

Romans

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Romans 7:7-13



Vss. 7-8

- We need to remember that as Paul is stringently correcting the Jewish Christians in the church in Rome, he is speaking as one of them. No one had earned the right to speak correction to them more than Paul. Here he begins to lay open his soul to them to help them understand just how crucial it is for them to hear his teaching and then respond accordingly.
- Paul begins with the painful paradox of the Law. It is holy. It came to Moses from God Himself. The Law is Divine. The Law is Just. The Law is not sin nor is it evil. The Law is good and. It was given to us for our own benefit.
- And yet, not unlike the tree in the center of the Garden of Eden, the Law gives rise to sin. It does this first by defining sin. Paul says in vs. 7, "...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law...". He cites the Commandment, "You shall not covet/lust" and goes on to say that he would have not known anything about coveting if the Law had not defined it for him. And once he understood what it means to covet and lust (vs. 8), soon it produced in him every kind of coveting and lust. For instance, once, ostensibly due to the world-wide gas shortage, the federal government limited the speed on the interstates to 55 mph. It was almost like a dare when every car had a top speed of at least 110 mph! There was even a song: "I Can't Drive 55!". As soon as the Law says you can't eat this or go there, it produces every kind of temptation and sin to do exactly what we are told we cannot do.
- No one is free from this. Not even the greatest saint! In his "Confessions", Saint Augustine tells the story of how as a kid, he became a thief.
 - "There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears--not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in that theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law, in order that I, a prisoner under rules, might have a maimed counterfeit of freedom by doing what was

forbidden, with a dim similitude of impotence? ... The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."

Vss. 9-11

- Often people will ask, "How can God judge people who have never heard of Jesus and never had a Bible?". Paul will deal directly with this later on in the letter, but he makes the point here in vs. 9, referring to his early childhood, that before he knew the law he was alive, but as soon as the Commandment came, sin became alive in him and he died. (This is how we can rightly say at a Christian's funeral that they have fully passed out of death into life.)
- Going back to the serpent in the Garden, there has always been a strong element of deception in sin. In vs. 11, Paul says that sin/Satan saw "an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me/seduced me and through it, killed me". William Barclay says this deception works three ways. First, we are deceived in terms of the satisfaction found in sin. Whatever it is, it is never enough, it never fills the need nor quenches the thirst. Second, we are deceived in thinking we can make an adequate excuse for the sin. "My spouse didn't love me." "I thought I could handle the alcohol/drug." "Why should he have what I want but cannot have? Is not my theft justified?" All such excuses fall flat before the throne of a just God. Third, we are deceived in thinking we can escape the consequences of the sin. One need look no further than today's news of people who committed crimes decades ago, but are now going to prison and losing their fortunes.

Vss. 12-13

- Paul concludes this line of thinking by making it clear that the Law is good and Holy, but to clarify, rhetorically asks, "How then did that which is good become a cause of death for me?". Well, give the Devil his due. Just as sin crept into the garden, so too does sin creep into the Law. In each case, and in every case like it, sin corrupts what is beautiful, good, holy, and righteous. \
- Again, Barclay: "The awfulness of sin is shown by the fact that it could take a fine thing and make it a weapon of evil. That is what sin does. It can take the loveliness of love and turn it into lust. It can take the honorable desire for independence and turn it into the obsession for money and for power. It can take the beauty of friendship and use it as a seduction to the wrong things. That is what (Thomas) Carlyle called "the infinite damnability of sin." The very fact that it took the law and made it a bridgehead to sin shows the supreme sinfulness of sin. The whole terrible process is not accidental; it is all designed to show us how awful a thing sin is, because it can take the loveliest things and defile them with a polluting touch."