



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"I ♥ Exposed"

Romans 7:5-12

If you run across an item titled, *X-rays of Strange Items in Kid's Stomachs Amaze Doctors*, you gotta stop and look at it.

The most commonly swallowed items include coins, barrettes, rocks and buttons.

More uncommon items x-rayed included the following:

- A fork
- A car key
- Magnetic blocks that reconnected once in the stomach
- Batteries, especially button batteries (which can create a circuit in the esophagus and burn through it)
- Safety pins

The apostle Paul didn't know anything about x-ray machines in the first century. If he did he might have, in this section of Romans seven, used the analogy that God's Law is like an x-ray machine in that it reveals what is hidden inside the human heart and mind.

He says something pretty similar as it is. He's going to talk about how God's Law was a spiritual diagnostic to reveal the human heart.

If you've ever had an x-ray you've probably seen the report from the radiologist. After describing what the x-ray shows he or she summarizes the findings. Verse five reads like a summary of the findings.

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

“When we were in the flesh,” i.e., before we are converted to Christ, God’s Law “aroused,” meaning *revealed* and *exposed*, the fact that “sinful passions” were “at work in [the] members [of our physical body].”

What are some of the passions revealed and exposed by God’s Law? Elsewhere Paul lists some of them as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries (Galatians 5:19-21).

Romans 7:6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

The first part of verse six reminds us of what we learned in verses one through four. There Paul explained that when we died with Jesus, we were set free from the Law the way a wife is freed from her deceased husband. We were set free to marry another - to be the betrothed bride of Jesus Christ.

In our newfound freedom we are empowered to “serve in the newness of the Spirit.” We are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit and are encouraged by Him to yield ourselves to the Lord.

The “oldness of the letter” is to live trying to please God by keeping the Law’s rules and regulations and rites and rituals. We don’t live by Law anymore. Love is a superior motive for daily living, for obedience, for holiness.

Paul is going to expand on “serv[ing] in the newness of the Spirit” in chapter eight. But before Paul could describe this way of living, he knew he had an argument to overcome.

A Jew, or a Gentile who had converted to Judaism, would hear Paul's comments about God's Law and think, "There must be something wrong with God's Law if it exposes and reveals people's sin."

Paul must stop to respond to this objection and show that the problem was not with God's Law but in man.

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

I know I'm belaboring the whole x-ray illustration but would you say that x-rays are bad because they show you what is wrong? No, of course not.

So why would someone think God's Law was 'bad?'

They might think that because they misunderstand the purpose of God's Law. The Jews had a long history of supposing that the purpose of God's Law **WAS** to make them righteous. They believed the *diagnostic* was the *cure!*

As a diagnostic tool, the x-ray is great. But what if a person who had swallowed something said, "I'll just stay right here, being x-rayed, until I get better." What if they thought the x-ray could help them get better?

We'd understand immediately they need something more to help them. So does a man or a woman whose sinful passions have been revealed.

"I would not have known sin except through the law." The Jews had summed-up God's Law with 613 commandments. Of the 613 commandments, 248 were mandates telling you what you should *do* and 365 were prohibitions telling you what *not to do*. Then there were endless commentaries on exactly how to 'keep' the various mandates and how to avoid the prohibitions. The Jews thought that by 'keeping' the Law they were attaining and maintaining a righteousness that was acceptable to God.

“Covetousness” is the most internal of the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments. Paul’s point was that God’s Law exposes what is already present in your heart. It exposes a sin nature you are born with.

Romans 7:8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

“Opportunity” is a word borrowed from the military. It means *to establish a base of operations*. When I hear a “commandment,” such as “Do not covet,” I realize that within my heart sin has a base of operations. I **do** covet! There is a base right there, in my heart, from which covetousness operates.

In fact, not just covetousness but “all manner of evil desire” has a base of operation in my heart.

“Apart from the law sin was dead” means I did not recognize my indwelling sin nature until it was exposed by God’s Law.

Romans 7:9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

When was Paul “alive... without the law?” I think he was referring to himself as a Pharisee thinking that spiritual life could be achieved and maintained by personal effort, by works of righteousness according to the outward tenets of God’s Law. He had a certain kind of ‘life’ that he lived when he thought keeping the Law would save him.

“When the commandment came” is when Paul realized the inward, spiritual, holy nature of the Law and understood that it’s purpose was to show him his sin. Thus “sin revived,” meaning it *sprang to life* as to his awareness of it in his heart. Instead of bringing him life, he “died,” meaning he understood he was spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins and that the Law could not help him.

In terms of our analogy, Paul understood God’s Law was diagnosing his problem, not curing it.

Romans 7:10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

As a Pharisee Paul thought he could have eternal “life” by keeping God’s Law. But when it really exposed his heart he saw it’s true purpose. It brought “death.”

Romans 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

While expecting to merit eternal life by keeping the Law, God showed Paul his sin by revealing his covetous heart. He realized he had been deceived by sin in that he thought it could be overcome by outward obedience alone. Instead he would be killed for his sin. He was headed for eternal death.

Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

“Therefore” reminds us that Paul was answering an objection. He was answering those who said he was teaching that if it revealed sin then God’s Law must be bad. No, all of God’s Law is “holy,” and every one of its commands is “holy, just and good.”

The Law and the commandments serve a great purpose. They accurately diagnose the spiritually dead condition of your heart by showing you all the sinful passions that have their base of operations there.

If God’s Law is His spiritual x-ray then Christians are His technicians who subject nonbelievers to the Law in the hope they will see what is really inside them – a sin nature that has set up a base of operations.

Once a person has the correct diagnosis - indwelling sin - he or she will be apt to receive the cure - Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead.