

Chapter Fifty-nine
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
Spiritual Life in Progressive Sanctification

⁷ What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. ⁸ But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin *was* dead. ⁹ For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. ¹⁰ And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. ¹¹ For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*. ¹² Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. ¹³ Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:7-13).

Paul says, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” in Romans 7:10. We have two possibilities in this text regarding Paul’s statement “for I was alive.”

1. Paul is referring to the age of innocence and accountability before God as a little child before he came to a consciousness of sin.
2. Paul is referring to a time prior to his conversion when he was living under the false premises of the “Jews’ religion” in ignorance of the purpose of the Law and only thought he “was alive.”

As the Old Scofield Study Bible notes tell us regarding these verses, Romans 7:7-25 are “autobiographical.” Paul is using himself and his life experience as the example of both conversion and progressive sanctification. Therefore, I would lean heavily towards Paul referring to a time prior to his conversion when he was living under the false premises of the “Jews’ religion” in ignorance of the purpose of the Law and only thought he “was alive.” Moral consciousness does not equal spiritual life.

Second, the center of the discussion here is not about salvation, but progressive sanctification. Paul’s reference to his being “alive” is not to a false notion of salvation (although he did have a false notion of salvation in the Law prior to his conversion). Paul is referring a false notion of spiritual life. The Law could not and did not give true spiritual life like the Spirit of God does in His indwelling of the believer and His filling of the believer’s life. Paul is referring to the issue of spirituality coming through the Law. Just as salvation by Law-keeping was a hopeless endeavor, so is spirituality (practical sanctification) hopeless by Law-keeping. This is Paul’s subject matter in Galatians chapter 2:19 through the end of chapter 3.

¹⁹ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. ¹ O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? ² This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain. ⁵ He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith” (Galatians 2:19-3:5)?

The word “grace” is often used in Scripture synonymously with divine empowering or enablement. This is the context of “grace” we find in both Romans 5:1 through 8:39 and Galatians 2:19 through 3:5.

“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision” (Galatians 2:9).

“⁷ Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ⁸ Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:7-8).

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 2:1).

God’s Throne is the sole distribution center for His grace and it is always a gift (undeserved). He has given unlimited grace to every believer in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

“⁵ Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. ⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: ⁷ Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (I Peter 5:5-7).

The theology of God’s enabling grace is often confusing when it comes to such things as blessings and chastisement. A blessing is when God dispenses grace in the life of the believer that the believer might enjoy. Blessings are often conditioned on obedience to God’s Word. Chastisement is when God dispenses grace in the life of the believer to correct inappropriate actions, attitudes or practices. Both are acts of God’s grace. The believer simply chooses which *tap* he wants God’s grace to flow from.

Often a wrong theology of grace results in people thinking they have liberty to sin excusing themselves from individual responsibility in the areas of separation from the things of the world and obedience to Biblical commands. This person translates grace as freedom *from* the Law rather than *power* to obey. Grace is never used in this way in the Bible. In fact, as we have already see, the opposite is true.

“¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?³ Know ye not, that so many of us as were {are} baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:1-4).

“¹¹ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. ¹³ Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. ¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:11-15).

Paul clearly explains the difference between being under Law and under Grace in Galatians 5:13-18.

“¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁵ But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. ¹⁶ *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Galatians 5:13-18).

“Liberty” (grace) does not give the believer permission to live any way he sees fit. “Liberty” (grace) is defined as walking “in the Spirit.” This refers to living life yielded to and empowered by the Holy Spirit as He transforms a life as the believer yields his will to the Word of God. In doing so, the believer will not allow his carnal nature (“lust of the flesh”) to have control. Therefore, the “liberty” of grace is the enabling of the Holy Spirit to give power to habitually live victorious over the sinful and destructive desires of the carnal nature. Once the believer is saved, his position before God is “in grace.”

“¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2).

The issue of spiritual growth (Galatians 3:3; practical sanctification) includes growing in our standards of holiness, personal and ecclesiastical separation, and personal self disciplines. A believer is not spiritual (“perfect,” spiritually mature) because he keeps God’s commandments. He will keep God’s commandments because He is spiritual (yielded to the Spirit). All spiritual growth takes place by the means of grace. There is no spiritual growth apart from growth “in grace.”

“¹⁰ As every man hath received the gift, *even so* minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God; if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (I Peter 4:10-11).

“But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen” (II Peter 3:18).

Paul says “the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death” (Romans 7:10). The “commandment” refers to the whole Law in general. The “commandment” was intended for life (rules to live by). This meaning is clarified by Leviticus 18:5.

“¹ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ² Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God. ³ After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. ⁴ Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I *am* the LORD your God. ⁵ Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD” (Leviticus 18:1-5).

However, Paul discovered “*This I found unto death (heurethê moi--hautê eis thanaton)*. Literally, ‘the commandment the one for (meant for) life, this was found for me unto death.’ First aorist (effective) passive indicative of *heuriskô*, to find, not active as the English has it. It turned out so for me (ethical dative).”¹

¹ A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume IV, Page 368, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Paul looked for spiritual life in Law keeping. Instead he discovered his own sinfulness in the Law and, along with that sinfulness, his own condemnation (“death”) due to the corruption of his fallen nature. What Paul discovered was sinful desires. When externalism (outward appearances) becomes the criterion for spirituality, the sinfulness that lies within us in our Sin Natures is shrouded and hidden from the view of others. Unfortunately, our own Sin Natures use externalism as a mask by which we deceive ourselves into thinking we are spiritual.

“For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*” (Romans 7:11).

We tend to dismiss the inner desire for sin (“lust”) because we have been successful in dismissing the temptation. We fail to see, perhaps refuse to see, that the inner desire is sin in itself. Therefore, spirituality (spiritual life) cannot be produced by externalism. If the fountain is corrupt, everything from the fountain is corrupt. If the believer wants true spiritual life to flow through him, he must bring himself into union (“fellowship”) with the new Fount of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

³⁸ He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. ³⁹ (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)” (John 7:38-39).

The “law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Romans 7:12). The Law is God’s and it comes forth from God’s holiness. Therefore, God’s intent in giving the Law is “holy, and just, and good.” The Law as a rule of life, which forbids all lusting and is intended to provide avenues of righteousness for correcting our human failures, is one of God’s many tools working all things “together for good” (Romans 8:28).

⁷ The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. ⁸ The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them is thy servant warned: *and* in keeping of them *there is* great reward. ¹² Who can understand *his* errors? cleanse thou me from secret *faults*. ¹³ Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous *sins*; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:7-14).

“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:13). Paul’s spiritual death was not CAUSED by the Law. Paul’s spiritual death was CAUSED by the sin that was in him. Again, the word “sin” is not referring to individual acts of sin, but to Paul’s Sin Nature; the corrupt fountain that can only bring forth corruption, not spiritual life. Secondly, we must constantly reiterate the subject at hand is not salvation, but the spiritual life that comes from being saved and indwelled by the Holy Spirit of God. The Sin Nature is not eradicated by salvation. The Sin Nature was “crucified with Christ” (Rom. 6:6), which frees the believer to be “married to another” (Rom. 7:3-4; union with the Holy Spirit).

The realization that death to spirituality lies within the corrupted and fallen nature of all of mankind is an issue that can only be fully comprehended in the *heart*. The *heart* is used as a metaphor in these things because it is where life is sustained (life is in the blood;” Lev. 17:11). This is why God says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked . . .” (Jeremiah 17:9a). That is why conversion and conviction must take place inwardly; “understand with their heart, and . . . be converted” (Matthew 13:15). Looking externally at performance in Law keeping is self-deceptive regarding the reality of true spiritual life. Understanding this inward reality reveals that the Law does not reveal our righteousness in that the Law’s commandment to not covet reveals how “exceeding sinful” we really are.

Chapter Fifty-nine
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
Spiritual Life in Progressive Sanctification

1. What is the significance of Romans 7-25 being “autobiographical” to our understanding of what Paul is saying in Romans 7:10? _____

2. Why is it important to understand that the center of discussion here is not salvation, but progressive sanctification? _____

3. Discuss the parallel in Galatians 2:19-3:5 regarding the hopelessness of spirituality (practical sanctification) through Law keeping and the only source for spirituality (spiritual life) is to be found in the doctrine of “grace.” _____

4. How do verses like Romans 6:1-4 and 11-15 correct a false theology of grace resulting in people thinking they have liberty to sin excusing themselves from individual responsibility in the areas of separation from the things of the world and obedience to Biblical commands? _____

5. Discuss Paul’s explanation of the difference between being under Law and under Grace (“liberty”) in Galatians 5:13-18. _____

6. By what means does all spiritual growth take place and from which all spiritual life is produced? ____

7. Explain Paul’s statement in Romans 7:10 using Leviticus 18:1-5. _____

8. When externalism (outward appearances) becomes the criterion for _____, the sinfulness that lies within us in our Sin Natures is shrouded and hidden from the view of others. Unfortunately, our own Sin Natures use externalism as a mask by which we deceive _____ into thinking we are spiritual.
9. Explain Romans 7:12 from the context of Psalm 19:7-14. _____

10. **“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:13).** Paul’s spiritual death was not _____ by the Law. Paul’s spiritual death was _____ by the sin that was in him.