

Slain by the Law

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Romans 7:9

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Let's turn to Romans chapter seven again, please, Romans the seventh chapter.

The Bible clearly teaches. I want you to get...the introduction of my message this morning is I believe the most important part of the message. It is what the message is all about, what I am going to say right now, the introduction.

The Scriptures clearly teach, clearly teach that a work of judgment always precedes or accompanies...now which word to use there I am just not certain. It is like somebody said, "Which comes first repentance or faith?" "Well, it's difficult to say. Repentance and faith," Mr. Spurgeon said, "is like a piece of paper. You have got to have two sides. You can't have faith without repentance. You can't have repentance without faith."

No man has ever turned to God unless he is turned away from his idols. And a man who turns away from his idols must turn to God. He must turn to God. You can't turn to nothing. Every man has a master. No man can serve two masters, but every man has a master. We are either servants of sin or we are servants of God. We are either servants of self or servants of God.

So what I am saying is that the Scriptures clearly teach that a work of judgment, conviction, conviction of sin of exceeding sinfulness of sin always accompanies a work of grace. There is no man ever been brought to Christ who has not been delivered from sin. There is no man ever been brought to Christ who has not been made aware of his evil, of his sin, of his need of Christ.

Now this is what Paul said in the book of Acts chapter 20 when he was talking to the elders at Antioch. He said, "I have preached the gospel testifying both to the Jews and two the Greeks two things: repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. I have kept back nothing profitable unto you. I have been true," he said, "in the declaration of this two fold message: Judgment and grace, conviction, conversion, repentance and faith. You don't have one without the other.

It is like in 1 Thessalonians chapter one. He wrote to the church at Thessalonica and he says, "I know your election of God because you heard the gospel not in word only, but in

the power of the Holy Spirit and much conviction and assurance. But,” he said, “you turned from your idols to serve the living God.”

So be assured of this. No man has ever been brought to Christ without being convicted of sin. No man has ever believed on Christ for the saving of his soul who does not have any heart, genuine repentance and sorrow over sin. Sin has to be dealt with before grace is applied. They has got to be a hunger before a filling. There has got to be an emptiness before there is a filling.

One preacher said this years ago. And I think it is very good. “If a person misses Holy Spirit conviction he is going to miss repentance. If a person misses repentance he is going to miss Christ. If a person misses Christ he is going to miss eternal life.”

So the beginning of the work of salvation is conviction of sin. What do you say are the first steps that a man takes toward heaven?

Somebody says, “Well, the first step that a man takes toward heaven is to believe on Christ.”

I don’t think so. The first step that a man takes toward heaven is feeling his need of Christ. The first step that a person takes toward God is not believing, but being convicted, being broken over sin.

Like...let’s take some Bible examples. Here was Bartimaeus sitting by the wayside. Bartimaeus was healed by our Lord, by the power of Christ. But Bartimaeus sitting there in his blindness and darkness felt a need. He felt a need for mercy, a need for help, a need for Christ’s help. And so Bartimaeus what did he do first? He didn’t believe on Christ first. He cried out for Christ’s help. It was a feeling of his need. Had he not been blind, had he not been in darkness, had he not been sitting by the wayside begging, there is a good possibility he never would have sought Christ’s help.

The same thing is true of the publican in the temple. He came in there and cried, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

The same thing is true of the leper in Matthew chapter eight who said, “Lord, if you will you can make me whole.”

Christ said, “The well do not need a physician, but folks who are sick. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

So the first thing in this thing of the conversion of the soul is the conviction of the heart. The first step toward God, the first step toward grace, the first step towards saving interest in Christ is being brought to realize that I am a sinner.

Now this revelation of sin...now listen to this. This revelation of sin to the heart—and it is a revelation to the heart. It is not just an awareness that everybody is a sinner. It is not just a belief in the fact.

“Well, I know man is depraved. I know everybody is a sinner.”

But this revelation of sin is a real crisis. We have been reading in Romans seven about a real crisis. It is a real disturbing crisis when a person realizes that he is a sinner. And it is a crisis. It is a traumatic experience from which a person never fully recovers.

Now you may find by God’s grace the remedy for sin. You may find the pardon of sin. You may find the forgiveness of sin. But if you ever enter into this crisis and it is a shocking traumatic experience and not everybody has experienced it. Everybody who is saved has experienced it. Everybody who has been saved has.

Now stay with me. I am saying this, that this work of judgment, this conviction of sin, this stripping by the Holy Spirit...And it is a stripping. This laying bare of the heart by the Holy Spirit, this tearing out of the foundations, this humbling of the mind, this devastation of the man’s pride, this revelation of sin, sin, sin, like we are talking about here...here was one of the most moral men on the earth, Paul. Here was one of the most dedicated men on earth. Here was a man who wrote more Scripture, preached more sermons, organized more churches. Here was a man who was consecrated and full time in one pursuit and that he was to make Christ known. And yet here is this man talking about old wretched man that I am, a law of sin warring in my members, a body of death. The things I would do I do them not. The things I would not do, I do.

This man has gone through a traumatic crisis and experience. He has been so humbled and broken by the power of God’s Spirit that he has seen, first hand, for himself with a personal realization and understanding what an awful guilty, corrupt, evil creature he is by birth, nature, choice and practice.

And this is a crisis from which a man never recovers. I say he may find the pardon of sin. He may find the forgiveness of sin. He may find the remedy for sin, but he never gets over his consciousness of sin. He never covers.

Actually...actually his awareness of sin and his sinfulness grows stronger every day. That’s right.

All right. Let’s give some Bible examples. Here is David, probably 60, 65 years of age when he wrote psalm 51. And here he is crying, “My sins are ever before me.” In his early days he was writing songs like, “The Lord is my shepherd,” messianic psalms of that nature. In his older days he was talking about “my sins and how God was just when he condemned and righteous when he spoke.”

Listen to Job. Here was Job a man who for many years in his life was...spoke quite often of his knowledge of God. And he spoke rightly. He had a knowledge of God because God

at the end of all this experience said to his three friends, "You have lied on me." Job told the truth.

What Job has said is true. And yet I hear this man Job, this man of whom God says, "Among men he is righteous. Among men he shuns evil."

But here Job speaks of himself after this realization, after the revelation, after this traumatic crisis when God let him see what he was. In the light of God's character, in the light of God's holiness, in the light of God's purity Job says, "I hate myself."

Now I know the psychiatrists say you are supposed to love yourself and are supposed to have...hold yourself in high esteem and I'm ok, you're ok. This is the spirit of this day. But Job, after he saw the Lord said, "I hate myself. I repent in sackcloth and ashes." He said, "I have been popping off. I have spoken. I have said things far too wonderful for me. I am going to put my hand on my mouth," he says, "I am not going to say anything else. I'm not going to say..."

Listen to Isaiah. Isaiah in chapter six said, "I saw the Lord, the Lord in his glory, the Lord in his holiness." This was the revelation. Now, you are never going to have this experience comparing yourselves with other people because you just come out looking pretty good and we usually pick somebody, you know, down here to compare ourselves with. We come out looking pretty good when we start comparing ourselves with outward laws and statutes and all these different things. We come out looking pretty good. Other people.

But God let Isaiah see himself in the light of God's holiness. And Isaiah said, "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips."

And, you see, lips...this was Isaiah's life. He was a prophet. He was a prophet, a man who was supposed to speak good things and glorious things and spiritual things. But he picked his stock and trade. He picked his real guilt. He picked his point of excellence and he said, "That's unclean." A man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips."

Take Paul here the chief of sinners. Take Daniel, Daniel the man of men in the country there, Darius' kingdom. And yet he said, "When I saw the Lord my comeliness, my beauty melted into corruption."

Now what I am saying is this. If God really saves, if God really reveals himself in saving, redeeming mercy through Christ to an individual, the first thing the Lord is going to do in order that that person might really believe on Christ and really trust Christ and really lean upon Christ and really receive Christ and really love Christ and really appreciate Christ, the first thing God is going to do, before he robes him in the beautiful spotless robe of his Son's righteousness, he is going to strip us naked. Now, he sure is. He is going to take every fig leaf apron of self righteousness, every little thing we hide.

He is going to take it and burn it and destroy it and leave us standing there without anything on and knowing we have nothing on. And then we cry for a covering.

Before God brings a man to bread, Christ the bread of life, that man is going to be hungry. That man is going to be so hungry that Christ will be the sweetest honey he has ever tasted. He is going...

And before God lets a man see his glory he is going to let him see just how much darkness he is really in.

Do you know there is nobody here this morning that would appreciate those emergency lights back there because we don't need them. But I will tell you tonight about nine o'clock if the lightning hits and all these lights go off and its pitch black in here and you can't find that door, that light would be mighty precious when there is no other light. And this is what I am saying is that before the Lord brings a man to the water he is going to thirst. It is going to be judgment before grace. There is going to be a stripping before a clothing. There is going to be a humbling before an exaltation. There is going to be a blindness before the light is revealed.

And I am saying this is a traumatic crisis. This is an experience that you never get over. When God shows me what I am, if God shows me what I am, I'll never forget it.

Now preachers may stand here in the pulpit and tell you what sinners we are and you go off and this afternoon you forget what that preacher said. But I will tell you this. If God ever lets you see just how low down we are by nature, how helpless, without God, without strength, without Christ, without hope, you won't ever forget it. And it grows. It increases as you get older, you realize.

And this is not just an awareness as I said before of the general guilt of all men. That won't get it. Well, everybody is guilty and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We can recite that just so flippantly, carelessly. This is not just...now listen to me. This is not just an acknowledgment of the violations of a few rules of moral conduct. Most people here right now in thinking about sin are pinpointing it to one thing you did some time ago. And if you hadn't have done that you would be in pretty good shape. If you hadn't have said this you would have been in pretty good shape.

Sin, my friends, is a whole lot broader than that. It is everything you have ever said has been wrong in God's sight.

You know we go back and we remember the time we stole that baseball or that watermelon or we said something our dear old mother, we said something back to her, we sassed her. Every good thing you have ever said has been wrong, too, in God's sight. I'm talking about God's sight.

He says from the soles of our feet to the top of our heads there is no soundness in us. He said there is none that understandeth. There is none that doeth good. So this aware...and do you see what a crisis it is?

You know, we weigh our lives and think about them and we think, "I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have done this. I shouldn't have said that. If I hadn't of said that or done that I would have had a good day."

And we just pick out little personal violations of moral codes. This thing of sin is a principle. It is a nature. It is a root. It is a being. It is a body of sin. Everything before God that I have ever said or ever done has been evil. That's so. And it is not just a feeling of guilt or earthly sorrow over offending another party or person. This is a heart crisis. This is a soul crisis of the greatest magnitude. This is a sight of personal corruption and personal evil and personal sin against God, a principle of evil, an all consuming principle and nature of evil that bows down the heart and overcomes a soul in despair before God.

"I'm a sinner."

Have you ever understood that? You will understand that before Christ will ever become precious to you.

I won't be able to do it for you. There is no way in this world that I can stand up here and mechanically lead you into conviction of sin. And nobody else can. You are not going to find it out reading somebody's book on total depravity. This crisis, this traumatic experience, this judgment of self, this judgment of self, this revelation of sin that will so crush you and break your heart and so humble you and so strip you before God and lay you bare before God that like the publican in the temple you will smite upon your breast in the presence of God and you won't even look up. You won't feel worthy to sing or worthy to pray or worthy to call his name. It will just be, "Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God, be merciful, be merciful to me the..." Did you know that that word...? That is a definite article. That is not "a" sinner, that is "the" sinner. This man was so overwhelmed with the grief of his sin that he said, "I am *the* sinner."

Paul was brought to that place. He said, "Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I, Paul am the chief, the greatest, the leader."

That is what I am talking about. That is exactly what I am talking about. And it is something you don't get over. And it is something that bows you down and brings you just to a sense of overwhelming grief before God. I am not talking about a cowering before men or other... They are all made out of the same rotten flesh you are made out of. They are dug out of the same pit. They are all hewn out of the same rock. Don't be looking down your nose at anybody. There is nobody beneath you. You are just as low as anybody can get. We are all down here on the same level, all sinners.

What did the Pharisee in the temple say? “I am not an adulterer. I am not an extortioner. I am not unjust. We be not sinners.”

So what does Paul mean here, “Without the law sin was dead”?

Here is what he means. He did not understand and had not been taught and it had not been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit the true content of the law, the true spirituality of the law. You who would be under the law, Paul said, don’t you hear the law?

Have you ever heard the law of God? Have you ever heard it?

Turn to Matthew five. Paul hadn’t. Matthew five.

Now listen to this. He is saying here, “Without the law sin was dead. Sin was dormant. Sin was inactive without the law.”

Here is what Paul is saying, “I knew the law in my head. I knew the 10 Commandments. I knew it said, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”

Look at Matthew five verse 21. Christ said, “You have heard it... you have heard that it was said by them of old times, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ You have heard that. You know that. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you. Here is what you haven’t heard. That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment.”

So we know the law. The law says, “Thou shalt not kill.” And Paul knew that law. Paul knew that law. But he only knew the law in its letter, the law in the letter, the law on tablets of stone, the law in his mind. He didn’t know the spirituality of the law, the real content of the law, the real requirements of the law. The law says, “Thou shalt not kill.” And what the law is saying is this. You shall not even have that feeling that leads to murder.

And these religious folks and today you say, “Well, I have never killed anybody.”

You have wanted to. You have wanted to. You see what I am saying?

“I have never stuck anybody across the face.”

You have wanted to.

“I have never done any harm to anybody.”

You have wanted to.

And that is what our Lord...that is the spirituality of the law, you see. And go on down. He said, verse 27, “ You have heard it said by them of old time, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’”

These Pharisees brought him a woman .They were trying to trap him to see where he stood on these things and he would have freed her he wasn't a friend of Moses and if he had stoned her he wasn't a friend of the people. So they brought this woman to him and threw her at his feet and said, “She was found in the act of adultery.”

You know what they meant. They meant she was found in the outward physical act of adultery.

Christ said in verse 21, “You have heard it said, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ But I say unto you whoso looketh, whoso looketh and desireth in his heart...”

This is the thing. Purity is not solely an act. It is in spirit and attitude and imagination and thought. And this is the content. This is the spirituality of the law. This is the spiritual content.

Look at verse 38. You have heard it said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Whatever men do you get even, you know. This is only fair. If he knocks your tooth out it is only fair somebody knocks his out. That's reasonable. That is justice.

But our Lord said, “I say unto you...this is what the law is saying, ‘Resist evil. Whosoever shall smite thee on the right check, turn the other.’”

“I can't do that, preacher.”

That's what I'm saying. If a man sue thee at the law and take away your coat, if a fellow takes you to court and takes your coat, let him have your cloak, too. If a man makes you go a mile, go with him two.

Verse 43, “You have heard it said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.’ I say unto you, ‘Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them that despitefully use you.’”

So here is what Paul is saying. Will you listen to me? Without the law, he is not saying I didn't know what it said. He is not saying I didn't approve of it. He is not saying I didn't try to keep it. He is not saying I didn't preach it or teach it. He did. But he is saying, “I didn't know what it was saying. I didn't have an understanding of the spirituality of God's law. God's law demands perfection not only in deed, but in thought, not only in act, but in attitude, not only in my manners, but in my motive. And I don't have to have...I don't...to offend in one point is to be guilty of the whole law. I might be...I might have just a fence up everywhere around the pasture and the fence down in one place and that is where the cows get out, Bob. That's where my problem is. So I might as well nto even have a fence.

Somebody says, "Well, I tell you. I have got some good points."

Well, you might as well not have any. That one makes you a sinner. One makes you a violator of God's whole law. That one destroys the whole pasture, the effectiveness of the whole pasture.

So this is what Paul...and before he had a knowledge of the spirituality of God's law sin was unrecognized. It was there, but it was dead. That is it was unrecognized. It was unadmitted and it was unacknowledged. It was dormant as far as his conscience was concerned.

I am not as bad as a lot of people. Have you often said that?

"Well, I'm not such a bad fellow. I don't know why the preacher always talks about total depravity and conviction of sin. There's a lot of things I have never done. I wanted to, but I never did."

All right look at the next line, verse eight. So that's verse nine. That's what verse eight is saying. Paul says, "Without the law, though I was religious, though I was trained in Gamaliel's school, though I had a lot of facts and understanding," he said, "The law...I didn't have a knowledge of the spirituality and sin just wasn't real to me. It wasn't real. It wasn't real in its ugliness, in its viciousness, in its evil, its corruption. It was dormant."

It was there, unrecognizable, unadmitted, unacknowledged.

All right. "I was alive. I was alive without the law." That means...here is what he is saying. "Having no consciousness of sin I was alive. I thank thee, Lord, I am not like other men. I am alive. I tithe. I give alms. I fast..." You see, I...I...I...I was alive. I was so big when sin is small. "I am not like this publican."

That is a sense of security and pride. And you know something? If old Paul had met a publican he would have given him room. He would have avoided him. "I was alive. I. You're dead, but I am alive. I am important. I am needed. I'm great. I'm secure. I thank thee, Lord, I'm not..." I'm alive, see, without the law. When the law...

You say, "Well, what's..."

Watch people who are selfish and self centered. "I was alive," you see. They don't have a knowledge of their sin. They don't have a knowledge of their sin. They have never been whittled. They have never been stripped, never been broken. And I was alive. I is sensitive.

Do you know why some people are so easy to offend? I is alive. I was alive. That is what Paul is saying. "Without the law I was alive. I fasted. I tithe. I gave alms. I am not like other men. I am not an extortioner. I'm not...I...I...I was alive."

Whoo.

All right. Look at the next line. “But when the commandment came,” verse nine, “When the commandment came, the commandment, the law. When the law came.”

Now the law was there. You see what? The law was there, but it wasn't understood. Spiritually it wasn't understood. But when it did come, when the Holy Spirit brought the law home to this man in its spirituality, in its spiritual content what happened? He said, “I...I...I died. I died.”

When God by his grace was pleased to give this man a glimpse of God's holiness and he saw his own corruption and sin, when God gave him a glimpse of the spirituality of the law, when God brought the holy law home to him in the power of the Holy Spirit and it must be done, this is what must be done. All the preaching of rules and laws and regulations and statues will go unheeded until the Holy Spirit in power.

Here is a man eyes to see within, not only without, but within. What happened? Paul said, “I died.” When the commandment came sin revived. Sin became evident. Sin became so obvious. Sin appeared to be sin. What I never considered to be sin before was revealed to be sin. What I never understood and never acknowledged to myself I saw and I felt. I saw my thoughts and my imaginations. I saw my guilt before God. I saw my utter complete ruin.

And do you know what happened? I, I died. I died. The I that bragged on its goodness died. The I that folded its arms in security...if anybody makes it surely I will...died. The I that looked down on everybody and criticized and gossiped and found fault with their weaknesses and infirmity died. The I that bent its knee, but never bowed its heart to God in repentance died. The I that never cried for mercy but only sought for reward died. The law killed I. I. It always does. I is a creature of darkness and it can't live in light. I is a creature of ignorance and it can't live beside the truth. And this is what Paul is saying and this is traumatic. This is a crisis of the most...of the greatest proportions, of tremendous magnitude. Here was a man in total security and confidence talking about I was a Hebrew of Hebrews and an educated man and a blameless man and a leader and an overseer and a teacher.

And he said, “I was without the law. I didn't have an understanding of what sin really was. I didn't have an understanding of what guilt was. And because I didn't have an understanding of God's law, God's holiness. But when the commandment came I saw. Sin revived. It just...oh, it just came up with such...in such proportions. It just flooded me. Where sin abounded, sin overflowed.”

I didn't see one little offense in 1929 and one little offense in 1947 and one little offense in 1958 and one over here in 19...I saw my whole nature was corrupt. It was a body of sin. It was a...from the soul of my feet to the top of my head and I died. I died. I didn't have another thing to say.

All my hopes of the past were destroyed. All my pride in the present was destroyed. All my hope for the future was dashed to pieces. I have been judged by the law and found guilty, condemned. And it doesn't get any better.

And that is when he cried Romans seven. Turn over here in if you will to verse 24. And that is when he was brought to this place. He said, verse 22, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." This is a converted man talking. "I see another law," verse 23, "in my members, warring against my mind, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Oh wretched, wretched, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

"Is there any hope?"

"Yes, sir."

The law can't do it. Walking down an aisle can't do it. Water can't do it. Church membership can't do it, but Christ can.

"I thank God," verse 25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

I have got to have an act of mercy. I have got to have a miracle, a miracle from God.

This permeated totally depraved, wretched, sinful creature with whom it is so much easier to do wrong than to do right, for whom it is so much easier to hate than to love, who has to cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am."

Is there any hope? Yes, there is hope, but it is not in anything mechanical or material or physical or outward. It is not in making the sign of a cross or burning a candle or crawling so far on my knee. It is God revealing in his Son a perfect righteousness in regard to this law.

Christ came down here as a man and he kept that law. He kept it. And he was my representative. And God has got to purge this old sin. God has got to cleanse it. It is filthy. It has got to be...the vessel can't be for God's glory until it is washed, not on the outside, but inside, purged and washed and cleansed. And only the blood of Christ can do that. The blood cleanseth the soul. He died for my sins.

But though I have in him a perfect righteousness and though he died for my sin this consciousness, this crisis has never let up because each day I realize, Jay, more and more how much I need Christ. And I need him.

You say, "That harlot sure needs Christ."

Not any more than this preacher. He just spells her name different.

You say, "That murderer sure does need Christ."

Not any more than this elder down here. He just lives in a different location, Cecil. He is behind the bars and you are on the outside. But by nature you are both murderers. He did his and we kept our...we were restrained by the restraining hand of God. We were restrained. And this is so. And when that...if that ever happens. Getting men saved is no problem. Getting men lost is the problem.

Everybody who is out there in the waters sinking is crying for help. And everybody who is sitting up here on the shore thinks he is all right, you know. And that is the difference. That's the difference.

And when a man really has...when he comes to this experience, when the Holy Spirit does it...if you ever get stripped you will want to be clothed. If you are ever out there in the cold biting wind of God's wrath without any...without anything to shield you, you will cry for a refuge. If you ever feel held moving up to meet you at your coming you will ask for help. I'm just sure of it. And you will turn to the only source of help and that is Christ. You will turn to him. And you will lay hold on him and, boy, as the days go by you will give thanks for Christ more and more. It won't take anybody to make you praise him. You will praise him. Our Lord said, "To whom much is forgiven, he will love much." Yes, sir. May God do it. He has to.

Our Father, we don't thank you that we are sinners, but we thank you that we know it. We don't thank you, Lord, for the corruption that is in our hearts, because that is all our own doings. But we are sure thankful that you didn't leave us in darkness and blindness. The Sin is there. It has always been there, but it is only by thy grace that we have been permitted to see it and able to see it and to look to Christ for help and for hope and for mercy. He is our hope. He is our refuge and our only refuge. We lay no claim to any righteousness of our own. Actually our religious righteousness is polluted as our carnal righteousness, even more in thy sight because it is false. But we look to Christ

Do this work of grace which no one can do but thee. Let us see ourselves as we really are. Reveal our hearts to us. Strip us by thy power, according to thy will we pray for Christ's sake. Amen.