

3ABN SABBATH SCHOOL PANEL
006 - LESSON – MONDAY - February 2, 2026

PAUL'S "PAST LIFE"

It is a common experience for Christian converts to think of their lives in terms of before they accepted Jesus and after, just as Paul does in Philippians 3. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, we sometimes speak of those who are not Christians as being “good people,” and, at least according to the world’s standards, many indeed are. In contrast, compared to God’s standards, no one is, not even Christians.

Why do you think Paul speaks so positively and at such length about Timothy here (*see Phil. 2:19–23*)? What else does Paul say about him (*see 1 Cor. 4:17, 2 Tim. 1:5*)?

Philippians 3:4-6 (NKJV) “Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: (5) circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; (6) concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Paul points to many things in his life of which he had once been proud. What are they? How would you describe the “good” in your own life (past and present)?

Paul makes an implicit contrast between believing Jews who are spreading false doctrine and uncircumcised believers who rely fully on Christ for their salvation and put no confidence in mere human works such as circumcision (*see Heb. 6:1, Heb. 9:14; compare Rom. 2:25–29*). Even though Paul’s past life and pedigree would have been quite impressive to his fellow Jews, none of these things contributed to his salvation. In fact, they actually hindered it because they blinded him for a while to his need of Christ.

1 Corinthians 7.19 NKJV “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.”

Romans 3.20 NKJV “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Romans 3.28 NKJV “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”

Romans 7:7–12 (NKJV)

Paul says the *law is holy, just, and good*; it reveals sin by exposing what is wrong in the heart.

“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (v.7) “The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” (v.12)

Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28 (NKJV)

Jesus deepens the understanding of the law by showing that sin begins in the heart, not just in outward action.

“You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not murder,’ but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother... shall be in danger of the judgment.”

“You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ but I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Now, some think Paul and Jesus are in conflict — Paul teaching we are not under the law, and Jesus upholding it. But when read carefully, they are in *perfect harmony*.

Here are **three points** showing how **Romans 7:7–12** and **Matthew 5:21–28** *complement, not contradict*, each other:

1. Both Affirm That the Law Reveals, Not Removes, Sin

- **Paul's View (Romans 7:7–9):** The law acts as a mirror. It doesn't create sin but exposes it: "I would not have known sin except through the law."
- **Jesus' View (Matthew 5:21–22, 27–28):** Jesus reveals that sin goes deeper than behavior—it begins in the mind and heart. His teaching expands the law's *spiritual scope* to show our need of grace.

Harmony:

- Both show that the law exposes the true nature of sin.
- Paul shows the *function* of the law; Jesus shows the *depth* of the law.

Supporting Verse: *Romans 3:20* — **"By the law is the knowledge of sin."**

2. Both Teach That the Law Is Spiritual and Points Us to the Need for a Savior

- **Paul (Romans 7:14):** **"The law is spiritual, but I am carnal."**
- **Jesus (Matthew 5:48):** **"Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect."**

Paul says the law reveals our inability to fulfill it through human strength. Jesus magnifies the law to show that even thoughts and motives fall short of God's holiness.

Harmony:

The law's purpose in both passages is *not condemnation*, but *conviction*—to drive the sinner to Christ for transformation.

Supporting Verse: *Galatians 3:24* — **"The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."**

3. Both Uphold the Law's Holiness and Internal Application

- **Paul (Romans 7:12):** **"The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."**
- **Jesus (Matthew 5:17–18):** **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."**

Paul defends the moral law's goodness.

Jesus fulfills it by revealing its divine intent.

Both reveal that **obedience that flows from love, not just outward conformity.**

Harmony:

Paul exalts the law's holiness;

Jesus exalts the law's wholeness.

Both declare that God's commandments are still binding—but they must be written *on the heart*, not merely kept by human effort.

Supporting Verse: *Hebrews 8:10* — **"I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts."**

Paul explains **what the law does** — it exposes sin and drives us to Christ.

Jesus explains **how the law works** — it reaches into the thoughts and motives.

Together, they reveal **the law is not the enemy of grace but the instrument that points us to it.**

Here are **three points comparing Paul and Jesus** in their **affirmation of God's Law:**

1. Both Upheld the Law's Divine Origin:

- **Jesus** declared, *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets... but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17).

- **Paul** affirmed, *“The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Romans 7:12).
- ➤ Both recognized the Law as sacred, reflecting God’s character and will.

1. **Both Taught the Law’s Spiritual Purpose:**

- **Jesus** revealed the **spiritual intent** of the Law — that obedience begins in the heart (Matthew 5:21–28).
- **Paul** explained that the Law exposes sin and leads us to Christ for righteousness (Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24).
- ➤ Both saw the Law not as a checklist, but as a guide to inner transformation.

1. **Both Pointed to Fulfillment Through Love and Grace:**

- **Jesus** summarized the Law in the **two great commandments of love** (Matthew 22:37–40).
- **Paul** echoed this by saying, *“Love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13:10).
- ➤ Both taught that true obedience flows from a heart renewed by love, not from legalism.

Here are **four key points about the integrity of God’s Law:**

1. **The Law Reflects God’s Character:**
God’s Law mirrors His holiness, justice, and love (Psalm 19:7–9). It is perfect, righteous, and unchanging because it reveals who God is.
2. **The Law Is Unchangeable and Eternal:**
Jesus affirmed that not “one jot or one tittle” will pass from the Law until all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). Its principles stand forever as the foundation of God’s government.
3. **The Law Defines Right and Wrong:**
The Law is the standard of moral conduct, showing humanity what sin is (Romans 3:20). It safeguards truth and righteousness in both heart and action.
4. **The Law Leads Us to Christ:**
While the Law cannot save, it points out our need for a Savior (Galatians 3:24). Through Christ, believers fulfill the Law’s righteousness by faith and love (Romans 8:3–4).