

## Plans and Side Effects

Romans 7:1-13

Key Verse: 7:4

“So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

How often do your plans succeed? Let me put it another way, how often do things not go as planned? If you are like me, the answer to that is not very often. There is always something that throws a wrench or a kink into the plans. For our third wedding anniversary, I had planned something special for my wife. We only had a few hours to ourselves because we dropped Ella off at Viola's parents. In the limited time, I planned lunch at a nice restaurant, and afterwards, Viola and I would go to two different places along the lake that we haven't gone to since the day I proposed to my wife. One of the places was a beach in Winnetka. After I proposed, we took a little drive on the north shore and ended up at this beach. We got out of the car, walked down to the beach and sat and talked. I thought it would be nice to do it again, so I made plans to go there. I planned out the route from the restaurant to the beach and made sure it was a way that Viola wouldn't recognize, but as we were driving the skies were getting dark. I was hoping that it would hold off until after we made it to the beach. It was holding off pretty good until we made it to the beach. We got out of the car and walked toward the beach, but before we got there, the thunder rolled, and the rain started to come down. Not long after we arrived at the car, the rain really kept coming down. My plans were ruined. We drove around for a little while, hoping that the rain would stop. It did, but only when it was time to go pick up Ella.

Things hardly ever go as planned, whether we do not take into account the weather in planning a picnic or we studied the wrong material for an exam or misjudged the traffic in the morning while going to work. Sometimes, though, it's not that everything goes wrong, but that there are side effects to complicate the situation. Take a look at medication. Medication has a certain purpose: to take care of pain, suppress the sniffles or what not, but if you read the packaging, there are side effects to the medication, like dizziness, swelling, and in some extreme cases, even death. These aren't the purpose of the medication, but while taking care of primary issue, the medication reacts to our body and produces side effects. There was one time when I was sick, the doctor prescribed a number of medications, but one of them prednisone, which was to reduce the swelling in my sinuses, actually made me sweat a lot. I would wake up drenched at night after taking the pill. It wasn't the intent to cause me sweat, but I did sweat a lot. There are many things like that, even things that God has established. Now God doesn't have any unforeseen side effects and all of his plans do go exactly as he planned, but some of the things that God created have what we would consider side effects. The example that we see in this passage is God's law. A couple of weeks ago in chapter 5, Paul wrote that the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. The law was brought in so that we would be aware that what we were doing was sin. Beginning with Adam, we all have been walking away from the life source, and never really knowing it. However, the law came into being to show us that we were killing ourselves with our actions. That's the law's purpose, but sin uses the law to inflame our desires. It's a side effect of the law, so that evil is committed through the good law.

The first part of today's passage has a similar tone to what Bob spoke on last week. We are dead to sin and alive to God. When a slave dies, he is no longer a slave. He is no longer forced to do any more work because he is no longer able to do much of anything. The first part of this passage says the same thing in regard to the law. We are free from the law because we

died to the law. We need to be free from the law, not because the law is bad, but because of a side effect of the law. The Bible says in verse 5, "For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death." When we are living according to the flesh, according to our own whims, the law has a side effect of producing the very sinful desires that it is intending to quell. Verse 5 says that the sinful desires were aroused by the law. It seems kind of strange, right? The law, which is firm and rigid and the pinnacle of righteousness, arouses sinful desires, which are excuse driven and completely unrighteous. How is that possible? Do we live in some bizarre universe where the good inevitably leads to evil? Honestly, some people might say yes, but this is what I mean by a side effect.

Does that mean that the holy law is actually sinful? Paul asks the same question and explains it a little bit. "What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead." (7-8) Think of it like this: how would you know that coveting even existed except for if someone told you? Your whole life you are ignorant to the fact that coveting existed, but when the veil of ignorance is lifted, not only are you aware of coveting, you actually want to do it. When the sin living in us hears about something that is sinful, then it really wants to do it. Here's an example of something similar. As a man, my hands are not things of beauty; they get beaten up, scraped, and bloodied on a regular basis. Even some of my scars have scars. At any rate, there are many times when I cut up or scrape my hand and I don't even notice it. Something will happen and my hands become a little bloody. I feel nothing around the cut or scrape, but then I look at my hand and I notice the blood and as soon as I look, that wound now is causing a lot of pain and it keeps causing pain because I am aware of its existence. Our sin is very much the same. We are unaware and unfeeling until it is brought to our attention and then we feel it all the time and the sin seems like it is increasing.

The result of this is as Paul states, "Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died." (10) What he means is that before he knew the law, Paul was innocent like a young child. He was carefree in his life. This doesn't mean that he wasn't sinning, but that he was free from the repercussions. My daughter is a year and a half and I know very well that she is a sinner. She is very selfish and self-centered, but she is not aware that there is something wrong with that. She is alive in that sense, because she is not burdened by her sin. However, there will be a day when she will come to know that what she is doing is wrong. When that day comes, when she acts selfishly, Ella will be intentionally sinning and sin will spring to life in her. Sin was always there, but now it will be living and moving and active because of the knowledge of what she is doing is wrong. When sin springs to life, and it always does, the result is death. The end of chapter 6 says that the wages of sin is death because that is where sin leads. Sin, all sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem, leads to death. This is because sin is a separation from God, who is the very source of life, and when you separate yourself from the life source, the inevitable result is that life runs out and death ensues.

The law was intended to give us life by showing us what is right and wrong, but what resulted was, in fact, death. As Paul explains, "For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death." (11) Sin is very cunning. When God is describing sin to Cain in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, he says that

sin is crouching at the door. It was waiting to take Cain just like a predator would pounce on its prey. Here the Bible says that sin deceives, and it does so by down playing the law and the consequence and trapping us in death. It is just like what the serpent did to Eve in Genesis. When God created the world and humanity, he placed man in a beautiful garden, and he gave them one rule, don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they eat, then they will die. The serpent came along and asked Eve if God really did say to not eat from the tree. Eve replied back that if they eat from the tree, then they would die, but the serpent flat out lied and told Eve that it wasn't true and that God was holding out of them. Unfortunately, what God said was true, and after Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death entered into the world. God's word was intended to keep people in life, but the serpent and sin used that word to deceive and lead humanity to death.

So the law of God, the word of God is good and holy. Then, does that mean that somehow the law is broken? Does that mean that the law has a side effect that God did not expect? God is God and all his plans happen exactly how he planned them. God created everything. There is nothing in this universe that can upset his plans. When God created the law, he knew full well that it would not be used according to its intent. But God is able to use the evil for his good purpose nonetheless. The Bible says, "In order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful." (13) Sin seized the opportunity to put us to death by using the law, but God used that very fact to help reveal the deception of sin. Sin is not something that we can dabble in; it is not something that we can play with and expect to be fine. Sin leads to death, and by sin using the law to put us to death, it proves that sin leads to death. Sin's deception actually leads to the revelation that sin is utterly sinful. That is God's power; that is the side effect of the law. The law was intended to show us our sin, but sin uses the law to condemn us to death.

By condemning us to death, sin shows itself for what it is: utterly evil and sinful. It is a strange and convoluted process, but the result is that all humanity is shown to be sinful. In the end, sin is outsmarted and its deceptions are laid bare. Sin is not pleasure or a means to get what we want, sin leads to death. The process shows that there is no one who is righteous, not even one. It shows us that there is no way for us to become good because we are condemned in our sin. We are bound to the law, shackled like a prisoner. There is nothing that we can do to get away and, ironically, our only release is to die. Much like with sin, like we heard last week, when we die to the law, we are free from the law. Its authority over us is broken upon death.

Paul uses an example from marriage to convey this idea at the beginning of this passage. "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man." (2-3) Marriage, in God's eyes, is legal until death. It's the whole 'til death do us part thing. If a woman, like this example shows, wants to get into a relationship with another man, then first, her husband would have to die, or she would become an adulteress. She is not able to serve two husbands. I have a feeling that they would get kind of jealous of each other and it wouldn't end well. However, if her husband dies, then she is free to marry another man and not be labeled as an adulteress.

In the same way, the law is our master. It is our husband, so to speak. As the Bible says, "So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." (4) If you were wondering why Paul was picking on women in the example in this chapter, it is in part because in the relationship that we have with the law and Jesus, we are not the man. We need to die to the law, so that we can be united with Jesus. The law brings death because of sin, but Jesus brings life to all who believe. Jesus died and rose from the dead for our sins. He took the punishment for our sins, and when we accept what he has done for us, we do die to sin and to law. And as it said last week, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5)

This is the full purpose of the law. As I've said, the law was given so that we might become aware of our sin. We would have never known the depth of our sin until it was revealed to us that what we were doing was wrong. And it is important to know the full extent of our sin. When we know the full extent of our sin, then we can know how much we need Jesus. The law was given so that we become aware of our sin, so that we would turn to Jesus. I'll say it again; the law exists to show us our need for Jesus! That is so important. We often think that the law is there so that we can follow it and finally be right with God, but that's not true, because we can never fulfill the law. We like to think that because someone is faithful to coming to church and faithful to Bible study that they are a good person and we commend them for their actions. Don't you know that Satan is also faithful to coming to church and Bible study? Satan knows his Scripture well. I am not saying that someone is Satan, but they are still sinners in need of Jesus. The one who looks good and righteous is a sinner in need of Jesus, just like the belligerent mooch who is a drain on society. Everyone needs Jesus because he fulfills the law in every respect. Jesus never sinned from the day he was born to the day he died to the day he rose back up to heaven. Only Jesus can release us from the bondage to the law that we find ourselves in.

When we are released from the law and bound to Jesus in a holy marriage, we are given a new life. If you look back at verse 4, you can see that it says, "that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." When we belong to Jesus, we belong to him so that we might bear fruit for God. This fruit is simply a changed life. When we lived as sinners, we did whatever we wanted without regard to the consequences. We may have enjoyed some of the things that we did, but we could still feel the grip of death on our lives. We were created in God's image, but that image became tarnished with every sin that we committed. When we are united with Christ, we start bearing fruit in that the tarnish on the image of God is removed, revealing the full image underneath. When we were studying the book of Galatians over the summer, there was section that gave the breakdown of what this means. The Bible says in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These are collectively a single piece of fruit. When we are in Jesus, God's Holy Spirit comes on us and begins to change us and we start growing in all the ways mentioned in Galatians. We become more loving, more joyful, more peaceful, more patient, kinder, better, more faithful, more gentle, and have more self-control. This fruit is a signpost to the work in us and they give so much glory to God and so much freedom to us.

When we die to the law, it changes our lives. Paul writes, "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (6) Apart from Jesus, we live according to the

law. Even if we are not lawful, we live under the law. We measure ourselves based on the law, and that is something that we just cannot measure up to. When we try to live our lives by trying to be good, we will fall short because the bar is set so high, but in Jesus, we are released from the law and we serve in the way of the Spirit. In Jesus, we allow God's Spirit to change us, to restore the image, and as he is working, we begin to follow the law. Look at that, another side effect! With God's Spirit in us, working in us, we find that we don't like our old desires any more. Drinking parties seem to be a waste. Porn becomes more about pitying the people involved instead of pleasure. Money loses its allure. That's the change that happens and it is liberating.

God is so wise and all of his plans are fulfilled exactly like he expected. He even has expected side effects to the plans that he has. The law was intended to show us our sin. Sin was always there, but the law came to give it a name and make sure that we cannot deny its existence. The law shows us that we cannot keep it and that we need Jesus. Through Jesus, we die to the law and are released from its condemnation to live a life by the Spirit that glorifies God in every way. Sin leads to death, no matter what, but only through Jesus is death not the end. In Jesus, death leads to life. When we accept that we were crucified with Jesus on the cross and our sin died there, we now have a new life by the Spirit, and that is something that we should be so thankful about.