

REASONS WHY GOD GAVE THE LAW, ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF ROMANS
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Often times in study of the book of Hebrews, as it outlines how much "better" everything is under the New Covenant (see Hebrews 1:4; 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:24), people begin to wonder concerning the Mosaic Law and exactly why it was given. This almost always comes under consideration when a study of Hebrews chapter eight and verse seven is undertaken. Notice what Paul says there, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." Clearly we see a "fault" in the Old Covenant from these words. The purpose of this brief article is not to discuss this "fault" but, rather, to look at the reasons God gave the Law, according to the book of Romans. And perhaps in doing this we may well be able to see the whole picture as is outlined in Hebrews and Romans. Also, we just might be able to come to some sort of an understanding of this "fault".

In Romans seven Paul discusses the Law in relation to the overall picture of what had been said in chapter six and verse fifteen. There Paul asked the question, "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?" In his attempt to answer this question Paul first resorts to using the marriage covenant as an example of how God sees the Old Covenant in its relation to the New. In chapter seven, verses one thru four, we cannot help but to see this point. Then Paul moves on to give the Romans an idea of the advantage or purpose of the Law. This is where I want us to concentrate our thoughts.

First, the Law produced within man a knowledge of sin (Romans 7:7). Keep in mind that prior to the giving of the Law God had spoken unto the fathers of the families in relation to what He expected. The Law, although given specifically to the Israelites, was more of an open "universal" law that all the Israelites could see and obey. They could also "see" when they were disobeying it. In this we then see that the Israelites were made aware of their condition before God due to what was said in the Law. This is exactly what Paul meant by the statement "I had not known sin, but by the law." On the word "known" in this statement Robertson states the following, "Second aorist indicative of ginosko, to know. It is a conclusion of a second class condition, determined as unfulfilled."¹ The Pulpit Commentary perhaps best sums up that Paul intends with this statement, "...in this verse (i.e. verse 7, R.W.S.), does he set forth the Law as awakening conscience of sin, and so preparing the way for the introduction of the gospel..."²

Secondly, the Law was given "to life" (verse ten). Actually, Paul says that it was "ordained to life" suggesting the idea that the Law was given by God to preserve man's life. History has proven that the pre-Law people needed something to help them in this matter. One only needs to study Genesis chapters six and nineteen to see this point. After the giving of the Law we see numerous passages that speak of the idea of extended life due to adherence to the Law. See such passages as Exodus 15:26; Leviticus 18:4 and Deuteronomy 4:1 as they will clearly substantiate this point. It was the same apostle Paul who, when writing to the Ephesian brethren, made reference to this point in Ephesians 6:2. When one studies this passage, as it relates to Deuteronomy 4:16, they cannot but see that obedience to the Law resulted in "life".

Thirdly, the Law was given to display the strength of sin (verse 13). Actually, Paul helps us to see that the Law points to the excess of sin. Paul's point is that sin has taken that which is good (i.e. the Law, which was unto life), and turned it into another way in which it grows even more despicable. Following this along, the Law was designed to reveal to man what

sin really was. It was then designed to give unto man life once he came to grips with sin and what it really was. However, as Paul points out, it really didn't go down that way. Instead, sin took "occasion by the commandment" and "slew" men (verse eleven).

Fourthly and finally, the Law was given as a measure to "gauge" man's spiritually (verse fourteen). Once man had come to grips with sin, he needed something by which he could use to determine exactly how far he has "strayed" from God. The Law served this purpose. One needed only to examine his life to see whether or not they had complied with the commandments given. We, of course, realize that Israel "failed the test". Paul, therefore said that man was "carnal" instead of "spiritual".

ENDNOTES

1. Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the New Testament, Baker, 1931, p. 367.
2. Spence, H.D.M. and Exell, Joseph S., editors, The Pulpit Commentary, Eerdmans, Vol. 18, p. 191.