

The Deception of Sin

Turn to Romans 7 in your Bibles and we will continue making our way through this complex chapter. After the first six verses that we covered last week there is a definite possibility of thinking that the Law is what is causing the problem of sin. As we will see today, nothing could be further from the truth though, and Paul will point out here that the Law is in fact good, and perfect, and holy. Let's read our verses for today beginning at verse 7, and then we will get started. **What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, You shall not covet. 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Pray

We have seen a couple of different analogies in the last two chapters of this great letter. Chapter six was all about how we are slaves of either sin or Christ, and then here in chapter 7 he switches to the metaphor of marriage to show us how we are joined to the Risen Christ by faith. We saw that we are all married to sin at one point in our lives, and that we are held together by the law. Make no mistake, these are not easy concepts, and we really have to dig into these verses to understand what is being said, but like the woman who is married to one husband, if he dies, she can be married to another, we are married to sin before we put our faith in Christ. So, we must die to sin, through the death of Christ, so that we can be joined to another, the Risen Christ. And we saw how this is accomplished by being born again of the Spirit. We die to the sin nature, it is made powerless over us through faith in the death of Christ, then we are married to the Risen Christ for a specific purpose, and that is to bear fruit for Him. We are saved so that we might serve Christ. Last time we also saw how our spiritual lives can be like that of a computer. And we saw that if we are trying to operate spiritually through the Law it is like trying to use an outmoded, out of date, and in fact, an obsolete computer. It is utterly useless, and unable to do what is required, like an old computer that can no longer run new programs or access the Internet. We need to operate using a new and better way, and that is by the Holy Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit we will bear fruit for God.

Now in all this discussion it would be easy to conclude that the Law is bad, or that the Law is causing us to sin. After all, in verse 4 we see that we are made to die to the Law, and in verse 5 we see that our sin nature is aroused by the Law to commit acts of sin. But, upon a closer inspection we see that we are not joined to the Law, but that the

Law is actually what has held us in the marriage with the sin nature, or as it is referred to in the Greek *the* sin. When the concept of sin is being discussed, not the committing of sins, but the noun sin, it often has the definite article *the* before it. That lets us know that the idea of sin is being discussed, and that is who or what we are joined to initially in the marriage analogy that Paul uses. Some commentators or preachers, like the late Ray Stedman of Pasadena, California, say that we are joined to Adam initially, and this is a really good way of putting it. We are joined to Adam through the sin nature like we saw in chapter 5. Romans 5:15 says **by the transgression of the one the many died.**

Through the sin of Adam we all died. We saw that judgment arose through the sin of Adam, and from that came condemnation. And that is who we are joined to here in chapter 7. Then, last time we saw that when we put our faith in Christ, Adam dies, or our sin nature dies, it no longer has any power over us, we are released from the bond to sin that we had, and we are joined to another, the Risen Christ. What a beautiful picture of the position in Christ that we have when we put our faith in Him. Christ doesn't just give us this position for our benefit though; He gives us the position so that we would serve Him with our lives.

Today we get a glimpse of just how sin operates, and this is extremely pertinent information for us today, since sin is our number one enemy in this Christian life. Eph 6:12 says **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.** We do not battle against fleshly enemies, but rather against the forces of evil, and that is primarily sin, and the wicked forces that attempt to deceive us. People in the military spend a significant amount of time studying their enemy and how he operates so that they will know how to defeat him. The first Special Forces soldiers to go into Afghanistan after 9/11 spent weeks in isolation preparing for their mission. They learned all that they could about the terrain, the customs, the language, and importantly the tactics of the people they were going to fight against. Their lives were wholly dedicated to learning everything they could about the people they were going to fight. We need to know how sin operates if we are going to be successful in this Christian life. We need to know how sin operates if we are to live sanctified lives. And the only way that we can bear fruit for God, and bearing fruit for Him is the entire reason that He saved us, is if we are holy. If we are not holy, we will not bear fruit for Him, He cannot use unclean vessels for holy purposes.

Is the Law Sin?

Romans 7:7 **What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, You shall not covet.** Verse 4 in chapter 7 says that we die to the Law, and then verse 5 says that our sinful passions were aroused by the Law, or literally that they work *through* the Law. So, does that mean that the Law is sin? May it never be! This is the same familiar response that he has given quite often to the questions he has raised in the last two chapters. Don't even consider that. That isn't possible. May that thought have never been conceived. The Law is not sin, and now he is going to show us why it is not. Notice here also the switch to the first person personal pronouns. Paul starts saying "I" for the first time in the letter. Earlier in the book it was all about people in general. The Gentiles are sinners, the Jews are

sinners, all people in general are sinners. Salvation is made available to all people through faith like we see in Romans 4:16 among others **For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.** In chapters 5 and 6 we begin to see the use of the word “we”, as Paul starts delving into our position in Christ. But here in verse 7 of chapter 7 we start to see him speak of himself by using the word “I”. Here we see that Paul is using the Word of God like a mirror to reveal his faults. The Word is a special kind of mirror though. It doesn’t just show a reflection. Rather it shows what you look like in comparison to what you are supposed to look like. This mirror points out all of our faults, and shortcomings, but it doesn’t just leave us without answers thankfully, it also shows us how to correct those faults, and how to deal with them. And, that is what we are going to get here; Paul is going to point out how sin operates so that we can deal with it. He says **I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.** This is the purpose of the Law. Romans 3:20 **because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** No one can be justified by following the Law, because we cannot follow it perfectly, and if we offend the Law in one point we are guilty of all according to James 2:10. So, the Law is given so that we know what sin is, we are left completely without excuse. We cannot claim ignorance. Not only do we have God’s law on our hearts (Rom 2:15), but we have it written down for us, and preserved for us in this Holy Book. And Paul says here that he would not have known sin except through the Law. And then we see the personal example that Paul gives of coveting, **for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, You shall not covet.** There are some interesting things to notice about this. First we see that there is a difference between the two uses of the word *covet* here. The first time it is used it is talking about the idea of coveting, or the idea of desiring what someone else has. Paul says he would not have known what coveting was if it weren’t for the Law. He wouldn’t have understood the idea in his mind if the Law had not said, “don’t do it.” Then the second time it is used here it talks about the actual commission of the sin. “You shall not covet”. You shall not do this act with your physical body. This, of course, is from the Mosaic Law, given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelite people. This is the tenth commandment, and it is found in Exodus 20:17 **You shall not covet your neighbors house; you shall not covet your neighbors wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.** The Law is about physically doing things, or physically not doing things. Here, Paul says that he would not have known in his mind to not do these things if the Law had not said to not do them. So, the first thing we need to see about sin is that it starts in the mind. That is where the battle begins like we talked about last week. The Law shows us what sin is by pointing out what not to do, it brings to our minds what the sins are. But, that’s not all there is to it, sin takes advantage of this and twists the intention of the Law.

Verse 8 says **But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.** So, sin takes the Word of God and twists it in our minds and causes us to sin through the commandment. Notice that Paul speaks of coveting, which is a sin of the mind. The battleground is in the mind. This is speaking of the very beginning of sin in the person,

right when it is conceived. This is how sin operates in the person. It starts in the mind. Jesus explained this to Peter in Matthew 15. This is a really great passage for another reason as well, as it teaches something about the Word of God that will help us in the battle against sin. You can turn over to Matthew 15, this is the time when the Pharisees came to Jesus and questioned Him as to why the disciples did not wash their hands in accordance with tradition before they ate. Jesus, just like He did with Nicodemus in John 3, cuts right to the spiritual matter. The Pharisees were concerned with the physical, the washing of hands, and Jesus immediately questions why they twist the Word of God for their own gain. He asks them why they do not follow the commandment to honor their father and mother, instead they follow a man made tradition of saying that they can get out of taking care of their parents if they say that they have given all their money to God. The key part is in verse 6 where Jesus says **And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.** **7 You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:** **8 This people honors ME with their lips, But their heart is far away from ME.** **9 But in vain do they worship ME, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.** He quotes Is 29:13 there, which shows that Jesus believed that the Word of God was adequate for teaching and reproof (2 Tim 3:16); we can trust it as being valid to correct our behavior. But, the Pharisees put the traditions of men ahead of the Word of God, and people still do this today as well. Often people will put their traditions ahead of what the Bible says, or they will put their theology ahead of what the Bible teaches. This is straying away from the literal interpretation of the Word. The Word of God must be the authority, not our traditions, or our theological concepts. We have to take the plain reading of the text at face value when it makes plain sense; otherwise we become the authority over the text like the Pharisees did here in Matthew 15. Then Jesus says it isn't what you eat that defiles you, but rather what comes from the heart. If we skip down to verse 15 we see the conversation Jesus had with Peter after this exchange with the Pharisees. **Peter said to Him, Explain the parable to us.** **16 Jesus said, Are you still lacking in understanding also?** **17 Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated?** **18 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.** **19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.** **20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.** So, there we see it in verse 18-20. Sin starts in the heart, or like we have said before the mind, the heart and the mind are the same thing. The sin is conceived in the heart, every possible kind of sin is conceived in the mind before it is physically acted upon, and notice that it is a sin when it is conceived, not just when it is acted on. The battle of sin begins in the mind, we have to control the sin in our minds before it has the chance to grow and be born into physically committing the sin. So, the Law was given to show us what sin is, but sin takes advantage of that and brings sin into our sin-tainted minds to produce all kinds of sin. The Word gives us a great way to combat this in Philippians 4:8 **Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.** Think on good, pure things and you will combat the attempts of sin to deceive you.

There is an interesting phrase at the end of verse 8 back in Romans 7 that tells us something important about sin **for apart from the Law sin is dead**. This does not mean that without the Mosaic Law sin does not exist. We saw that in chapter 5 verse 13, before the Law sin was still in the world, and we know this because people died. Death is the result of sin, and people were dying before the Law came because they sinned. What this is saying in verse 8 is that sin is like a leech. Leeches depend on other animals to live. They get their food and energy by latching onto another animal and using the host animal's blood as its energy source. Leeches need something else that is alive to provide food for them, or they will die. That is the way sin is. It is not an entity of its own that can survive on its own. Sin uses God's Word and the Law in order to exist. I saw a picture once of Jesus and the Devil arm wrestling, like they are in some sort of cosmic battle for the universe. That is not the way it is. Christ has won the battle, Satan is defeated, but Satan wants to take as many people with him as he can, and one of his favorite tactics to use is to twist the Word of God, or like here the Law of God to conjure up sin in our minds. Sin needs the Law, the Word of God in order to exist; it uses it like a leech uses the blood of its host. And the Law of God is written on the hearts of all men according to Romans 2:14-15. We all have a moral conscience whether we know the actual Mosaic Law or not. We know right from wrong, and this is what sin uses to cause sin to be conceived in our minds. Our sin nature is what is inside of us that the sin takes advantage of to cause us to sin. Without the sin nature, sin is dead. Sin has no chance to exist in the person without the sin nature, and that is our hope for the future, when we receive our glorified body we will no longer have a sin nature, and we will live for eternity free from sin. That is getting a little ahead of the game at this point, but it's good to keep our eyes on where we are headed though, as a little encouragement.

Some commentators believe that Paul is referring to life before the Mosaic Law came into existence in verse 9. But, this isn't a literal interpretation of what has been preserved for us, however. Paul is using the first person, singular pronoun of "I" here for a reason. He is talking about himself. This is his personal testimony of how sin has operated in his life, and how he deals with it, so that we can do the same thing. Back in Philippians 4 after telling them what they should think about, Paul says in verse 9 **The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you**. He wants us to know how to deal with sin, so it will not have the rule over us. Verse 9 of Romans 7 says **I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died**.

Before he had a real concept of what the Law said Paul was alive. If we take this literally it means that when he was a child, before he understood the Law, he was alive, spiritually, which should encourage us somewhat when we here of children dying. But, when he understood the Law in his mind, when he could grasp its full message, sin became alive. It is like a phone that the battery has run out. It is dead until it is plugged into a power source. The Law is the power source for the sin. Once the Law was there, once the power source was available, sin became alive, just like a phone with a dead battery that gets plugged into the outlet. It comes alive, and is able to operate. And when sin begins to operate within us, we die, spiritually. Then in verse 10 we see that one of the intentions of the Law is to bring life. The Law shows the perfect will of God. In it we find what we are supposed to be like. The Ten Commandments personify the godly person. We are to love God with all our heart, mind and soul; that is the first 4

commandments. Then we are to love our neighbor as our self; that is the last six commandments. If we do that, perfectly, we will live. But, we can't because we have inherited the sin nature from Adam. We are physically incapable of following the Law perfectly, our minds are tainted with sin, it is in us. And, if we break the Law in one tiny spot, one thought that is out of place, we have broken the whole Law, James 2:10.

The Deception of Sin

Now, here in verse 11 we really see how sin operates inside of us. **For sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.** Sin grabs onto the Word of God, twists it, deceives us, and thereby leads us into spiritual death. Notice again that Paul is using personal pronouns. It is all through this section. He is talking about himself again so that we can use him as an example of how to fight against sin in our own lives. The first thing I want you to see in this verse is that term "taking an opportunity". The Greek word here is **λαβόντσα**. This is the same root word that we saw back in Romans 5:17 where it says **much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.** That word for "receive" means literally to grab onto, to seize, and that is exactly what sin is doing here in verse 11. It grabs onto the commandment and uses it against us just the same that we are to grab onto the grace offered by Jesus Christ if we are to hope to have eternal life. Sin is the antithesis of righteousness and everything that is holy and good. It is the antithesis of God. So, sin grabs onto what is supposed to bring us life, the Word of God, and uses it to deceive us into sinning, and thereby killing us. We have two examples of this in Scripture, one that leads to sin and death, and one that is an example for us to combat sin in our lives. We talked about the sin of Eve in one of the messages on Romans 5, so I won't go into a lot of detail, but this example clearly shows how sin operates, and how it deceives us. Satan, who is the personification of sin, used the Word of God to tempt Eve with disobeying God in Genesis 3. This is exactly what Paul is talking about here. Satan, just like the sin in verse 11, took God's Word, twisted it, and deceived Eve into thinking that she would get some sort of benefit out of disobeying God. You remember that God told Adam that he could eat of any tree except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because in the day that he ate of it he would surely die. Then Satan comes along, and asks Eve in Gen 3:1 **Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?** That is just slightly different than what God actually said, and then Eve responds with not exactly what God said also. She doesn't have God's word stored in her heart literally the way it was spoken. **From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.** Then Satan really turns on the deception when he says **You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** Surely you won't die, in fact you will be like God if you eat the fruit! Oh the deception of sin! That is what it always does, it lies to us, it says that it will be ok if we do this sin. No one will know, no one will get hurt, it's just me, this won't hurt anything, and besides I will get a benefit from this sin. That is the big lie. There is no benefit from sin, it only causes death and destruction. And be sure your sin will find you out. People will know your sin, it will be discovered, if not in this life, it will certainly be exposed in the next life when we stand before All Mighty

God. This obviously, is an example of how not to combat sin in our lives. We cannot reply to the deception of sin with our own interpretation of God's Word like Eve did, and we certainly cannot reply with outright rebellion like Adam did. He knew it was wrong to eat, and the Bible does not record the Devil attempting to deceive him, he just rebelled against the Word and ate anyway. Now if we quickly turn over to Matthew 4 we will get an example of how we should respond when sin attempts to deceive us.

As we already know from our Scripture reading this morning this is the temptation of Jesus by Satan. The circumstance is similar to that of the temptation of Eve in the Garden. Satan uses the same tactic here that he used against Eve, but we need to notice the difference in how Christ responded to the deception. Starting at the beginning of chapter 4 we see **Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.** First, Satan appeals to Jesus' flesh here. He is hungry, as an aside this shows the humanity of Christ, because He physically became hungry like we do. Satan here tempts Jesus to live outside of the will of God. Verse one says that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Part of the temptation was for Him to be hungry, but to not give into the desires of His human flesh. It seems this temptation was for our sakes, to show that Jesus was in fact the sinless Son of God who could take away our sin, so He was here tempted in every way like we are, yet He did not give into the temptation (Heb 4:15). Christ responds to the temptation with the Word of God, the literal Word of God, not a manmade interpretation of it, but with what it actually says. **But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.** This is Deuteronomy 8:3. We do not live by the desires of our flesh, we live by the Word of God. God's Word is more important than food, through it we gain eternal life, food only provides life in this life, temporarily. God's Word can give us eternal life. Next, Satan took Christ to the pinnacle of the Temple, and then he misquotes Scripture like He did with Eve, and attempts to deceive Jesus. Verse 6 **If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, HE will command His angels concerning You; And ON their hands they will bear You up, SO that You will not strike Your foot against A stone.** But, once again, Christ responds with the Word, and importantly the will of God. Here Satan is tempting Jesus to once again go outside the will of God. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a great, miraculous person who would deliver them from their circumstances. Here, Satan is attempting to get Jesus to make a great display by throwing Himself off the temple, because, afterall, the angels will protect you. Here Satan misquotes Psalm 91:11-12 to make it seem like God's angels will protect Him if He does something foolish. It was not God's will for Jesus to come the first time like He will come the second time. The first time He was to come in meekness with salvation for people; The second time He will come with great power and judgment, it would have been outside of God's will for Him to do that the first time He came. So, Christ responds with Deut 6:16 **You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.** Finally, we see that Satan takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the earth, and tempts Jesus with power over all these nations if only He would worship him. Again, Satan tries to get Jesus to act outside of the will of the Father, but Christ responds with the Word of God. Satan knows Christ is coming again,

and here in these last two temptations he is trying to get Christ to act like He will the second time He comes. When He comes again He will have the rule over the nations of the world, but Satan is here trying to get Him to take it now, with one little caveat, He would have to worship Satan to get it. **Then Jesus *said to him, Go, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.** This is from Deut 6:13. Christ combats the deception of sin with the Word of God. It is important to see that He combats it with the will of God as well. He knows the will of God because He is in constant fellowship with the Father, so He knows what He is doing and what God's purpose is for Him at all times. We need to be the same way, we need to be in constant fellowship with God in order to know His will, and we need to know His Word and apply it to the situation when we are being deceived by sin. Prayer, Bible study, and submission to the Lord's will, this is a very familiar formula, but it is one that works every time in combating the deception of sin. This is exactly what the Lord did when He was led into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted, and we can assume that He prayed, for forty days and nights before the temptation came. He was prepared, and we must be prepared just the same way, because we are tempted in just the same way. Eve was tempted to eat just like Jesus was tempted to eat. Eve was tempted with personal gain, she would not die if she ate, just like Jesus was tempted with personal gain, He would be accepted as the Messiah by the Jews if He gave some miraculous sign to gain their attention. And, Eve was tempted with power, if she ate she would be like God, just like Jesus was tempted with power, if He worshipped Satan He would be given rule over the nations right then. Well, obviously Jesus handled the temptation much better than Eve did, she gave in on every account, where Jesus resisted on every account with the will and Word of God. Then the devil left Him alone, just like he will leave us alone for a time if we resist him; James 4:7 promises **Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.** So, when we draw near to God and His Word we will be able to see the deception of sin for what it is, and we will be able to resist the temptation.

Finally, in verses 12 and 13 of Romans 7 we see that the Law is not the cause of our problems, it is not the cause of our sin. Our own sin is the cause of our problems. Romans 7:12-13 **So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.** The Law is holy and good. It shows what the perfect will of God is. God's will for us is to love Him and to serve Him, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This is the Law. Sin uses the Law to conjure up sin in our minds. We see how it operates in the examples of Eve and Christ. Satan, being the personification of sin, uses the Word of God, he twists it, and deceives our sin-tainted minds into thinking that the Word isn't always perfect, or that it doesn't always apply, or that it doesn't always matter, and thereby sin leads us into committing sin. The Law is not bad, it is not evil. But, sin uses that which is good and perfect to lead us into sin, and this is what shows the utter sinfulness of sin. It takes that which is good and perfect and twists it into sin, debauchery and evil. And, we, in our sinful flesh, fall prey to sin and its deception, but, oh how we should be so thankful that we have an advocate with the Father. We have the one who paid the price for our sin on Calvary's cross. We have the

faithful Son who is at the right hand of the Father constantly making intercession for us when we have our faith in Him. What a wonderful Savior we have in Jesus Christ. He understands our temptation, because like we saw today, He was tempted just like we are, but He was found to be without sin, so He could pay the price for our sin; He was the perfect sacrifice for our sin. And therefore we need to live in submission to His will and His Word.