know I was breaking the rules I was just as guilty. I was just as guilty even though I didn't know the rulebook. If I had been playing in a sanctioned tournament I would've been disqualified because I broke the rules. But now, after I'd read the

book, I was faced with a totally different dilemma. I've read the rules now, I hit the ball and it's lost in the woods. You know what the temptation is? Temptation is to do what I'd always done—take a ball, drop it back down, and keep on playing. But then, it's even more of a sin or a crime or breaking the rules, because I'm doing it willfully. So I am faced with a choice: am I going to keep on breaking the rules now that I know the rules, or do I do what's right and go back to the tee and do it the way the rules say? That's the difference.

A child may sin, and they don't know the rules, but the time comes when they become guilty for their sin, when they know the difference between right and wrong. You say, "Do they have to know the Bible for that to happen?" No. There's a time in every child's life when their conscience is activated and they understand that innate sense of right and wrong and they say, "I know this is wrong, but I still am choosing to do it." You say, "Okay, I'm glad you're talking about kids." Well folks, I'm not talking about kids, I'm talking about you. I'm talking about me. I'm talking about all of us in this room. If you can understand what I'm saying to you, chances are you have reached and are in the age of accountability. You and I are accountable.

## II. LOST— A PERSON CONTROLLED BY SIN IS SPIRITUALLY DEAD

That leads us to stage number two, or spiritual state number two. I call it "Being lost." And that's a Bible word—being lost—and let me define it. A person controlled by sin is spiritually dead. Look at verse 9? "Before the law, I was alive, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died," he means spiritually he was dead. Now that was true of all of us before we came to Christ. Look at Ephesians 2:1, which says, "As for you you were dead in your trespasses and sin." Now this passage says a lot about sin. In fact if you look at verse 7, the second sentence in this verse says, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law."

This is what sin is and what it does. Like the lady that went up to her pastor after a sermon and said, "Pastor, I'm so glad you came! We never knew what sin was until you came." You may not know what sin is! Well, in this passage of scripture, sin is used as a subject and there are eight verbs associated with it. Study this on your own sometime—I'm not going to trace them—we're going to talk about three things sin does:

### 1. Sin always deceives you

Look again at verse 11, "For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment (and here's the verb) *deceived* me."

Last night there were a bunch of kids throughout the neighborhood knocking on doors saying, "Trick or treat." They had masks on. When kids come to your door like this, you may not recognize who they are. That's exactly what sin does. Sin disguises itself. It puts on a mask and it tries to present itself as something other than truly sin. It makes itself try to look beautiful. Sin never wants you to call sin "sin."

Karl Menninger, a clinical psychiatrist, wrote a book a number of years ago entitled, *What Ever Happened to Sin?* In this book, he says, "In America, we are in denial when it comes to sin. We don't want to call sin "sin" we want to call it something else!" We don't call it abortion; we call

it "a choice." We don't call it drunkenness; we call it "alcoholism." We don't call it wickedness we call it "weakness." We don't call it adultery; we call it "an affair." We don't call it turning away from God and dishonesty; we call it "stretching the truth." We don't call it gossip, we call it a "prayer request," right? I mean, we call sin different names! I read the other day in a newspaper that the FBI is breaking into a child pornography ring existing on the internet and in this article it kept referring to child pornography as, "kiddy porn." Now, to my mind, there is probably nothing more debased and rotten and nasty than adults who make children victims in child pornography. But in America we call it, "kiddy porn." That sounds like a ride in an amusement park or sounds like a snack, "kiddy porn!" We just try to make it sound not quite as bad as it is, and that's what sin does: sin deceives you, it lies to you, all of your lives it lies to you. I'm not just talking about lost people. When you're a Christian, sin will still lie to you about the outcome and the result.

At first blush, sin always looks beautiful. I tell you what, in my ministry, I've seen it happen so many times. A husband and a wife who are having some marriage problems separate to try to get some space, but they really do want to save their marriage. When they separate from one another the devil brings into the life of this man some attractive female who pays attention to him. Do you think that's an accident? Do you think that's just a coincidence? Oh no. On the front end, it looks pretty, but on the back end it's terrible. Or, in the life of the wife. The devil will bring some man into her life who pays attention to her and sits down and listens to her—and, after all, her husband's got the personality of a speed bump and this guy, he's listening and paying attention—WOW! Friend, that's no accident. Sin is the great deceiver. Have you seen the commercials about cocaine? Cocaine is the big lie? Drugs say, "enjoy pleasure," but it always leads to death and pain. Sin always deceives.

## **2. Defiles you**

Sin always defiles you and makes you dirty before God. That's why, when David was praying in Psalm 51, he had to pray this prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God!" You know what it is to have your hands dirty when you've been working on cars or working out in the yard, you don't want to sit down and eat with dirty hands! You have a sense "something's just not right. I've got to clean my hands." The Bible says what dirt is to your hands, sin does to your heart; it soils your soul and you have a sense of being defiled.

And you know, we as Christians ought to hate sin! We have to realize sin is against God. We just think it's a trespass against somebody else, but all sin is against God. Did you know the greater the person against whom the crime or a trespass is committed, the greater the negative consequences? Let me illustrate. This is just a "what if," but what if Mike did something I didn't like or said something I didn't like? I could take my fist and just pop him in the mouth! Now, what would be the consequences of that? Well, he'd probably jump back on me and beat me up or something, or you'd probably say, "You know, I can't believe you did that." There would be some consequences to that. But you know what? Mike's just an average citizen. What if a state trooper stopped me, walked up to my car, and said, "You're speeding. I'm giving you a ticket!" And then, what if I popped him in the mouth! Consequences are going to be a little bit more severe, aren't they? Right. And, what if I'm down listening to Governor Bush giving a speech or something, and he says something I don't like and I make my way up to the governor and pop

him one in the mouth. The consequences are going to be even *more* severe. And what if, and don't think I really want to do this, but what if the President said something I didn't like and I tried to get to him and hit him in the face? I'm going to be a heap of trouble then. Why? Because the more important the person is you violate, the more the consequences are going to be negative.

I'm here to tell you, there is no one in this universe more important than God almighty. Every lie, every lustful thought, every sin, is against God. You don't believe that? Do you remember when King David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had committed murder to cover it up? The special prosecutor of the Old Testament, Prophet Nathan, came to him and said, "You are the man." This is what David prayed: "Against you, God, and you only have I sinned and done this evil thing in your sight." All sin is against God and defiles us in God's sight.

Even in the New Testament, when Jesus is telling the story of the prodigal son and the prodigal son is down in the pig pen, in the mud and the manure, and he comes to his senses, this is what he says, "I'm going to get up and go back to my father and I'm going to say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.'" All sin is against God and it defiles us and deceives us.

### **3. Destroys you**

According to this passage of scripture, sin will always destroy you. In verse 11, look at the last few words in this verse, (sin is the subject of the sentence) "Sin put me to death." In verse 13, in the middle of verse 13, it says, "Sin produced death in me."

When you first are exposed to sin, you think, "This won't hurt. Just a little bit won't hurt." But sin always has a price that's more than you want to pay. For instance, do you know why I personally hate cigarette smoking? I could use any other sin, but I personally hate cigarette smoking because all of my life I watched my mom and my dad smoke two packs a day. Never one time did my dad light up and say, "You know, I'm killing myself with this cigarette." But when they were each in their 50s, I sat by their bedside as both of them were eaten up with cancer until they died. And you will never convince me cigarette smoking didn't play a big part in that! I personally hate cigarette smoking. I don't hate cigarette smokers. That's why when I see some of these stupid middle-school and high-school students who are lighting up, thinking they are so cool, and they think, "Hey, this is cool, this is nice, this makes me appear old and wise," I look at them, shake my head, and say, "You guys are so stupid." You don't understand that up front you may get a little rush thinking, "Hey, I'm a big person," but you don't realize what that is doing to you! That's the way sin operates. Up front, all you see is the bait—you never see the hook. Up front, all you see is the mesmerizing motion of the serpent—you never see the fangs. Up front, all you see is the beautiful color and the light of the fuse as it fizzes—you never think about the explosion. But sin always destroys.

Paul is saying in this passage of scripture, "Listen, the reason God gave us the law is so we can know when sin is present. So we can know what is right and wrong." Have you ever walked into your kitchen and said, "I smell natural gas." Or have you ever walked outside and smelled natural gas and thought "Something is wrong"? On March 18, 1937, a Thursday morning, just down the road in New London, Texas, deadly gas leaked out. Did you know natural gas is

odorless and colorless? None of the teachers knew there was a deadly amount of gas in the air. Suddenly, there was a spark and a huge explosion—and 293 precious students and teachers died. Since that time, our government said gas is too deadly to remain odorless, so now it is a federal law that an artificial odorant is added to natural gas. That's not natural. Did you know that it's not natural to the added smell of rotten eggs so that, friend, if there is gas present you can smell it. Our government said that gas is too deadly to remain undetectable! And that's exactly what God is doing in his word. He is saying, "Sin is so deadly and I love you so much that I'm not going let you go through life without letting you know that this is sin!" And that's what that rotten egg odor is to natural gas, that's what the law is to sin. You need to know when it's there.

### **Don't despair!**

Some people are lost, controlled by sin, but I want to say, "Don't despair. That's bad, but not hopeless." You may be lost, but the good news is, in Luke 19:10 Jesus said this, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." And that leads me to my third spiritual condition.

Today, you are either safe, you are lost, or you are

### **III. SAVED—A PERSON WHO TURNS FROM SIN TO JESUS FINDS LIFE!**

That's the third spiritual condition. Let me give you a definition of what it means to be saved. A person who turns from sin to Jesus finds life. That's what it means to be saved. It's actually not in this passage but that's where Paul is leading. If you want to skip down to 8:1, here's the good news, "For there is now, therefore, no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus." Now, you may say, "Well pastor, I realize that I'm lost. What can I do about it, how can I be saved?" Let me just give you three statements—and it's as easy as "ABC."

#### **You can be saved if you will:**

##### **1. Admit you are a lost sinner**

Before you can ever be saved, you have to realize and admit you are lost. I often ask people to share their testimony with me and to tell me how they became a Christian, and every now and then I will have someone say something like this, "Well, I've always been a Christian. There never was a time when I was lost!" Did you know that's a very dangerous statement? Because I don't think any person has ever always been a Christian. There may have been a time you were safe, but unless you were converted the very instant after you reached the age of accountability, I'm here to tell you there was a time when you were lost! Now, I was lost as a child, and I promise you I didn't do a lot of terrible things. I stole a few grapes from the Piggly Wiggly, and I was self-centered, and I hit my sister and my brother and disobeyed my parents, but I wasn't a terrible sinner. But there was a time I was lost, and when I was 9 years old I was "saved." I trusted Christ, and I had to admit I was a lost sinner.

##### **2. Believe that Jesus accepted your penalty**

You must believe Jesus accepted your penalty, and there is belief involved. That's why the Philippian jailer asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul told him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." This is one of my favorite verses, Second Corinthians 5:21, because to me it is the entire scenarial salvation summarized in one verse. It says, "God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Here was Jesus, holy, righteous, sinless, and here I am, sinful, unholy, disobedient. And when Jesus died on the cross he took all my sins upon himself. God made him who knew no sin to *be* sin for me. The other side of that transaction is, "that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." You talk about a good deal. On the cross I swap my sins for his righteousness. And before you can be saved you have to believe Jesus accepted your penalty.

### **3. Confess that Jesus is running your life**

You must confess. I could say confess that Jesus is your Lord as the Bible says but people don't know what Lord means, so let's just say this: "Confess that Jesus is running your life." That Jesus is in charge. How do you do that? Well, one way you do is you come forward in a service and you publicly say; "I want to follow Jesus." You are publicly baptized. You have confessed him with your mouth and said you are a follower of Christ. You can confess him in a number of ways. If you're not a member of this church you can come and say "I want to be a part of this local church," that's another way to confess him. But you cannot be a secret agent, closet Christian! You always will want to let others know you are a follower of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a great Christian from China who has written some great books. In one of his books he tells the story of a group of people near a lake in China. None of the folks could swim, and a man waded out into the water and inadvertently stepped into a hole and although he was only about 100 feet from shore, he was drowning—the water was over his head. The people on the shore (none of whom can swim) were calling for help. A Chinese farmer nearby heard their calls and rushed to the side of the lake. The crowd asked, "Can you swim?" The farmer said, "Yes." Then the crowd said, "Well then, rescue this man, he's drowning!" The farmer stood there and crossed his arms. The people said, "No, no. You can swim and this man is drowning, please jump in and rescue this man!" And the farmer stood there with his arms crossed. Finally when the drowning man went down for the third time, that's when the farmer jumped in the water, quickly swam out and pulled the man to shore. Sputtering, the man came back to life. But the crowd had no words of thanks and praise for the farmer. Instead, they said, "You are the biggest coward we have ever known! Why didn't you go out sooner and rescue that man?" He replied, "I can swim, but I can't swim that well. If I had gone out and tried to save him when he was still trying to save himself he would have drowned both of us. I had to wait until he gave up trying to save himself, and only then could I save him."

I think most people who are not Christians haven't been saved *not* because they are terrible people, but I think it's because they are still trying to save themselves. They're still trying to "Be good and do good." It is not until you try to stop trying to save yourself and allow Jesus to save you that he reaches down from Heaven and he rescues the perishing.



## OUTLINE

Three spiritual conditions:

### I. SAFE—A CHILD IS INNOCENT UNTIL HE RECOGNIZES THE LAW (RIGHT AND WRONG)

1. We are born with a sin nature

Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. *Psalm 58:3*

2. We are "accountable" when we know we are choosing to sin

### II. LOST—A PERSON CONTROLLED BY SIN IS SPIRITUALLY DEAD

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... *Ephesians 2:1*

Sin always:

1. Deceives you
2. Defiles you
3. Destroys you

Don't Despair!

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." *Luke 19:10*

### III. SAVED—A PERSON WHO TURNS FROM SIN TO JESUS FINDS LIFE!

You can be saved if you will:

1. Admit you are a lost sinner

2. Believe that Jesus accepted your penalty

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *2 Corinthians 5:21*

3. Confess that Jesus is running your life

SAFE?

LOST?

SAVED?



**DISCLAIMER:** These messages are offered for your personal edification and enrichment. There is no legal copyright on this material. I have used many sources, and I have always attempted to cite any exact quotations. Any failure to cite a quote is simply an oversight on my part.

If you are a preacher or teacher, I encourage you to use this material to stimulate your own Spirit-driven imagination. Additional study beyond this material will benefit both you and your listeners. You have my full permission to use any of this material as long as you cite the source for any substantial amount used in your message.

If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes