

We left off last time in chapter 7, verse 7. Lets read Romans 7:7-25.

Vs. 7 – Paul asks the question – “is the law sin?” He has been making the point in vs. 1-6 of ch. 7 that the law has the peculiar consequence of inciting our passions, to do the very thing the law inhibits us from doing. The classic example of course is stated in the very first story following the creation account in Genesis, the story of the fall. God gave Adam and Eve one commandment in the Garden of Eden – do not eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or you will surely die. So what do Adam and Eve do? They have no other restrictions from God other than this one. Well you know what they do, they eat the forbidden fruit, the one thing God commanded them not to do.

So Paul, vs. 7 of Romans asks the logical question: Is the law itself sin? And then he answers with authority: “by no means”. But he also adds: “If I did not have the law, - thou shalt not covet, I would never have known what sin is.” He uses covetousness’ as an example. The law teaches us what sin is. Martin Luther is famous for saying the law is our SOS, our distress signal, the Law Shows Our Sin. SOS.

Vs. 8 – Paul says sin finds opportunity in the commandment. And then he speaks from personal experience, by saying the law about covetousness – wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. We need to remember that Paul is addressing these thoughts to Jews in Rome who are saying now that “if the law has died, in terms of our salvation and means of declaring ourselves to be righteous, then is the law, which incites us to sin, itself evil?” To the Jew the law was sacred. It was the measure of how they analyzed themselves and their relationship with God. But now, since Jesus Christ came, righteousness depends not on the Law, but upon the grace of God’s gift, through Jesus atoning work on the cross. Paul does say, the effect of the Law is that it is a distressing part of human nature that any prohibitions tend to awake in our passions a desire to transgress that law. We cannot resist the desires and temptations that the law incites in us. One of the very best theological treatises on this very truth was written by St. Augustine, in his famous book: “Confessions”. In this supremely influential book, Augustine shares of his boyhood experience and proclivity to steal pears off his neighbor’s pear tree. He admits he didn’t need the pears to eat, he and his friends simply couldn’t resist the fun of stealing the pears, just because they were there.

The fault, Paul says is not in the Law, the commandment. The fault is in the sinner. In Vs. 8, Paul says, apart from the Law, the sin is dead. We would not know our actions are wrong, with the Law telling us right from wrong. The Law is a measure for us. The Law therefore is good and holy, not sinful. We are sinful. But a side affect of the Law is it does have the proclivity to tempt us. It is we who are depraved, not the Law.

Vs. 9 – Paul speaks from his personal experience. “I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment arrived, sin revived, and I died. The very commandment which promised life, proved to be death to me”. Most scholars believe that Paul is speaking about how the Law, once he understood it and came to have importance in his life, convicted him and he realized he was a “dead man walking”. He and nobody else, could ever achieve living in accordance with all the Law, so Paul knew that if he were to be judged by his life vs. the Law, he was a dead man.

Vs. 10 - “The very commandment which promised life to me, proved to be death to me”

Vs. 11 – Paul goes on to say something quite extraordinary: “ Sin, finding opportunity in the commandment deceived me, and by it killed me”. These words are helpful for us to realize that, we do not find the Law as encouraging to us, the Law only shows us short we are in living as God would have us live. We will see this expressed more clearly in a few more verses.

Vs. 12 – Paul says – “So the Law is holy, and the commandments are holy, and just and good”. Paul knows that the problem is not with the Law, it with our own depravity. We simply cannot live a holy life, the Law therefore condemns us.

Vs. 13-25 - Paul deals with the question: Did the Law, which is good and holy, cause death? He will answer that by insisting, it is not the Law which causes death, it is our sin which causes death. The Law just makes our sin known to us.

Vs. 13 - Paul says - "did that which is good then bring death to me?". He answers: "by no means". It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin. The commandments of God make me aware of my sin.

Vs. 14 - "We know that Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." Paul uses these words which would be familiar to the Romans, to describe the slave market. Paul is saying, my life has been sold into slavery by my sin. Sin has become my master.

Vs. 15-25 - are among Paul's most famous concerning his inner struggle to try and live the holy life that he knows God would have him live. They are remarkable in their penitential tone, in their confessional nature, and in their humility. And it is safe to say, they express eloquently the struggle we all have, in our walk towards sanctification. Please read &:15-25 again!

Vs. 15 - Paul says: "I do the very thing I hate, not what I want to do"

Vs. 16 - But the Law is good.

Vs. 17 - "It is not I who do it, it is the sin that dwells in me." Sin to Paul has taken up residence within him and controls him. He is the slave to his master, which is sin, living within him. Sin has a strong grip on him, and he is powerless against it.

Vs. 18 - Paul admits knowledge is not the issue. He says: "I can will what is right, I just can't do it" The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Vs. 19 - Paul says: I do not do what I want to do, but I do the evil I do not want to do."

Vs. 20 - "Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I that do it, but sin dwelling within me." Paul is not copping out here, he is simply admitting that there is within him a force which has enslaved him, which controls him.

Vs. 21 - "When I want to do good, evil lies close at hand" So many of the saints down through history have identified with exactly what Paul is admitting to. The closer we try to get to God, the more difficult the struggle. Some would say that reflects the reality that Satan, Christ's primary adversary only cares about thwarting the ones who desire God the most. The New Testament speaks often about "Spiritual Warfare", the battle for the loyalty of the soul. Bunyan's "Pilgrims Progress" is another great book on this topic. Read it! Sanctification is a long and arduous struggle.

Vs. 22-23 - Paul says: "I delight in the Law of good in my inmost self. But I see another force in my life at war with that desire to live a Godly life". There is a fierce battle raging for every soul's health. Paul says: "I am captive to the Law of sin, which dwells in my members"

Vs. 24-25 Paul concludes with the only hope for himself and for you and for me. There is only one path out from our internal captivity to sin. Paul says: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the Law of Sin."

Amen St. Paul, Amen.