

## Paul: Grace, Law, and Obedience

### Paul and the Law

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 20-Nov-04; Tape #693

A story is told of a typical Protestant church board of directors filtering through applications of men applying for a preaching position. A brief resume of the applicant's job experience was requested, and on one application they had before them had these comments:

"Gentlemen: Understanding that your pulpit is vacant, I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I have been a preacher with much success, and also have had much success as a writer. Some say I am a good organizer. I have been a leader in most places where I have been.

I am over fifty years of age, and have never preached in one place more than three years. In some places I have left town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit that I have been in jail four or three times, but not because of any real wrongdoing. My health is not too good, but I still accomplish a great deal.

The churches that I have preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I have not gotten along well with the religious leaders in the town where I preached. In fact, some of them have threatened me and even attacked me physically.

I have been known to forget whom I have baptized. However, if you can use me, I promise to do my best for you."

Well, one board member turned to the committee, and he said, "Well, what do you think? Shall we hire him?" The good folks were appalled! "Consider a sickly, trouble-making absent-minded ex-jail bird?" Was the board member crazy? "Who signed the application?" "Who has such colossal nerve?" The board member eyed them keenly before he replied, "It is signed by the apostle Paul."

I want you to turn to II Peter 3:14-18.

II Peter 3:14-18 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation: even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him has written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they

do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Who is this man whose writings Peter even considered to be difficult, and whose writings are called scripture? Who is he? What kind of a background does he have? Was he qualified to write so much of the Bible? That he wrote things "difficult to understand" is evident. I do not know of any of the Bible's writers whose works are so hotly contested. The issue that is most hotly contested is the place of "grace, works, and law" in a Christian's life.

The only of the other Bible's writers to mention Paul is Luke in the book of Acts. Much of the book of Acts concerns him, and so there is a fair amount of material there. When combined with what he said and wrote about himself, we can get a pretty fair picture of some of his background that helped prepare him for God's calling.

Let us look at a number of scriptures as we make a survey of things that are said about him.

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and I beseech you, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Tarsus is located in south-eastern Turkey. I think it is interesting that he described Tarsus as "no mean city." A better translation of the word "mean" would be "no *obscure* city." He sounds as though he was pleased (if I can put it that way) that he was from Tarsus.

Acts 22:25-28 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what you do: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, are you a Roman? He said, Yes. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

Paul was by nationality a Jew, but this section of scripture establishes that he possessed a Roman citizenship—something awarded by the Roman government usually for the performance of some duty, and it was considered to be a very valuable possession. It appears that his father earned it, or bought it. I am not real sure, but it came to his father anyway in some manner, and then it was passed on to Paul at birth.

Earlier, in verse 3, he says this:

Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught

according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as you all are this day.

Despite being born in Tarsus, he was actually brought up in Jerusalem. He does not mention it at all, but one would think that having been brought up in Jerusalem it would have been very difficult for him not to witness some events of Jesus' life.

Gamaliel was a noted Pharisaic rabbinical teacher of the time, and Paul was taught according to the strictness of the fathers' [the Jews'] law, and he was zealous toward God.

Acts 22:4-5 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest does bear me witness, and all the estate [the council] of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there, bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

So here was Paul, brought up in Jerusalem, taught by Gamaliel, very zealous about obedience to what he was taught, so much so that he bore authority from the council of elders of the city to represent them in persecuting the church of God.

Paul adds to this testimony a further description of his pedigree:

Philippians 3:4-6 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee: Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

That was quite a pedigree, which will be referred to at least a little bit later. If Paul wanted to trust in the flesh, then what we see listed here are his bragging rights. That is, if he wanted to brag before the Jews, he had a great deal to brag about. But there is even more.

Galatians 1:14 And [I, Paul] profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

What we see here is a picture of a man who was making very fast progress in gaining the recognition and confidence of his contemporaries as somebody to be reckoned with. And not only his contemporaries in terms of his own age, but also his contemporaries in terms of those who were older than he and rulers in the council.

I want you to see something that I think will help us to understand him just a little bit better.

This is not about Paul, but rather it is about Peter and John. I want you to notice the difference between the evaluation that was made of Peter and John with the evaluation that was made by the contemporaries of Paul.

Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

This appears to me as though no Jew would have said that of Paul. Paul had the trappings, the outward appearance, and maybe the demeanor or whatever of somebody who was someone to reckon with. So compared to the original apostles, he gave a far different witness before people than they did.

It is interesting that in the book of John, Jesus received somewhat the same evaluation by His contemporaries.

John 7:15 And the Jews marveled, saying, How knows this man letters, having never learned [or studied]?

It is obvious that Paul had a far different reputation in the community from any of the original twelve, and even Jesus Himself. What you see on the outside may not be quite what the person really is, but Paul had the respect of those of his day, and of his age, and even of those who were older.

To this point, what this adds up to is that the apostle Paul had much accomplishment to be puffed up about, and so when he wrote those things in Philippians 3, he was not really bragging at all. He was just giving the unvarnished truth. When he wrote those things in Galatians 1, that was true. As we are going to again see, it was not that he was bragging at all, but if he wanted to trust in the flesh, he had a great deal going for him.

But then happened what was for him the unthinkable, and it happened on the road to Damascus. This is described in Acts 9, and repeated in Acts 22. He witnessed a blinding brilliant light that he covered in the presence of. He was rendered blind, and he had Jesus speak to him, commanding him to go into Damascus where he would receive further instruction.

In Damascus, the instruction came from one of the hated sect?the sect he persecuted. A man by the name of Ananias came, telling him that he, Paul, was now one of "the called," that he was chosen to witness for Christ, and that he should rise and be baptized. It was a dramatic turn of events as any personality in the Bible ever experienced.

Acts 9:19-25 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the

chief priest? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await [their plot] was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

What a turn of events! The hunter became the hunted, and he began to experience being on the other side of life. He became the enemy of those in power. Instead of acceptance was rejection. But he also began to experience God's overseeing of his life in a way that he never would have experienced had not God done what He did.

Acts 22:17-21 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get you quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive your testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on you: And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send you far hence unto the Gentiles.

These four verses here illustrate that Paul began to experience God's direct involvement in his life. This is undoubtedly faith-building so that he would have the spiritual wherewithal to accomplish what God had laid out for him, because God had given him a very difficult and demanding assignment.

But those kinds of interventions were not enough to put the finishing touches on the preparations for his assignment. It is one thing to even personally experience a miraculous occurrence directly from God, and it is another thing altogether for God and His Word to be written on someone's heart. That is very clearly shown by the Israelites in the wilderness. Look what they experienced. Look what they saw. But forty years later they were still no different from what they were when they came out of Egypt. And so Paul, even though he was experiencing miraculous intervention so that his life was saved, it is another thing altogether to have God's Word written in one's heart.

Something else happened to Paul that is of great significance, because it prepared him in an immeasurable way to perform the responsibility that God gave to him. Paul, by this time is an old man, and he is reflecting back, and he is giving Timothy advice.

I Timothy 1:15-16 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Paul does not mean here that he was the first one who was shown God's mercy. He means that in order of priority, in order of what occurred to him. In other words he is saying, "I was the greatest of all sinners, and what Christ did for me is greater than He did for any other person." That is the way he looked at it.

Already we begin to see what a difference there was between this man who, before conversion, had all these many, many accomplishments he could have bragged about among his own people. But something was happening to his mind, and in Romans 7 he says:

Romans 7:7-12 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

Paul came to see himself. He repented. What we are going to read here in I Corinthians 15:9 is just as true of Paul as any of the other things he wrote about himself. He says:

I Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet [fit] to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

He is a far different man from what he was before. We need to stop for just a second and give a little bit of time for us to reflect on how different are we from before we were converted. Would we be willing to admit the same things that Paul did? It is a question that needs to be asked.

Are we showing a kind of pattern of behavior like Paul gave to God? Are we showing the kind of sacrifice that he gave to God? Are we showing the kind of dedication that he had to the responsibility that God gave to him, burning himself out day and night for the sake of the brethren, for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ? He literally gave his life, not at one time, which would have been easy, but over a long period of time? maybe thirty or forty years? in doing what he did

He wrote I Corinthians about 51-52 AD, so there he was, roughly 19 or 20 years after conversion, and he was calling himself, honestly and truthfully, "the least of the apostles." And yet he also says in another place, "Nobody worked harder than I did." He said, "I worked more than they all." That can even be understood to mean, "I worked more than all of them put together." What a change! Nobody will ever be able to accuse Paul of not giving up his life, of sacrificing it.

Let us go back to the book of Galatians once again.

Galatians 1:11-12 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:15-18 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

There is something very interesting that Paul reveals about himself at the beginning of verse 15. It says there, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace." Some translators render the beginning phrase of this verse as: "But He who had set me apart before I was born." That changes things considerably; not that God merely oversaw his birth, but now Paul is claiming (if it is translated that way, and translated correctly) that like Jacob, like Jeremiah, like John the Baptist and others, that he was sanctified in the womb.

Why would Paul want to make sure that we understood this?

Romans 9:9-12 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls:) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

These verses make sure that anybody who heard Paul or read the words that he wrote, which is now scripture, would understand clearly that absolutely no works of his had anything at all to do with God's choice of him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. No works of Jacob made God choose Jacob. Jacob was set apart in the womb, and Paul is claiming the same thing. No works of Paul made God call *him*, because he too was set apart in the womb before he did *anything*.

It is important for us to understand this, that what matters is what *God* did, and what *we* do after God does what *He* does; that is, following conversion. But there is something else that I think is worth considering too. If God did set Paul apart from the womb, then it is highly likely that God guided and directed him through his entire education—the education that Paul received long before God ever called him directly into His service as an apostle. Paul was admirably and thoroughly trained in the basic foundation of Old Covenant law without his ever knowing, until his calling, what its real use would be.

I know that Herbert Armstrong thought that God set him apart long before he was aware that he was called. Is it possible that God has done the same with you, with me? I think that possibility exists.

If any of you heard my sermon that I gave during the Feast of Tabernacles, expounding upon Hebrews 4, in verses 3 and 4 it says very plainly there that "God's works were finished from the foundation of the world." Do you understand what that means? It is awesome! It is saying there that God had the whole thing planned out before He ever began. That is mind-numbing! It is something that will ring your bell and give you some appreciation for God and the kind of mind that we are dealing with.

God knows the end from the beginning, and He can maneuver and manipulate His creation?that means you and me?into the circumstances that we need to prepare us for what He is preparing for the Kingdom of God. He allows us the liberty to make choices. We can make wrong choices, but then He has a way of straightening us out. It might be painful. We can avoid those pains if we do the right thing the first time. We are dealing with a great God of awesome mind, and we need to appreciate it and fear what He is. I do not necessarily mean be afraid of, but to respect it for what it is.

In Galatians 1:11, Paul emphasis that what he received, what he preached, came directly from Christ. This does not mean that he had absolutely no discussions with any Christian person regarding doctrine; rather that shortly after his conversion he departed to the desert and was there taught directly by Christ, and any human input that there might have been was minor to a very great degree. It was Christ who directly taught him.

No one knows for sure whether Christ was literally there in person, revealed as He was to the original twelve. It may well have been that Paul had to minutely and thoroughly examine the Old Testament, guided and inspired by Christ, to understand what the original apostles understood. That would account for the three years.

Again, I am pretty sure that is what Herbert Armstrong thought, because I heard him say, "I had to learn like the apostle did, on my knees, with the Bible open in front of me." He said it took him a long, long time?a lot longer than it took the apostle Paul. But I know he felt that Christ was there, but in spirit and not revealed, but was guiding and directing his study and the understanding of God's Word so that he would come up with the answers, the doctrines, the teachings that would exactly parallel what He had done with the original apostles.

As news of Paul's conversion and preaching in Gentile areas spread through the ranks of Jewish church members, opposition to the validity of his calling and the message arose. This was after the three years. So Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, James, and John, not to be instructed by them, but to get to know them and compare notes.

Incidentally, verse 18 tells me that what I have just said is correct, because in verse 18 Paul says, "I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter." It means not to be instructed, but to meet him. That is all.

Galatians 2:6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it makes no matter to me: God accepts no man's person)

for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.

He believed exactly the same things the apostles did, and they believed the same things he did, and so their discussions proved to one another, and they were comfortable with each other.

I have not seen this stated anywhere I have studied, but I believe the apostle Paul wrote more about God's law in the New Testament than all of the other apostles combined. In fact, when what Luke wrote about him in Acts is combined with the epistles Paul wrote, about one-half of the New Testament is about him, or came through his mind. I bring this up because I want you to understand to appreciate that this man is very important to Christianity.

What did the original apostles and Paul believe regarding obedience to God's law? Unfortunately today it is often looked upon in liberal Protestant, and even in Evangelical Protestant circles, as though it is little more than an option one has rather than a duty-bound obligation we owe to God, fellowman, and ourselves as well.

I want you to reflect again on two things that Peter said about Paul's writings. First, that some of the things he wrote are difficult to understand, and second, that it is the unstable and the untaught who twist what he said to their destruction. In other words, they wrongly judged what he wrote, and this we most assuredly do not want to do.

Let us go back to a very well-known scripture in Romans 8.

Romans 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh [the unconverted] cannot please God.

If we are honest and not self-deceived, we will admit that there is a built-in bias that we have all experienced against God's law. Unconverted anti-law commentators have a way of wrestling with what Paul wrote, trying to understand Paul's sometimes difficult reasoning. Then they write volumes explaining what *they* think he meant to say and most frequently state in their writing and anti-law position.

I want you to take warning, because what they do is a wrong approach. First of all, does it ever dawn on these people that Paul was writing these sometimes long complicated sentences exactly as *God* inspired him? Does not God's Word say that every word of this Book is God-breathed, inspired of Him? This is where we have got to start. God wanted those things to be difficult to understand. God does not make everything easy.

God did not make it easy for the Israelites in the wilderness. He said, "I allowed you to go hungry." He made it difficult for them so that we would understand that everything connected to life, once God converts us, is not going to be easy, and sometimes understanding what He is saying is going to be very, very difficult. How difficult? Well, so difficult that another apostle said that they are difficult! If the apostle thought they were hard to understand, they are going to be harder to understand for you and me who do not have the same measure of experience or the same measure of God's spirit as those men did.

We do not want to fall into the same trap as the unconverted and twist Paul's writings to our destruction, and so that makes understanding Paul's scriptures very serious business. Be patient, knowing that when you look into the writings of these anti-law commentators that there is a built-in bias against God's law in what they write. When they set aside God's law as something as not being required of a Christian for salvation, that setting aside is made on the basis of those perverted judgments. They will be there.

We are going to let James, another apostle, explain to us what the process is. This was to me shocking. To tell you the truth, I never quite thought of it this way, and it was because I did not understand what James was saying, but I do now.

James 4:11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

What James wrote there is very good to understand. James is using slander here as an example of sin, but any sin will do. Any sin would serve as the example. When we slander a brother, or anyone for that matter, we have in actual fact twisted God's requirement that we do not do this. By judging that God's law against slander does not apply to us, we therefore set ourselves above the law. Do you get that? We have actually put ourselves in the place of God by setting our own standard. [We say] "Well, that does not apply to me." Oh yes it does, and so we have set our own standard.

Do you know what we do? We do exactly what Satan motivated Adam and Eve to do in the Garden of Eden. He cynically said to them, "You shall be as God, knowing good and evil." They set their own standard. What God had told them did not apply to them. They set their own standard. They judged that God's standard was not good enough for them, and therefore they took of what God said not to do.

This has another interesting ramification, and that is that we have knowledge of God's law in a way that the unconverted do not have. If we sin, we usually know it. We are then forced to supply all kinds of justification for our act in order to avoid the pangs of guilt. Well, why not just avoid the pangs of guilt by simply not sinning in the first place? This is exactly what Paul was, and to this day, is exhorting Christians in his writings: "Do not break the law."

I am going to carry this a little bit further.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without [or apart from] the deeds of the law.

Let us look at Galatians 2 again, where Paul writes something very similar, but adds something to that.

Galatians 2:15-16 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the

Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Up to this point it sounds very much like what Paul wrote in Romans 3: 28. In fact, it is virtually the same thing: "By deeds of the law, nobody is justified."

Galatians 2:17-18 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners [that is, to break the law], is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Keeping God's law has not even one time, since mankind was created, ever justified a single person before God. The function of God's law is to define righteousness. It defines sin, but it does not justify. Law guides us along a path of life. We are going to go back to Psalm 119 where we will see this confirmed.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

There is always an underlying theme in Paul's writings that sin is very serious business, but I have seen those verses that I originally read here—Romans 8: 28 and Galatians 2: 26—used to support a "no-law" position; i.e., that we are not required to keep God's law. What these verses clearly say is that nobody can be *justified* by keeping the law, keeping any law of God. The argument of these "no law" people is, "Why be concerned about keeping something that cannot make one right before God?"

Why cannot law keeping justify one before God? The reason is because that is not the function of law; not only law in general, but law more specifically in terms of God. It is not the function of God's law to justify.

Function is the purpose or the activity a thing is assigned or established to perform. Here is a simple illustration. I will assume that everybody knows what a Philip's head screwdriver is. If one has a Philip's head screwdriver, but one has slotted screws, that Philip's head screwdriver will not work in the slotted screw heads. Why not? Because that is not its function. It is not designed nor manufactured to work with slotted screws.

The same principle is true of God's law. It is not designed by God, and it cannot be required by any human being to use obedience to the law to justify one's self. It cannot do it. Law's function is to *guide*. Law's function is to *define* right and wrong. Law's function is to set standards of conduct. It cannot justify. Whether converted or unconverted, our keeping it will

never justify anybody, because that is beyond its function to do such a thing.

There are a couple of other things that I need to add to law's function—things that we are more familiar with in terms of the Bible, and that is that law defines righteousness. Law defines what love is. Law's function is to educate one upon a line of conduct that will please God, but it will not justify one, and so it is essential that we understand what justification is.

In the biblical sense, justification means *to clear of guilt*. In a legal sense, it means *to align with a standard*. Justification aligns one with a standard. After one has broken God's law, God's law cannot be used to align a person with a standard. It takes something else *designed* to justify, and that something else is *the blood of Jesus Christ*. That will align us with the standard. It will align us with God's law. It will align us with the code of conduct that God has established that we live by.

We need to understand this in light of what Paul wrote here in Galatians 2:17-18, because I said he added something there to this statement that law keeping will not justify anybody. He says, "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, ? (Notice he does not say justified by the law but *justified by Christ*).?we ourselves also are found sinners [we are breaking the law], is therefore Christ the minister of sin?" In other words, does Christ think it is all right if we break His law? "God forbid," Paul says. "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

Let us understand this a little bit further. We are going to go back to Romans 7 to verses that we looked at before but let us look at them in a slightly different light from what we did before.

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. No, I had not known sin but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet.

Paul is telling us here what the law does. It shows us a code of conduct that is acceptable with God, and to break that law is sin. He said he did not even know what sin was until he understood what the purpose of the law was. It is to point out what is right and what is wrong. He is talking here now about when he was converted. This is a man who understood a great deal about Old Covenant law, but when he was converted something happened to his mind that made him look at the law in a way that he had not perceived it, nor understood it before. He said:

Romans 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

Paul is saying that when he really began to understand the law in its spirit, he began to see sin all over the place in him in the way he conducted his life. Do you think he thought that he was sinning whenever he consented to Stephen's death? He did not think that he was sinning. He thought he was defending the faith. But now his outlook had changed considerably. He said:

Romans 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the

commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

He finally began to really see it. He was a dead man as far as he was concerned, and God could take his life at any time, because Paul owed Him something that he could not pay without giving up his life.

Romans 7:10-12 And the commandment, which was ordained to life [meaning that its purpose was to make life good, better] I found to be unto death [because it aroused in him an awareness. It inspired in him an understanding of what a rotten wretch he really was, and he said] For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore [the conclusion is] the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

Paul wants us to understand that is the way the commandment is, but he was not like that at all.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him,?

Remember he said, "The law came, sin revived, and I died." Now he is using the term "crucified." What do you do with somebody who is dead? What do you do with somebody who was crucified?

Romans 6:6-7 ?that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

And so Paul got baptized. He was buried. He was a dead man. Now we understand what he means in verses 17 and 18 of Galatians 2:

Galatians 2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ [by faith in His blood through repentance, through baptism],?

We are buried in baptism into Christ's death. We symbolically go through dying by getting baptized, and then we symbolically go through a resurrection to life again, and Christ is now our Lord and Master.

Galatians 2:17-18 ?we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ [our Lord and Master] the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed [his former life, his life in the flesh], I make myself a transgressor.

Is this man possibly saying that God's law is done away! No way! He gives absolutely no hint that the law of God is done away, but people twist it into making his words say something that

is not there, and the unlearned, the untaught, will believe it and think that they do not have to obey God's law. I speak from experience in the sense that I left, and my wife left, the Worldwide Church of God in 1992 because we came to the conclusion that these people were telling us that keeping the law of God was no longer required. Well, God destroyed that body completely for that kind of teaching. I am glad you left when you did, because you would have gone down with it.

So it is the body of sin (meaning the "old sinning self") that was crucified with Christ through faith in Christ's blood, repentance, and baptism. It was spiritually destroyed so it could be resurrected and built again. Now does Paul want us to build again what we had just destroyed? Not at all. It has to be built again, but not by going back to sin. From the very beginning of Romans 6, as well as Paul's point in Galatians 2, his concern is that we should be aware that a course of life that does not consider sin as dangerous would defeat the very purpose of our life as believers.

Paul is absolutely consistent that he does not consider law as to function "done away" at any time in any person's life. Its function is always to guide one along a safe path to the goal of God's purpose. Thus, when Paul writes, using law's function as it pertains to salvation, his approach then is always general. There is only so much that any law—even God's laws—can do.

Obedience to God's law cannot justify us. It never has, and never will, save anyone. But on the other hand, everyone who is saved will be a keeper of God's laws, because God details in the law the path that He wants us to use to be prepared for His kingdom. It is that simple. It is the breaking of God's laws—departing from the path that they detail, beginning with Adam and Eve—that has gotten everybody in trouble with God, and has required Christ's death to pay the penalty.

It is obedience to God's laws following forgiveness that glorifies God and provides Him with the evidence that we have learned our lessons well, and that we are striving with all of our being to keep ourselves free from falling into the same trap once again.

There is something else that I want to go into, but it is rather long and I only have about five minutes left. But I will give you two summary points to this place. I actually have three here, but I am only going to give you two of Paul's that appear in this sermon.

number 1: The apostle used his early life as an example and pattern that all of us have fallen into and followed to some degree, thus creating a mountain of debt owed to God. In fact it kills us.

number 2: Obedience to laws—even God's laws—can accomplish only so much, because it is not the function of law to spiritually save. Law's function is to guide one along the path of conduct, to define righteousness, love, and sin, and to set standards.

The next point I have is to do with self-righteousness, but we will save that for another day.