

Romans Chapter 7: 5-13; “The Destruction of Self-Righteousness”, A Sunday School study given in relation to Chapter 19 of the 1689 Confession of Faith, on March 11th, 2012, by Pastor Paul Rendall.

Verses 5-13 – “When we were in the flesh the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” This is a very revealing phrase, “When we were in the flesh...” It describes the state of the unbeliever who is trying to keep the law by his own strength. When he realizes that there are sinful passions at work in his heart, the hearing of the law aggravates those passions by giving them a greater strength when he realizes that he is being given a commandment to do something that he cannot do it perfectly, or perhaps he does not want to keep the commandment at all. But being commanded to do it by God, and then realizing that the Law will not be able to give him help in keeping it, he fights back by going all the more passionately and deeply into sin. He becomes angry with God that He should expect perfection of obedience and he does not have strength to perform it. Listen to Matthew Henry – “The law, by commanding, forbidding, threatening, corrupt and fallen man, but offering no grace to cure and strengthen, did but stir up the corruption, and, like the sun shining upon a dunghill, excite and draw up the filthy steams. We being lamed by the fall, the law comes and directs us, but provides nothing to heal and help our lameness, and so makes us halt and stumble the more.”

Verse 6 says that the Christian has been delivered from the law, by his having died to that by which he was held. Therefore He can serve God in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. He does not simply observe the law of God outwardly, but he rejoices in learning to do it in his heart according to the motions of the Spirit of God working in his heart. He now sees the spirituality of the law. He sees that love is the fulfillment of the law. He sees that he can serve God without the fear and terror which so often came to the people of God under the Old Covenant when they drew near to God. Instead it is the reality of 1 John 5: 3. “For this is the love of god, that we keep His commandments.” “And His commandments are not burdensome.”

In verse 7 Paul deals with the question which might naturally arise in the mind of a believer who has heard that the law arouses sinful passions in unbelieving people – “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have know sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” Here is one of the main uses of the law; that of defining what sin is. Paul uses the example of the 10th commandment which told him that covetousness was sin.

Verse 8 - Sin working in Paul’s heart used that commandment to produce in him all kinds of covetous desire.

Verse 9 - This sin had laid dead and dormant in his heart until the commandment came. He felt alive to his own righteousness. He was confident in his own evaluation of himself as keeping God’s commandments. And then Paul’s self-righteousness was slain. He was alive once without the law. (Phil. 3: 6). But the commandment came with convicting power. And then he died to the idea that he could keep that commandment and that he could be justify in his thinking that he had been keeping it.

Verse 10 - The commandment which was supposed to bring life to him, he found to bring death. The intention of all of God’s commandments is for our good, to do us good, and to bring us life if we keep them with our heart. Paul thought that he was “blameless”, but he was now finding out that this was not the case. He had been deceived by his own sinful heart and mind into thinking that the commandment was something that he could keep outwardly, without having to have his heart changed.

Verse 11 – Sin within his heart as an unbeliever took the opportunity of riding on the back of the commandment in order to conceal its true evil nature. It sought to bring him to the point of inward frustration and anger. Sin would use the strictness and perfection of the law to make him feel as though it was the law that was hemming him in, and taking his freedom away from him, not allowing him to do what he had secretly and ignorantly wanted to do before in his covetousness. This would then lead him to the false conclusion that if he could not keep the commandment, he should then attempt to demonstrate how strong he really was, how free he really was, to sin against it. Thereby, as he thought more and more about the commandment, covetousness of every kind was engendered by sin in relation to the good commandment of God. (1 Corinthians 15: 56 – “The strength of sin is the law.”)

John Gill says on verse 11 – “The meaning here seems to be, that his corrupt and rebellious propensities, excited by the Law, led him astray; caused him more and more to sin; practiced a species of deception on him by urging him on headlong, and without deliberation, into aggravated transgression. In this sense, all sinners are deceived.” “Their passions urge them on, deluding them, and leading them further and further from happiness, and involving them, before they are aware, in crime and death.” “No being in the universe is more deluded than a sinner in the indulgence of evil passions.”

Verse 12 - tells us that all of this was not the law’s fault. It was the fault of the sinful nature of the man. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good.” Psalm 119: 97 – “Oh, how I love Your law!” “It is my meditation all the day.” “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.”

Verse 13 – It would appear then that what was good had become a source of death to him. But Paul says that this was certainly not true. Rather it was sin; so that it might appear to be sin, which was producing in him death through what was good, so that sin might become exceedingly sinful. Does sin appear to be exceedingly sinful to you? Then the law has discharged one of its main duties to you. “The law is spiritual (Verse 14), but he knew himself to be carnal, sold under sin.”