

## Musing #57 — Romans 7:7-20

Paul has come to the realization of the Law's purpose. The Law served as a means for God to reveal our lost and dead state apart from the power of Christ who resides within us.

**The power of sin** remains a concern for Paul (and for us). The power of sin often exploits our inherently self-centered needs and desires to lead us into sinful actions and desires.

Interestingly, in Romans Chapter 7, Paul uses the word "I" 28 times. He uses "I," "me," and "myself" 47 times in just 19 verses (RSV). This suggests that he intends to emphasize the self-will issues associated with what the Bible often refers to as the "flesh."

**Romans 7:7 It now begins to look as if sin and the Law were very much the same thing—can this be a fact? Of course it cannot. But it must in fairness be admitted that I should never have had sin brought home to me but for the Law. For example, I should never have felt guilty of the sin of coveting if I had not heard the Law saying 'You shall not covet'.**

The Law requires a holy walk, but it does not provide the necessary power to achieve it. Here lies the irony: the more a person strives to adhere to the Law, the more they transgress it, as they become increasingly reliant on themselves.

J.I. Packer in his book "Knowing God" states In Romans 7:7 Paul raised the question, "is the Law sin?" The answer he had to give was: **No, but the Law is a source of sinning for it actually foments (stirs up or provokes) what it forbids, and so stirs up the impulse to disobey that the more a man sets himself to keep the Law, the more he finds himself transgressing it.**

Consider a simple example: a sign on Highway 24, which runs near me and through Southpark, indicates a speed limit of 65 mph. Why does this mean 68 mph to me? And, frankly, to most drivers, it means 70 mph, or even 75 mph? I am not suggesting that driving 66 mph is a sin! I am merely illustrating that these man-made laws are designed to expose "guilt."

The law's consistency across generations is not its fault. However, it does proclaim guilt. Paul essentially states, "I was unaware of my numerous sinful tendencies until I realized that God's Law states, "disobedience to my Law is sin." The Law made Paul conscious of his sin through his desires and coveting, which were not entirely new to him. Nevertheless, it provided Paul with the opportunity to discern the distinction between sins and the power of sin.

**Deuteronomy 5:21 Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.**

**8 But the sin in me, finding in the commandment an opportunity to express itself, stimulated all my covetous desires. For sin, in the absence of the Law, has no**

**chance to function technically as “sin.” 9 As long, then, as I was without the Law I was, spiritually speaking, alive. But sin found a way to pervert the command into a temptation, making a piece of “forbidden fruit” out of it.**

As a member of the Sanhedrin, Paul was supposedly “above the Law in self-righteousness.” But on the road to Damascus, Christ enlightened his understanding.

**10-11 The commandment, which was meant to be a direction to life, I found was a sentence to death. The commandment gave sin an opportunity, and without my realising what was happening, I was fooled, and fell for it.**

The very Law that required his flesh to live and perform “good” for the Law now demanded that same self-centered flesh to “reckon itself dead” to his egocentric and self-absorbed “self-righteousness.” Everything he had trusted for holy living God declared to be “dead” and worthless.

Consider the irony here—Paul had come to believe that he was alive and that sin within him was dead. Only to discover that he (the old man) was dead and sin (the power of) within him was still very much alive. God desires us to cease our efforts to increase the willpower of the flesh, and learn to depend on the Holy Spirit within to power our difficult choices and decisions.

**12 But still, the Law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good. 13 But how can that be? Did the Law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes. 14 So the trouble is not with the Law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, and too easily pulled toward sin.**

Sin is the two sided coin—

- 1 - It pushes me to covet, lie, lust, feel guilty, defeated, and more.
2. It also pushes us to adhere to all the laws and rules that others require.

There are forms of legalism prevalent in many of our churches today. Many man-made demands can be used to pressure us for more giving or doing that feeds a debilitating shame and guilt, keeping many humble believers defeated and under deep feelings of unworthiness. Humility is good. Being a humble saint is where we must stand.

God certainly wants to us to know the power of sin. Only in this way can He help us to understand the power available to us through the indwelling Spirit. Paul is sharing his personal struggle. In his spirit, he is a slave to righteous living. Yet he still has tendencies to sin in his thought life and in his actions. In his spirit, he is free and wants to do good. In his soul, he finds himself wrestling with the law of sin. **I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin that is in my members.** Romans 7:23

Indeed, the power of sin is a law. It is always present and constantly working its influence. In our spirit (inner man), we desire to do good. In our soul (mind, emotions, will), something continues to rise up with its deceitful, cunning temptation, and pull.

Chuck Swindoll, referring to our self-life, wrote— **“When the weakness of the flesh succumbs to sin’s wickedness, we will inevitably lose.”**

The central question for every Christian is whether our power over the power of sin is primarily found in our will for better choices.

Paul begins to address this issue. Notably, he uses the words “I,” “me,” and “myself” more than 40 times in this section (RSV).

**15-20 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the Law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.**

He is questioning: “The fact that I condemn certain actions I perform should demonstrate my agreement with God’s Law.”

However, he also states: “I do not comprehend my own actions. Because I do not perform what I desire to do, and I do the very things I abhor. I often find that I possess the will to do good, but lack the power.

Similar to Paul, the power of sin is ever-present and has an after-effect—a carry-over influence on my mind, emotions, memory, choices, needs, etc. This effectively illustrates the ongoing struggle that occurs in the lives of all believers—the battle between our own “soul” and “God’s Spirit.”

We desire to do what is right (in our spirit/Spirit), yet we continue to covet, lust, distort the truth, and more. We have been conditioned by the world and the flesh to pursue self-satisfaction.

The Law was never given with the expectation that we could adhere to it. It was given in the full awareness that we would transgress it. We are left with only one answer facing this dilemma. Paul was unable to accomplish his goals, and neither can we—“to will is present with me; but how to get it done is not happening.”

Paul expressed his frustration, echoing the sentiments of many Christians, stating that we are weary of succumbing to the same temptations. Notably, Paul has identified the root cause of this issue: **“the power of sin that indwells me—is always present!”**

The problem extends beyond our individual struggles; we possess a spiritual completeness, characterized by holiness and righteousness. However, the persistent influence of sin on our desires and impulses remains a challenge. It is crucial to recognize that this influence is **an inherent law.**

The solution lies in the recognition that only a higher law can overcome a lower one. In our next session, we will delve into the source of Paul’s solution to this common predicament.