

Slaying self righteousness

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- [0 : 00] The epistle of Paul to the Romans chapter 7 and to verse 9. For I was alive without the law once.
- But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. It's very clear that the apostle Paul is talking here about himself.
- That's why in the verse, verse 9, he uses more than once the word I. I was alive once without the law.
- But then he says when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. So he's talking about his own experience.
- It is something that happened to the apostle Paul. And of course religion is a personal thing.
- [1 : 16] It is not enough to know things in our minds about God and about Christ. We need to have a personal experience of Christ in our own hearts and in our own minds.
- Every one of us, I'm sure, realizes that. It is good to have knowledge in our heads, but it is of course not enough. So here in these words, the apostle Paul is talking about himself.
- And he is not doing so to draw attention to himself, but in order to teach us something very important about conversion.
- About the way in which God brings men and women and children to the experience of salvation.
- And he is talking, therefore, about the change that came into his life. The change that brought him into the knowledge of salvation.
- [2 : 33] It is what we refer to in a technical way as a transition. Now that's a word which is very difficult for younger people.
- Let me say what a transition is. Otherwise, the word will have no meaning for those of us who are of younger years. Well, we have a certain kind of a van, don't we?
- A van that drives about the streets. And it's called a transit van. And it has that name because transit means moving from place to place.
- It's quite a big sort of van. You can put your furniture in it. You can put things in it that you want to move from place to place. So, the people who made this van gave it a clever name.
- A transit van. And the word transit means moving about from here to there. And from there to somewhere else. Transit van.
- [3 : 33] Van. So, the word transition is really the same thing. It means changing from something that you were to something that you become.
- You can use it in all sorts of ways. There's a transition from being a child to being a grown-up. and there's a sort of stage in life in which you are half young and half grown-up.

It's what we call being an adolescent or these days a teenager. Now, the teenage years, especially the younger years, are transitional years. They're years of change from childhood to manhood or womanhood as the case may be.

And in those years, people grow up very quickly. They get tall very suddenly and they grow quickly. Now, that's what's meant by a transition.

And there is a transition necessary for every person if they are to change from being a lost sinner in this world to being a saved sinner in this life.

[4 : 52] And that's what Paul is talking about in my verse. He is explaining to us very important lessons as to how this change came about in his life.

He says, I was in this condition once but now I'm in another condition. And in the verse of verse 9 of chapter 7 of Romans who explains to us how the change, the transition came about.

How was it? Well, let's look at it. And I think you'd agree with me it's necessary to look at this in order to help people to see what's going on in their lives.

Because it's altogether possible that there are people sitting here and this very thing is happening in their life at this time for all that we know.

Certainly it is something which has happened in the lives of numbers of people who have been in this church in the past and still are in it like most other churches.

[5 : 57] wherever the gospel of Christ is preached to people it is preached so that this change may occur in their lives. That's why we preach.

It's to change people. It's to move them from being lost sinners to bringing them into being saved sinners. And that's something which is worth your while remembering because if you are not particularly interested in listening to preaching and if you're not particularly interested in coming to hear sermons maybe there are people like that but you come because you're asked to come or told to come let me explain to you that the reason why your parents and others bring you to these services is a very loving one a very caring one.

It's because they love you enough and care for you enough to want you to be changed from being a lost sinner which is what we all are by birth to being a saved Christian.

They want you to make this transition. They want to have you altered and changed from being what you are and what we all are by birth to being what you can become through the new birth.

This is what we listen to preaching for. Not just simply for entertainment. When you put on the radio and the television if you do then it's almost certain that you put it on really very largely for entertainment.

[7 : 26] Those who have televisions and things like that they put them on usually for entertainment. And people just sit in front of them and they don't need to concentrate. But preaching and the Bible they demand of us that we think as the speaker is speaking and reading they demand that we concentrate because it's as we understand what the Lord says in his word that something starts to go on in our life.

And it is this change or this transition this movement from sin to grace from being lost to being saved this movement from darkness to light from Satan to God is going on in the lives of people.

So let's look at this together because the apostle is telling us how this happened to him. Alright that then is what it's all about.

Let me read the words again at verse 9 For I was alive without the law once but when the commandment came sin revived and I died.

The first thing I look at with you here is this we see the apostle alive without the law that's what he says verse 9 I was alive without the law once or once upon a time Now that's a very important statement he is describing the condition in which people are before they become Christians the condition in which we all are naturally here is the state of the world men and women are alive without the law and especially this is true of religious people they are alive without the law and obviously you would expect me to explain those words so that you can see what it is that the apostle means and he's referring to himself because it refers both to him and to everybody else who is without a saviour to say to say that he was alive without the law is the same as saying he thought himself to be alive he thought himself to be alright he felt he needed nothing he believed he was as good as anybody else without the law means that the ten commandments did not particularly worry him he felt no sense of guilt when he broke

[10 : 20] God's commandments sin did not trouble him sin did not make him feel guilty he lost no sleep over committing sins against God he did not feel when he committed sins in his old unconverted state that it was anything very serious because he tried to make up for it as we all do before we become Christians having done a bad thing we then try to do some good things to make amends and the good things are we come to church and we pray and we say our prayers and things and we think that because we've done a bad thing and then done a good thing we tend to think that the good thing will blot out the bad thing we tend to think that the good things we do will cause God to forgive the bad things we do and that we don't feel at all troubled or guilty or worried about the sins of our lives now this is what he's talking about

I was a lie he says in my own opinion he's referring to his pride his pride at doing good things his pride at having kept in a way some of what God commanded him to do he was proud of the fact that he used to go to church he was proud of the fact that he used to keep some of God's commandments in an outward sense and he believed that through doing these good things he was gaining favour with God he thought he was working his passage to heaven and the ten commandments were there and he knew them and he regarded these things as things that he basically kept now this is what we refer to as legalism this is the meaning of the word legalism a very important word to understand legalism is the idea that through keeping

God's law and obeying his commands that we can win God's favour and get a place in heaven and that's how we all are that's how we all think by nature everybody walking about in Inverness tonight whether they're in church or whatever they are they're all legalists because every non-Christian is a legalist they all suppose that if they do a few good things it will blot out the bad things if they keep some of what God commands they think that it's enough to get them safely home to heaven in the end and so they're contented as they are they're alive is his word they think they have life they think they have enough they think that God is pleased with them and will bless them one day with his mercy and with his forgiveness and with eternal life they're looking for it they're hoping for it they're expecting it and they're quite content to go along life's journey like that they are not troubled about anything if they were really troubled about their sins then they would come to

Christians to ask for help but they're not troubled about their sins they know that they're not perfect and if you were to talk to them and say are you a sinner they would say of course I am I'm no better than anybody else and just like the rest but they are not troubled by their sins they do not shed tears over their sins they do not weep for sorrow over their sins and it never occurs to them seriously to think that God will ever pass them off in the end because of their sins they're untroubled they're unperturbed and unconcerned this is a state of people who are as the apostle Paul was alive without the law once and my friends it's a terrible condition to be in it is a state of spiritual death it is a state in which people are deceived because they think that they are going to heaven when they are not going to heaven they imagine that they are fit to face

God when they're completely unfit to face God they think they've got something when they've got nothing they suppose God's favour is towards them when God's anger is towards them and could anything be more dangerous than that to suppose yourself to be safe when you are not safe to suppose yourself to be on the way to glory when you're not on the way to glory and the apostle didn't know this he didn't realise he was in this terrible condition he was alive so far as he knew so far as he thought he was alive with the favour of God and he thought well of himself he believed himself to be as good as the next man and as worthy as the next man to receive the blessing of God this law this ten commandments didn't really perturb him he never lost a moment sleep over these ten commandments they didn't give him any serious thought oh he knew that he wasn't absolutely perfect but he did not realise that the ten commandments demand that we be absolutely perfect he thought that what he had and what he did was sufficient to gain anything he needed from God and the sad condition is that he was lost and did not realise it now that's the condition in which people are who are not converted and that's why I read to you from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 9 because of course in that chapter what do we have but the account of the conversion of Paul and when we meet

[16 : 55] Paul or Saul at the beginning of that chapter we see him in the condition in which I'm now describing him alive without the law and that's how he went about his life persecuting Christians tying them up with ropes taking them off to prison watching and supervising over their death even tempting the Lord's people to blaspheme he says in another place he was set against the Christian faith he had no love for Christ he couldn't understand the gospel believe the gospel to be unnecessary and thought that Christ had been just a fanatic like many other religious people in this world just another crank and he thought the Christians were deluded and deceived and that they were cranks and that they deserved to be persecuted because they were blaspheming and he would compel them and force them to speak against Christ he did this because he felt so confident that he was all right he was so sure of himself that he at least had done everything that could be expected by God from any man to do no this sad condition of being alive without the law is something which all sorts of people suffer from today religious people everywhere are suffering from this not true

Christians but those who were religious and are not true Christians there are whole churches of people just like this alive without the law they don't know Christ they don't know God but they are church members in their congregations may even be elders they may even be ministered in pulpits but unconverted not knowing Christ not knowing God ignorant of the state of sin in their own hearts and this of Paul is where they are they are alive in their own judgment but really it's all self-delusion and Jesus talks about these people when they become ministers and go in for the ministry and when they get their own men and their own congregation and they preach to the people they can't possibly preach the truth to them because they have had no experience of this truth themselves and Christ says about them they are blind leaders of the blind and you know what he says next if the blind he says lead the blind both of them fall into the ditch which means eternal punishment if the blind ministers lead the blind congregations and neither of them knows God neither of them is saved then there's only one sad thing that can happen that the blind ministers leading the blind people are both together going to fall into the ditch the blind leading the blind and that's exactly where this apostle used to be before he came to faith in

Christ I was alive he says without the law once now you will meet in the old testament a description of what God thinks about that kind of person and this is what God says to those who are preachers and yet they do not know Christ for themselves and they do not preach the truth this is what God says about them you have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly saying peace peace when there is no peace and you see what that means don't you it means that these false prophets in the old testament they told people that they were all right when they were not all right and that there are multitudes of preachers today in Scotland and in

England and all over the world and I'm afraid they deceive the people a preacher dare not deceive the people but there are those who do and you know the true preacher from the false preacher just here at this point the false preacher will always say to the people you are all right you don't need anything you haven't got the false preacher who is not sent from God but is the blind leader of the blind he encourages the people to feel that they're safe and saved and going to heaven without any talk about repentance without any talk about faith in Jesus Christ without any reference to being converted or born again and that's how this man was the apostle Paul before he came to faith in Christ he was in this tragic condition in which he was alive so far as he thought alive and without understanding the spirituality the holiness the perfection of the moral law of God alive without the law

I want to say one thing to the Lord's people and it is this dear Christian fathers and mothers and friends do everything you can to deepen the sense of awakening which may at times come into the minds of your families and friends and children if the word of God ever helps them to see themselves as lost then do what you can to deepen that and if you fear that there is somebody in the church ever and the word of God has spoken to them then be particularly careful when you speak to them after the service and after the benediction be especially careful to say only those things to them which are likely to deepen the impression of the word of

[23 : 56] God because it is a very sensitive matter winning souls to Christ and it is possible when the word of God has spoken to someone for you or for me carelessly later to say something light and trivial and unimportant and the effect of that could be to blot out the sense of awakening which God is giving to them through the word at that time there is a very good illustration as to how we can deepen the convictions of other people and how we should study to deepen the convictions of those who are affected by the word of God it concerns the great Robert Haldane Haldane was once in a certain place and a younger man whom he had taught the gospel to and who wasn't converted came up to him and said oh Mr Haldane it's you how nice to see you Mr Haldane it's you now Haldane knew this man and he turned to him and he said friend what if

I had been deaf now that sounds a rather sharp thing to say but it wasn't it was a very loving thing to say Haldane was saying to this young man friend I'm glad to see you too as you're glad to see me but supposing I had been deaf would you have been ready to meet me you see he was challenging his conscience and that's a loving thing to do it's a kind thing to do to challenge men's consciences because people are alive in their own estimation of themselves they're alive when they're really dead they think they're alive when they are not so now secondly let me turn from that to the next thing in our text at verse 9 when the commandment came sin revived and I died so the second thing in our text is this here is a man who was alive but is now dead through the law you see what he says when the commandment came sin revived and I died he is talking about a change in himself a change of a deeply spiritual and religious kind here is the beginning of a transition he is beginning now to alter his opinion of himself the second condition mentioned here is this that he now dies now that again requires me to give you the explanation he's not talking about physical death because he lived of course for many years after his conversion what then is this well it is the change which comes upon us when we realize how sinful we are when we realize how lost we are when a sinner through

God's commandments comes to see how wicked and guilty we are then from being confident and alive we become fearful and we die through losing all our self-confidence because God through the ten commandments shows us in this condition that the sins of our lives are things which are going to damn us forever and that is something which is the beginning of this change the beginning of this transition it's rather like this that you can get a pencil and you can write on the wall and you could say I am a sinner and you could write that on the wall but then you could also get a very big chisel and a hammer and you could carve it into the wall

I am a sinner two inches deep into the plaster or into the wood or brick work one is superficial the other goes deep down right into the very heart and fabric of the material of the building and that's the difference between the first condition Paul was in and this second condition this transitional state when God begins to make us realize how sinful we are it is as though God were to take a hammer and chisel into our hearts and consciences and he carves his own commandments there and he carves them so deep that we feel the pain of his workmanship we feel struck by it hurt by it hit by it and I could change the illustration burnt by it do we still do this I don't know but when

I was young we used to do things called poker work we used to get a piece of wood maybe you still do it boys and girls you get a piece of wood and you put the poker into the fire and you get the end of the poker red hot then you can put the poker on the wood and with the great heat of the end of the poker you can carve black letters onto the wood and you can write your name or something on the wood well that's a perfect illustration as to what Paul is talking about here because when God begins to take the ten commandments he as it were in this condition he makes them red hot and he writes them with a poker as it were on our consciences and we feel the spirituality of the law the power of the law we feel the perfection of the commandments thou shalt have no other gods before me and the particular commandment which Paul was convinced of his wickedness through was not the first commandment that I quoted but the last which goes like this you remember thou shalt not covet now what

[30 : 42] God did to him was this that as the apostle Paul was travelling by foot on the road to Damascus he saw bright light brighter than the noonday sun it was Christ speaking to him Paul had companions with him on the road and these companions they were affected by it but they didn't hear the words clearly but the apostle Paul heard the words of Jesus clearly they fell down they were influenced by the spiritual presence of Christ but Paul heard the actual words Saul Saul why persecutest thou me and he fell down and at that time and in the next three days during which Paul neither ate nor drank food nor drink in those three days of fasting and praying when his eyes were blind supernaturally they couldn't see and had to be held by the hand and led like a child in those three days

Jesus Christ was taking the poker and writing on his heart the tenth commandment thou shalt not covet and he was convincing this apostle that he was quite unfit to die that his goodness was not good enough that his righteousness was not righteous enough that his religion was not religious enough that his virtue was not virtuous enough that his life for all its outward uprightness was a life in which he was the enemy of God and God was angry with him because he was an unsaved sinner he had not kept any one of the ten commandments and especially he had never kept the tenth commandment which means that we are not to be greedy lustful envious covetous of other people and what God did was he wrote these words of the tenth commandment on his heart as with a poker with such power and such force that the word of

God convinced the apostle that he was not fit to die that he was not fit to meet God that he was not ready to be judged that he was a lost sinner and a lost soul and so that's the way you see he puts it this is the way he puts it God slew him God brought him to an end of himself God used the ten commandments to show him as in a mirror his own defilement his own guilt his own corruption his own lost state I through the law he says at verse nine I through the law when the commandment came sin revived and I died and that is exactly what God does we see ourselves to be dead in a spiritual sense and the effect of that is we realise we have no righteousness of our own we realise we have no hope in ourselves we realise that we are underneath the wrath and curse of God it's a terrible condition to be in

I say that because I have been there and many of the people sitting here Christians they have been there and it's a terrible experience and the apostle Paul went through this experience for three days he didn't want to eat for three nights he didn't want to eat or drink it was a condition in which he was in a state of self despair he hated himself now he realised now that he had been deluded deceived that he had been in a wrong opinion of himself his good opinion of himself was worthless he saw that his complacency and his easy religion was worthless all his righteousness he saw they were filthy rags they were like a rotten rag which a mechanic who repairs engines of motors uses for cleaning up the oil inside the engine a filthy rag coated in grease and petrol and every kind of filth from the engine compartment of a car and

Paul saw his righteousness is like one of these filthy rags used by the mechanic in the garage he saw himself to be polluted and defiled godless without any hope whatsoever now this is a state which we call self despair when the commandment came sin revived and I died he doesn't mean physical death as I said he means he dies to his own good opinion of himself he dies to all hope of salvation through anything he could do he comes to this condition in which he is convinced of his sin now friends why does a loving god do that to men I'll tell you it is to break our love of sin nothing would break our love of sin if god were not to break it for us it is to make us cry to god for mercy it is to prepare us to receive the gospel you see people don't listen to the gospel do they you know very well that people don't come rushing from north south east and west to hear the gospel they go rushing north south east and west for some things but not for the gospel why don't people listen to the gospel is it why do they not come rushing to hear it and the answer is they don't see their need and if you talk to them they say but

[37 : 12] I don't see my need of Christ why should I give up everything and follow Christ it's too much they say but when god brings them into this condition of pain in which they realise that they are under god's hand of judgement when they see that they are suspended by a single thread over the pits of eternal fire and that their only hope is in the mercy of god and in the kindness of god and in the sovereign grace of god in the gospel then the effect is that they begin to want to know about the gospel and they don't simply come to church but they come and they listen with both ears they listen with all their might I might give you just one of many quotations from a great and learned

Christian writer he puts it like this the very beginning of repentance is grief on account of sin together with self condemnation and all of that is to prepare us to receive Christ that's the work of God now those of you who are Christians let me have a word now for you because as you see I'm trying to help those who are not yet professing Christians that are here but there is something here for Christians and it's this Jesus says to Christians he that is forgiven much the same loves much he that is forgiven little the same loves me little loveth little and you will discover in life as you go through it as a

Christian but those Christians who are the best Christians are the ones who have most love for Christ because they see that their sins were enormous but those who are not such strong Christians you will discover that they have not got such a sense of appreciation of what Christ has done for them oh yes they appreciate it but not so much so the secret of being an excellent Christian is to realize how much Christ has done for you and that makes you see how guilty we are and how much Christ had to suffer to bear our guilt and the more we feel the greatness of our sin the more we feel our appreciation of what Christ has done these things work together in tandem always they go in parallel always the more you see your sin the more you appreciate

Christ as a Christian now I have time then just to speak about the third condition in which the apostle Paul was I said something about a man who was alive without the law and then second I spoke about a man who was dead through the law now let me come to the third state of this apostle Paul it is a man alive in Christ a man alive in Christ it is this transition moving from the lost state to the saved state from condemnation to salvation from ignorance of God to knowledge of God and it is a condition in which God gives to us full assurance of salvation and I want to stress that it is very important not only to be saved but to have assurance of salvation and

I think that's what happened to the apostle Paul when Ananias came and laid his hands on him let me remind you of that here was this apostle he had been at this stage three days and nights without eating and drinking and then this man Ananias this Christian man came along God spoke to him and told him and deal with Saul and help him and he went to him and he laid his hands on this man brother Saul he said receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost and he was something like scales fell from Paul's eyes and that was a symbol of the fact that now he understood the gospel he saw the truth concerning Christ he had never seen it till now he had been in this transitional state in which he was under a sense of the guiltiness of his life but now when the scales fell from his eyes he saw that Jesus is

[42 : 31] Christ that Jesus is the saviour how do I know well because of what the bible tells us in Acts chapter 9 immediately what did he do he went into the synagogue where the Jews were worshipping and he stood up with the scroll of the law which he knew so well and he rolled it open and he expounded to the people here's this passage and there's that passage which proves that Jesus of Nazareth is your Messiah and the people were confounded and amazed how did this man have the ability to open up these Old Testament scriptures and the answer is his eyes were opened new birth had taken place he was born again not only that but he had full assurance of salvation he was given this baptism of the Holy Spirit and that brings assurance the baptism of the Spirit brings assurance and my friends don't rest in anything short of that full assurance of salvation it's not enough just to have a quiet personal faith he we will shine them may pass their we will find~~ ...

Romans