

Romans (7:7-13)

Deliver Me From ... Me!

Part 25 - February 6, 2005

ALL ABOUT THE LAW

In Romans 7:1-6 Paul said that we are released from the law through Christ, and moreover we must now choose between being married to the Lord or to the Law (a demanding perfectionist).

- We must be committed to Christ-loving over rule-keeping.

The law's rules and regulations can't reward us for keeping its commands; but only punish us for breaking them. The Law has the power to reveal, but not to remove sin

Have you ever been pulled over by cop and told to report to the police station to be rewarded for driving in an orderly fashion, and stopping correctly at all the marked intersections? I thought not.

This is Paul's simple point: it isn't the normal function of the law to congratulate the law-abiding. But he hardly stops there. In verse five Paul claims that it is the Law itself that *arouses* our sinful passions! And that kind of talk could be taken the wrong way.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. - Romans 7:7-13 NIV

RELABELING SIN

So first, Paul reassures this Roman congregation that he's not coming against the Law or saying that the "Law" is bad.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! – Romans 7:7a NIV

Then he quickly sums up the appropriate function of the Law:

Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. – Romans 7:7b NIV

The great function of the Law is to expose sin, even as mankind it's best to cover it, excuse it, and camouflage. It would be the height of stupidity to take a bottle of poison, remove the unpleasant label (with its skull and crossbones) and replace it with a *nicer* label; maybe one that says, "Root beer." It would not only be stupid, it would be criminal. Yet, this is what mankind tends to do when faced with sin:

- It's not lust and fornication, it's passion!
- It's not cheating and lying, it's business sense!
- It's not betrayal and adultery, it's an affair!

The Law labels and exposes sin for what it really is.

For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." - Romans 7:7c NIV

It's very interesting that Paul chooses coveting (the tenth of the Ten Commandments) as his example. The other nine deal with external behaviors, but coveting deals with inner desires. And you can't have any of the others without the tenth attached:

- "Do not steal" indulges the desire to have what is not yours.
- "Do not commit adultery" indulges the desire for illicit sex.
- "Do not murder" indulges the desire for revenge, money, etc.

So we can say that coveting is the most reprehensible, because it is the *internal* basis for our *external* sinful behavior. And even though Paul (as a pre-Christian Pharisee) became an expert at keeping the external rules, this one got him!

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. - Romans 7:8a NIV

LAW PROVOKES SIN

Q: What's it mean: "Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment ..."? What opportunity does God's Law give to sin?

- Whenever law pushes against us we automatically rebel.

Put the word “should” in front of anything, and we instinctively procrastinate. I *should* go on a diet. I *should* go to bed.

On work days I hit the “snoozer” 3-4 times - I’m *sooo* tired; but not on my days off. I think: sleep in, that’s what you wanted to do all week!

- Prohibitions arouse our desire to do what is not permitted.

Candid Camera type shows often exploit this phenomenon. People will pass by a hole in a fence without a thought. Put up a sign that says, “Do not look in hole” and they’ll line up for a peek!

- When we’re given a rule, our knee-jerk reaction is to presume it’s a restriction or deprivation, rather than a protection.

It’s the allure of forbidden fruit; the thrill of the illegal. I’m satisfied going 65 (mph) as long as the limit is 55! The limit provokes (tempts) me to speed. If the sign says, “Speed Checked By Radar” I’m mildly resentful. I don’t even have a *sporting chance* of breaking the law!

- It’s really about sovereignty and self-rule. *I’ll* decide how fast I should go, and if I should look through that hole!

I saw a lady on the news who quit her job because the employees had to stop smoking. And even though she *wanted* to quit (and was offered expert help), she didn’t want to be *told* she had to.

See, this is what Paul realized (and it’s incredible): it’s not just that we’re law *breakers* (with enough threat of punishment and some will-power we can get a handle on that). In our sinful nature we’re law *haters*. And do you know why? Because we’re self-rule lovers!

- This is why reverse psychology works so well!

Q: How do you feel when a police car drives along behind you? Do you think: this is nice; I am as protected as I can be? Or, do you think: Turn! Go away! Why are you following me? Have you ever turned, just to “shake” one off your “tail”?

Do you think: “I don’t want an authority hovering over me!” Hmm. God’s Law tells us we’ll not set the standard. We’re not the final authority. And we’re not entitled to self-supremacy.

- God’s Law contradicts the *deity* of my desires.

In response to this, some believers make sure that the god they have is the kind of god who never *vetoes* their legislation. God's commands actually bring dormant sin to life!

For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. - Romans 7:8b-9 NIV

When Paul (the proud rule-keeping Pharisee) realized that he had an internal sinful nature, all hope was lost, because the rules (he wanted to keep) were the very thing provoking him to sin!

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. - Romans 7:10-11 NIV

When Law meets "flesh" it becomes, in the power of our sinful nature, an instrument in defeating its own demands. What a devastating revelation for a Pharisee. The Law *exposes* the hidden nature of our sin. The Law reveals our innate need for a Savior.

Q: So, does that make the Law bad? On the contrary:

So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. - Romans 7:12-13 NIV

Paul offers up two marks of spiritual maturity.

1. We should see God's commands as holy, righteous, and good.
2. We should see sin as utterly sinful (repugnant/repulsive).

Let's close by rating our relationship with Christ.

Q: Do you perceive God's guidelines as *restrictive* or *protective*?

Q: Do you obey them to *avoid* His punishment or *express* your love?

As we quantify our level of maturity, it's obvious that we can't survive on a relationship of restriction and punishment.

Q: Know how to be followed by a cop without getting nervous?

A: Let someone else drive. You can laugh and enjoy yourself!

This is what Christ does for us. He takes the wheel. We're no longer being scrutinized by the Law; *He* is. Our sins are forgiven; the requirements of the Law fulfilled. This is the "law of love" which changes our desires.