

Romans

Romans Chapter Seven

Romans 7: 8

July 11, 2010

This is lesson number **48** in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: “**For apart from the law sin was dead**”

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, 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." **8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.** 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. 12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Last week we studied verse 7 and noted that Paul had said some things about the law in 5:20 and 7:5, and he wanted to be sure that he was not misunderstood; that anyone would conclude that the law itself was sin.

So Paul then proceeds to prove that the problem is not with the law, but with sin.

In verse 7, he states that he would not have realized in the depth of his being the true nature of sin unless the law had corrected his self-righteous view of his obedience. Paul was a Pharisee, an expert in matters of the law, as the Jews of his day understood the law. Paul believed that the law had been given to the Jews as a means to justify a sinner. He was deceived in his belief that he was meeting the demands of the law.

We read **Philippians 3:1-11** last week, and it clearly shows the contrast between how Paul viewed the Law and sin before and after the Law came to him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Philippians 3:1-11

3:1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! 3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 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. 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. NKJV

When the knowledge of sin was revealed to Paul in the power of the Holy Spirit an earthquake occurred in Paul's soul. The superficial ideas of obedience in the legalistic "letter of the law" collapsed and the awful nature of sin against a holy and just God overwhelmed him. He is no longer Saul of Tarsus, the self-righteous Pharisee committed to arresting and killing those people who were "in the Way," i.e., Christians; now he will become Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul explained how God used the 10th Commandment, "You shall not covet..." to convict him of personal and deep sin against God.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." **Exodus 20:17**

I want to say again what I think is a very important thing to see in verse 7. The word translated "known" occurs twice in verse 7. But there are two different words in the Greek language and it should be translated better to give their distinctive meaning more clearly in English.

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, 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."

The first "know" is a kind of apprehension. The second "know" is much stronger than the first and means "to know absolutely."

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Lloyd-Jones translates the phrase: “I would never really have comprehended the meaning of sin but by the law”; but then he adds, “I would never have understood and come to feel in the depth of my being, and have a full understanding and experience of the meaning of lust, and the part that lust plays in a man’s life, were it not that the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”

Paul not only came to see that to lust, i.e. to have evil thoughts, was sin, but the law brought him to see the terrible power of lust in his life. So the law did this great service for him. If the law had left him alone, he would have died a self-righteous Pharisee. So we must not think that the law is sin because it is the law applied by the Holy Spirit that causes us to see the real nature of sin.

Before we continue with verse 8, I want to briefly give my understanding of the purpose of the law and its relevance to the unbeliever and to the believer.

1. The law was never intended as a means to acquire grace. Salvation is entirely a sovereign act of God. Neither is the law meant to prepare a person to merit God’s grace. **God justifies the ungodly.**
2. Sin was already in the world long before the law was given to Moses. And the moral law was already present in what is called “natural law,” before the law was given in written form on Mount Sinai. It is true that the law condemns, but men come into the world condemned already because of the one sin of the one man, Adam.
3. Grace in Christ was determined “before the foundation of the world,” and the gospel in germ form was spoken to the serpent in the presense of Adam and Eve; Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord; Abraham, said Jesus “saw My Day,” Substitution in the Christ, many years before the law came in alongside of sin.

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4. The law has three aspects: moral, civil, and ceremonial. Long before Israel became a nation these laws had been given to Moses for the purpose of regulating and separating the Jews from all other nations. Brother Gables pointed out that for the Jew all parts of the law were moral.
5. The Jews came to believe that because they were favored by God, and because they had been given the law, that they were immune from its condemnation. They were wrong.
6. God has always had His people in every generation who understood the distinction between the Spirit of the law and the letter of the law. David did not sin as he was fleeing from King Saul, when he ate the shewbread that only the priests were allowed to eat. Our Lord Jesus quotes Hosea when He tells the self-righteous Pharisees who were critical of Him because He ate with tax collectors and sinners. Matt 9:9-13

9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."
7. The law defines sin and makes a record of sin. The purpose of the moral aspect of the law is the same in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law were "nailed to the cross." The Old Testament Israel no longer exists as a nation and will not be restored as a nation {eschatology interprets Scripture}.
8. So when Paul, while still Saul of Tarsus, a religious but lost Pharisee, learns what "**You shall not covet**," really means, that which he thought would bring life he found to bring death.
9. We have previously dealt with verses 1-6: The believer is dead to the law as a means to be justified. But the law is not dead to the believer.

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Let me try to explain how the law works after a person is justified, born again, saved, and “in Christ.” The religious, but lost person tells a lie. He is about to be found out. He tells another lie to cover up the first lie. His conscience may feel a tingle but not enough to stop him from telling more lies. He can rationalize anything!

Contrast that with the believer. The believer tells a lie. The Holy Spirit whispers to his conscience: “Thou shall not bear false witness.” The believer repents of the sin of lying because he knows in a deep sense that lying is sin. He confesses his deception and tries to make restitution. Will he ever tell a lie again? Yes, but he will not rationalize his sin because the believer lives in a state of repentance.

A bit of wisdom: If you tell the truth you won't have to remember what you said to someone.

If a person can continue to sin without conviction and repentance, it is a good sign that he has never been saved.

This is what the Apostle is telling us that he experienced when he learned what the law meant by "**You shall not covet.**"

Before the law worked in Paul he could sin and not believe that it really was sin. He could covet but did not understand that it was condemning sin.

In verse 8, Paul continues to explain the relationship between sin and the Law. Verse 8 opens with a “But...” “But sin...” Now Paul is going to take us a little deeper into the character of sin. The trouble is not with the Law, the problem is with sin. And this is not outward acts of sin, but the principle of sin in fallen mankind.

Sin is an active force, not simple the absence of certain deeds.
“The plowing of the wicked is sinful.”

The picture presented by the word Paul uses; “taking opportunity,”
Cf. verse 11, “taking occasion” is quite interesting.

This word means “to make a start from a place.” If you were going on a trip, this word would describe the place from which you started your journey. “But sin taking opportunity,” Sin having a starting point in the Law.

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The word is also used as a military term, as in “a base of operations. In the military, the base of operations is where you plan and train and collect your weapons. So sin uses the commandments as a base of operations.

Perhaps the best way to explain the word is the way in which the word is used as “fulcrum.” A fulcrum is the point at which you gain leverage. If you want to move a heavy object you get a long pole for a lever and a block of wood. If you put one end of the pole under the heavy object as close to it as possible and use the block of wood as a fulcrum. Go out to the long end of the pole and with a little force you can easily move the heavy object.

“Give me a lever long enough and place to stand and I can move the earth.”
Archimedes - Mathematician and inventor of ancient Greece, 280-211bc

Thus sin uses the Law as a “fulcrum” to move our resistance and to produce the results it desires. Sin taking opportunity uses the Law as a fulcrum, or base of operations, or a starting place to “powerfully work” all manner of evil desire.

Paul had not known the depth of sin until the commandment came:
“You shall not covet.”

Now all manner of evil desire was aroused by the law.

This may seem at first to be a bad thing, to be disturbed so by the Law.
But if the Law does not disturb a man, he will never know sin to be sin.

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There are two Scriptures in Genesis that best describe man in his fallen condition:

Genesis 6:5

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**

Genesis 8:20-21

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although **the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth**; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

Many preachers in our day have moved so far away from the Bible that they don't preach about sin. Their main objective is to draw a large crowd and be considered "successful" with the hope that the Lord will "call" them to an even larger church.

This is cynical, I know, but how many preachers do you know who have been "called" from a megachurch to a small country church?

The Apostle Paul shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God. Don't ever forget that verse 18 of Chapter One follows the grand theme of the entire letter. If sin and judgement are not preached there will be no need created in the sinner's heart and mind for a Savior.

This is the main reason, I believe, that most of our Baptist churches list so many people as members who have quit the church. They made their "decision," and got a band-aid for their conscience but now they have little or no interest in meeting with the church.

We must understand that sin is not merely the failure to obey God. Sin is here stated as a positive force that can "take opportunity, or occasion," or use the Law as a fulcrum, it can work powerfully.

Back in 5:21 sin is said to "reign." This is the language of something that has great power and authority. A king reigns over his people. That's what 6:14 says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you."

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In 6:16-17, sin is a master that the unbeliever serves sin as a slave.

Sin is so strong that it can even use the holy Law of God as a fulcrum or base of operations, a starting point.

Just how does sin do this?

How does sin use God's law?

First, men are very comfortable with the god of their imagination. When you discuss religion, very often someone will say something like, "Well, I like to think of God as ..." But when you tell them what the Bible says about God they may not receive it as the truth. Why? Because the natural or carnal mind is enmity {hatred} against God.

So when the Law says to man, "You shall not ..." The lost man is not prepared to bow the knee to God. Man in his natural state firmly believes that he is in control of his eternal destiny.

If he reads in God's word, or someone tells him, that God is in control of His creation, the unbeliever rejects that truth and says, "My God is not like that." And he is correct because his god is no god at all.

So when the Law comes, the sin that was already there in a man is aroused and in his spirit of rebellion he rages against God. Have you noticed how mad an undisciplined child becomes when he is told, "No," or "Stop doing that"? That's what happens when the unbeliever is confronted with God's holy Law.

Most men can live with the precept that adultery is wrong, even those who commit adultery. But the sin of adultery is not limited to the actual act of adultery. Jesus taught that the law about adultery was spiritual and not limited to the physical act.

Matt 5:27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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“Those of old,” as well as the Pharisees and scribes at this time correctly quoted the seventh commandment, but here again, as with the sixth commandment {murder}, they did not give a full exposition of the matter. As with the previous case, it was not the law, but the rabbinical teaching that was at fault.

The seventh commandment {adultery} should have been explained by the scribes and the Pharisees in light of the tenth commandment, "You must not covet your neighbor's wife." {Ex 20:17; Deu 5:18}
Cf. Matthew 15:19 "For out of the heart"

The Pharisees were very strict about the outward act of adultery e.g. {John 8:1-11}. Jesus, however, views the evil lust of the heart as adultery, just as He views sinful hatred of the heart as murder.

Besides the 10th Commandment, can you support a spiritual understanding of "You shall not commit adultery" from the Old Testament? I believe so.

Gen 39:7-9 Joseph and Potiphor's wife.

7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife **cast longing eyes** on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this **great wickedness, and sin against God?**"

Potiphor's wife was as guilty of adultery as if she had been successful in seducing Joseph.

Another way sin works using the Law as a fulcrum, or a place to start, is when the law arouses thoughts that otherwise might not have occurred to you.

Take the example of watching certain movies or television shows. Things will be suggested to your mind that you know to be wrong and you would have never thought of wanting to do them. But now sin takes the Law against these things and sin makes these things exceedingly desirable.

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Let's look at a specific example. There was a movement in California to teach sixth grade children about the homosexual lifestyle. Why do children about 12 years old need to know anything about the homosexual lifestyle? The vast majority of sixth graders would not think of choosing to experiment with homosexuality. But when they are exposed to this perversion some of them may accept this lifestyle as normal and may even become interested in having a personal experience. If they are correctly told that sodomy is an abomination, that may cause them to desire it more.

It is not too difficult to understand why some of our young people want to experiment with harmful drugs, and unmarried sex, when they watch much of what passes for entertainment.

So sin uses the law as a place to start, as a base of operations to launch an attack, or as a fulcrum to move the resistance of the person.

The only defense against this attack of Satan is the Gospel.

The Gospel involves more than "make a decision for Jesus." First you need to "make a decision" about sin. A man will not realize what sin is until the Holy Spirit uses the holy law of God to convict of sin and judgement and righteousness.

Ah, but when the "wind" of the Holy Spirit comes in His mighty power, a new creation is born. A slave of sin becomes a slave of God. He is married to Christ that he may bear fruit to God.

"For apart from the law sin was dead." We will continue D.V., the next time on this passage. Suffice it to say that Paul means here that sin was "dead" to his understanding of the real meaning of sin, and not that he was not a sinner before the law came to him.

By God's grace and mercy I want us to see how the law is holy and just and good and that we will learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin.