

The Sinfulness of Sin and the War Within (Rom. 7:7-20)

Definitions:

- **Natural law:** the moral law (Law of God) that exists in every image bearer, regardless of exposure to the Holy Scriptures. It is a principled law to love God and to love others.
- **Positive law:** laws, commands, and prohibitions that must be revealed, which cannot be known otherwise (circumcision, dietary, cultic, clothing, festivals, Baptism, etc.).
- **Mosaic law:** 613 laws given as a covenant to the nation of Israel. It was established in the context of redemption from the slavery of sin with anticipation of inheriting the land (Deut. 5:1-6). It was temporary as a Guardian (Gal 3).

*Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. Some of them have been fulfilled, while others await their fulfillment. Those fulfilled can still be optional in their observance, though not mandated. Others have been brought to their full intention (i.e., the priesthood of believers, sacrifices, the temple, etc.).

1. The Sinfulness of Sin Within (v.7-11)

- Paul anticipates that the letter's recipients may accuse him of condemning the law. After all, Paul has previously noted that we are released from the law (v.4). He assures his readers that the law is not sinful but holy, righteous, spiritual, and good (v.4, 12, 14).
- A. *Without a published law, sin remains concealed* (v.7):
 - Paul is not implying that sin does not exist apart from a published law (i.e., Mosaic law or any positive law). Instead, the provision of the law defines and reveals the sin already present in the sinner.
 - Sin, in essence, is a principled heart attitude (not simply behavior) that opposes righteousness, holiness, and truth revealed in the character of God. It is more than the absence of righteousness but a definite presence and principle. It is a powerful, evil, and wicked presence likened to the domination of a monarch or king (Rom. 6:14) in the unregenerate sinner. It prefers to remain hidden, undisclosed, undetected, and abstract, with no formal definition, ruining and condemning the sinner. However, the presence of law and demands of God upon the sinner "stir up and aggravate" it. The result is an "outburst" of rebellion, self-assertion, and self-autonomy.
 - Like all men, Paul possesses the law, either internally (natural law) or through the publication of it (Mosaic Law).
 - The Greek uses two words for "know" in v. 7. The first is general knowledge (fact), while the second is knowledge through experience (intimacy).
 - Paul is echoing (not alluding) to the drama in the Garden (Gen 2-3):
 - He chooses the command "do not covet" as the principled law that, in many ways, not only summarizes the sin to which Adam and Eve succumbed but is the attitude of many Old Testament laws, including many of the Ten Commandments.
 - Additionally, covetousness is not recognizable, as it is a sin in man's heart which does not always manifest itself. Paul chooses this sin to demonstrate the overall principle of sin: it resides and is inflamed in man's heart.
 - While covetousness is often translated as concupiscence, the context depends on whether it desires something forbidden (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Ex. 20:17) or good (Lk. 22:15).
 - Only after the command was given, covetousness was discovered (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-6).
 - This indicates that Adam and Eve may have sinned before eating the fruit. Between the positive command (Gen. 2:16-17), the craftiness of the serpent, and the reaching/partaking of the forbidden fruit, sin entered (3:1-6).
 - Sin precedes transgression. Curiosity with Adam and Eve became concupiscence; inquisitiveness became acquisitiveness (covetousness).

- B. *Sin seized the law and used it to its advantage* (v.8):
 - Once the command came, sin used it as its "base of operation" or a "fulcrum." When law is given, the spirit of rebellion is aroused in the man and is aggravated as sin's self-assertiveness comes into play. This is because man, in sin, wants to be autonomous. He is self-satisfied, self-contained, and desires independence.
- C. *Sin is deceptive in the unregenerate* (v.9-11):
 - As a Pharisee, Paul was deceived in his sin (Phil. 3:2-11). He knew of the Mosaic law but did not "see" his sin. He only saw the sin of others around him (Acts 7:58; Phil. 3:6) until the law accomplished its purpose (Acts 9:1-19).

2. The War Within (v.12-20)

*v.12-20 require grammar and intellectual dexterity, as theologians differ on who the "I" and "me" are.

- A. *The problem is not with the law but sin* (v.7, 12, 14):
 - The law is spiritual, holy, righteous, and good. Holiness is opposed to unholy. Holiness means separation from sin and evil. Paul does not elaborate on how the law is holy but instead demonstrates that it is far removed from sin or evil as it reveals God's character. In calling the law "holy," Paul is not describing the law's demand as holy, but that the origin of the law (God, the Lawgiver) is holy.
 - Sin has "hijacked" and used the law as its mode of operation.

B. *Sin is deceitful and will use the law against sinners. How do we recognize it?*

(1) It will pose as an attitude of helplessness and self-pity when discovered. (2) It will attempt to drive the redeemed sinner to antinomianism (Rom. 6:1). (3) It tries to reason the absurdity of God judging man for his thought life (Deut. 5:21; Matt. 5; Heb. 4:13). (4) It will seek to excuse man of sin and instead blame shift. (5) It rejoices if it can victimize the sinner, so repentance is unnecessary. (6) It will create other words and definitions to bypass the word "sin," excusing the sinner from his sin. (7) It will attempt to give peace to the anxious, lustful, bitter, angry, resentful heart by reassuring that "no one knows, and no one is hurt."

The inadequacy of the law is not due to its content but to its weakness and vulnerability in the flesh, which is the sphere of man in the first Adam. The law is not sinful, nor does it cause death. Sin is the ultimate cause of death. The law is the instrument and vehicle through which sin manifests itself and, consequently, the law's death in the hands of sin and the flesh.

The law unmasks sin, gives it a recognizable definition, removes its ambiguity, and exposes the true character by unmasking it (4:15; 5:13-14): the law, in the hands of sin, brings wrath and death (4:15; 7:8-11, 13). Ultimately, the giving of law would eventually end the reign of sin.

Since the redeemed sinner has been set free from the sphere of the law in the hands of flesh (old Adam) and sin, how can Paul use such defeated language (v.14-20)?

- A believer has been set free from the bondage of sin by faith alone through the death of Christ (6:2, 11, 12, 18, 22; 7:4). As a result, he is removed from the enveloping presence of the power of the flesh (8:9) so he can serve God (7:6). Paul uses strong words to describe the strength and dominion of sin, such as a military stronghold (v.8), a prison (v.14), and a contrasting desire between what he wants, and what he does (v.16-20).
- He describes a regenerated man with a heightened sensitivity to the remains and stain of sin. All those in Christ can relate to Paul's lament: while he hates his sin, he still sins.