

The Law not only made him cognitively aware of coveting as sin; it also made him experientially aware of coveting as sin. The Law aroused Paul's sinful passions, and thus he came to know sin in both the cognitive and the experiential senses, not only objectively but also subjectively, not only outside himself but also within himself!

Now Paul makes a series of affirmations that is difficult to understand.

He says he was once apart from Law, and then the Law came to him.

He says that sin was once dead in him, and then sin sprang to life in him.

He says that the Law was intended to bring life, but the Law brought only death to him.

He says that he was once alive, and then he died.

What can these affirmations mean, especially in view of what we know of Paul's background and life up to the time of his conversion?

When was Paul ever apart from the Law? in Philippians 3:4-6 he says that he was brought up from childhood as a Pharisee, and was found blameless as to the righteousness which is in the Law. In Acts 22:3 he tells us that he was born in Tarsus but brought up in Jerusalem and educated under the great Rabbi Gamaliel (mentioned in the Mishnah) strictly according to the law of his fathers. And in Acts 26:4-5 Paul says that the Jews knew his manner of life from youth onward, that he was the strictest kind of Pharisee. So we must ask: When was Paul ever apart from the Law?

And when did the Law come to him, if he learned about the Law from his early childhood? As far as factual knowledge of the Law, Paul was never apart from the Law!

When was sin dead in Paul? And when did sin spring to life in him? Was he not a sinner from his mother's womb? even if "dead" means "dormant", when and why did sin spring to life in him?

Was the Law intended to bring spiritual life to Paul? Was the Law given to justify human beings and give them eternal life? And if it was given to bring life, why did it bring death to Paul? Was not Paul an observant Jew, a strict Jew who obeyed the commandments, a Pharisee of the Pharisees by his own testimony?

When was Paul once spiritually alive? And when did he die spiritually?

How can these affirmations be explained?

Perhaps the following suggestions will help to explain what Paul is saying in this passage.

(1) Paul says he was once apart from Law, and then the Law came to him.

Suggestion: Paul was once without correct understanding of the Law; then Paul was awakened to a correct understanding of the Law.