

## Lesson Twelve

(7:7-25)

### THE CLASH OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT

#### FUNCTIONS OF THE LAW

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet: 8 but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin is dead. 9 And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; 10 and the commandment, which was unto life, this I found to be unto death: 11 for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me. 12 So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good. 13 Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good; — that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful.

The paragraph which begins at verse seven opens with a question. We have found the question-answer method of teaching to be used

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regularly by Paul. Chapters 3, 4, 6, and 7 began with questions. We now address our attention to the second and major question of Chapter Seven, "Is the law sin?" The law is, in itself, not sinful, but is, in fact, perfect. It came from exactly the same source as that from which the Gospel came, and it accomplished all that it was intended to do. To suggest an imperfect law is to posit an imperfect God. Paul appears to argue in verses 1-6 that we are free from the law as if it were something detrimental. But when the last word is said, it is quite clear that weakness is not in the law, but in flesh (Romans 8:3). Paul states plainly that "the law is holy" (v. 12). As is his custom, he moves from the general to the specific: not only is the law, in its entirety, perfect, but each commandment is holy, righteous and good (v. 12). He further praises the law as being "spiritual" and at once confesses his own carnality (v. 14).

What are the functions of the law (vv. 7-13)? Defining sin and thus pointing it out clearly is one capability of the law. Once more Paul introduces his subject generally: "I had not known sin." The specific example is the sin of covetousness, chosen out of a host of sins which would have illustrated his point.

Sin is personified in verse eight. The process of "finding occasion" is as a person looking for an opportunity and sin uses the commandment as a tool to probe and accomplish its own ends.

Empowering sin is another ability of the law, "for apart from the law sin is dead" (v. 8)! "The power of sin is the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). When the law came, death resulted. Physical death is not the subject here as it is in 5:12, ff. where Paul contends that men died because of Adam's sin and kept dying when the law had not as yet been given. But the law came giving knowledge of God's will. Man failed to conform to the will of God, sinned personally and spiritual death resulted. The coming of the law does not have primary reference to the original writing on tables of stone at Mt. Sinai, but refers to the individual coming to an awareness of sin as in 6:20, "And the law came in besides that the trespass might abound" — in man's awareness and conscience.

A third function of the law is to preserve life. We have previously noted that the law was not designed to justify from sin (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:20). Neither can the law produce life in the sense of bringing about what Jesus called being "born again" (Galatians 3:21). The greater one's knowledge of the law, the greater his despair and sense of condemnation if he does not keep the law. The greater one's knowledge of the Gospel, the greater his joy and assurance if he walks by faith and commitment to God. Alexander Campbell, on the basis of Galatians 3:21, ff. held that Romans 7:10 should be understood to say, "And the commandment which I *thought to be* unto life." But Paul was not suggesting

that at one time he erroneously thought the law to function in a way in which, in truth, it did not function. The law was "unto life" in the sense that its commandments, if followed, would enhance earthly life and improve one's conscience and relationship with God. The law was not destructive nor was it in any sense a foe of life.

The fourth action of the law is that it indicates the true character of sin (v. 13). Through the law sin is seen to be "exceeding sinful." Sin is not something with which to toy. Physical life would be no more endangered by playing with a stick of dynamite than spiritual life would be threatened by playing with sin. Carlyle speaks of "the infinite damnability of sin." If people knew the destructive and damning power of sin, they would not be so quick to rationalize sin in their lives or treat any sin lightly. Again the consciousness of man is involved. The law did not make sin sinful, but the law possessed the ability to plant in the mind of man a keen awareness of the destructive power of sin.

### THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM OF BEHAVIOR

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do. 16 But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17 So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. 18 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. 19 For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. 20 But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. 21 I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Verses fourteen through twenty-five of Chapter Seven deal with the universal problems of behavior. Paul's conclusion about the law is that it "is spiritual" but his evaluation of man is quite different, "I am carnal" he admits, "sold under sin." (The same kind of contrast is made between "spiritual" and "carnal" in I Corinthians 3:1). The questions raised here

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in commentaries are: Does Paul speak of himself? does the pronoun "I" refer figuratively to others only or is it an editorial, "I" in which the author speaks only of himself? If the reference is to others, excluding Paul, who are they? Hodge says it is almost universally admitted that Paul does not speak only of himself. There are those who think Paul is speaking of the whole human race before the law was given. Others hold that he writes figuratively of the Jewish race and this was the most common view of authors from the Reformation to modern times. Many modern writers take the view that Paul is writing about the unregenerate man or non-Christian. Obviously if the last view be the correct one, Paul could not include himself in the discussion.

The most acceptable view is that Paul spoke of his own personal experience as typical of all Christians. Barclay writes, "Here Paul is giving us his own spiritual autobiography and laying bare his heart and soul." Bruce agrees with T. W. Manson who puts it succinctly, "Paul's autobiography is the biography of Everyman." Admittedly there are problems for those who hold this view. For example, in the light of the "slave-mart analogy" of Chapter Six with which Paul teaches that Christians have changed from the master of sin to the master of righteousness, how could he as a Christian say, I am "sold under sin" (v. 14). My answer to the seeming dilemma is that one must understand this troublesome phrase, "sold under sin" in a relative and not an absolute sense. Paul uses other phrases that must be interpreted in a relative framework. An example would be Paul's strong desire to "know" Christ (Philippians 3:10). When those words were written, Paul had been preaching the Gospel for two and one-half decades. He had labored for Christ over vast territories, from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Romans 15:19). So when he says in prayerful tones, "that I may know him" one understands immediately that Paul speaks in a relative, quantitative sense. It is not that the apostle wants to be introduced to Christ. He already knows him well, but he wants to know him more and more until ultimately he knows him fully. We have the reverse application of a quantitative, relative statement in 7:14 in that Paul does not mean he is continually, nor totally sold under sin, as is the non-Christian, but he does still struggle with the sin principle which raises its head and exerts its influence in Paul from time to time. The succeeding verses develop the thought of verse 14 and show clearly that this limited quantitative view of "sold under sin" is correct and applies only to a limited number of times and circumstances in Paul's life.

There are five good solid lines of argument in favor of Paul speaking biographically as well as of every other regenerate man in general.

1. It is abnormal for any writer to use pronouns in a strictly figurative sense as prolifically as they appear throughout this paragraph. The

pronoun "I" is used thirty times; the pronoun "me" may be counted twelve times; add "my" or "myself" five times and there are a total of forty-seven pronouns which point to Paul as surely as the needle of the compass points to the north.

2. Paul affirms in verse fifteen, "What I hate, that I do." How can this expression of hatred of sin be properly applied to the non-converted sinner who revels in his sin? He may be aware that what he does is not right and even admit that the judgment of God is just, and that he is worthy of death (Romans 1:32), but he still loves to sin. Hatred of sin is hardly characteristic of any other than the Christian who knows what it cost God at Calvary to conquer sin.

3. The unregenerate man does not "delight in the law of God" (v. 22). How many worldlings do you know who love God's Word, who "meditate upon it day and night" (Psalm 1:2; 119:15, 23, 24), who judge the Word of God to be "sweeter than the honeycomb" and desire it more "than gold" (Psalm 19:9, 10)?

4. At verse fourteen the verb tense changes from the past to the present and the present tense is used throughout the rest of the chapter. It would be strange, indeed, to refer, even figuratively, to people before the time of Moses and the law, or to the Jewish race during the Mosaic dispensation, with the continuous use of a verb in the present tense. Such a "present" expression does not even fit the view that Paul speaks of himself before his conversion from Judaism to Christianity.

5. The paragraph, understood very literally, makes good common sense because it reflects accurately the universal experience of man. Through the years I have asked of my students, "Is there any person in the classroom who does not occasionally do what he hates? Is there anyone present who does not yet struggle with sin and sometimes yields to temptation? To date no one has raised a hand. It is more than modesty which keeps those hands from being raised. It is reality, Paul's experience, your experience, and my experience with sin. It is the universal problem of behavior.

Barclay cites three areas in which human inadequacies are plainly evident. "Human knowledge" is not adequate to handle the sin problem. To know the right does not guarantee that one will do that which is ethical. Hamilton says, "The devil has all the knowledge the angels have, and he is wholly evil." The second inadequacy cited is "human resolution." When human will is confronted with opposition, it frequently fails. Peter is an outstanding example of one whose willpower failed his desire and intention. The third inadequacy is related to "human diagnosis." It is one thing for the doctor to diagnose an illness, but quite another thing to prescribe a successful remedy. Today most doctors can recognize cancer rather readily and even specify the particular

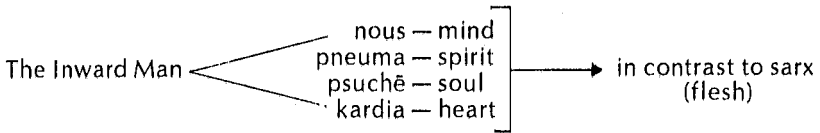
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kind of cancer with which one is afflicted. The doctor or scientist who can write a prescription for successful treatment will become a world-hero overnight. Paul knew very well what was wrong in his life, and he was wretched over it. Within him was no ability to solve the problem, nor could the solution be found among men (v. 24). Victory could only be found "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25).

There are three laws (principles or motivating forces) of which Paul speaks in verses 22-25. The first of these forces is the "law of God" as written in the Scriptures. The "law of God" is the will of God expressed. In a democracy law should be an expression of the will of the people. It has been a custom in some areas of the United States for people to say, "Here comes the law" when a policeman or patrolman approached. Obviously what is meant by that saying is, "Here comes a representative of the law" and if law were traced to its ultimate in a democracy, it would be proper upon seeing an officer of law to say, "Here comes a representative of the people" because he enforces their will. The law of God and the will of God are identical. To limit the power and force of the written Word of God is to limit and depreciate the ability of God to will, or to express His will and see that it is recorded correctly, or to enforce his will and bring into existence that which he desires. The Bible begins with the dynamic Word of God speaking the worlds into existence. The entire account of creation pivots on the phrase, "and God said." "The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." The written Word of God is potent and an undeniable force when its content is given lodging in the mind of man. It is "living" and possesses the power infused into it, by God Himself, to beget life. (See the discussion of Romans 1:16 and the statement that the Gospel is the "power of God unto salvation.")

The second motivating force introduced is "the law in my members" (v. 22) which is also called, "the law of sin" (vv. 23, 25). Inasmuch as much of the next lesson will be devoted to Paul's use of the word "flesh" suffice it to say at this point that "flesh" is used by Paul to mean that which is an operating force within the body and flesh uses the members of the body to fulfill its own designs. "The law in my members," "the law of sin," and "flesh" are all quite synonymous with Paul and all must experience an incarnation to be effective. This law, principle, or force can only function "in my members" (v. 23) or "the body" to produce its ultimate product which is death (v. 24).

The third law discussed is that of "the mind." The law of God operates in conjunction with the law of the mind. The inward man delights in the law of God (v. 22), and it is with the mind that the law of God is served (v. 25).



God addresses himself to the intellectual, spiritual, inward man. The Devil appeals to man through the flesh and uses things physical to promote his program which can be summarized in three words, deception, sin, and death.

### READER'S REVIEW:

1. What is the major question asked in Chapter Seven?
2. What is the unacceptable, but unavoidable implication which is made by suggesting that the law of God is weak or imperfect?
3. State evidence that Paul thought of the law positively rather than negatively.
4. How is sin personified by Paul?
5. List four functions of the law discussed in this section of study.
6. What is the distinction which should be made in the meaning of the word "death" between its usage here in 7:9-11 and the discussion of "death" in 5:12-14?
7. How can you harmonize the ideas that the law was given unto life and the law kills?
8. What is it that one should know about sin which would discourage him from rationalizing sin or treating it lightly?
9. What are the various views of the meaning of the personal pronoun "I" as used in verses 14-25?
10. Which of the above views you have stated do you consider to be incorrect and why?
11. The author states that there are "five good solid lines of argument in favor of Paul speaking biographically" when he uses the pronoun "I." State these arguments and indicate why you agree or disagree with them.
12. List the three areas in which Barclay states that men are inadequate when they face the sin problem.
13. Cite the three laws or forces which are operative in man and identify or define each of them.
14. What is meant by the statement that all of the laws you have just cited "must experience an incarnation to be effective"?
15. In what sense may it be said that the "law of God" and the "will of God" are synonymous?
16. List the various parts of man that are used interchangeably at times in the Bible to denote the inner man which stands in stark contrast to the sarx or fleshly man.