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Romans

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.
Romans 7:11

This is a similar sentiment to what was stated in 7:8. What Paul is doing is showing how sin takes root in us. Even though it is derived from something good, such as the law, things get cunningly turned around through deception.

The Greek word for "deceived" is *exēpatēsen*. It indicates being thoroughly deceived or "hoodwinked." A form of this same word was used to translate Eve's words in the Greek copy of the Old Testament in Genesis 3:13 - "The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'" This shows that Paul is probably referring to Genesis and is thus using the personal pronouns "I" and "me" in this chapter to refer to his humanity and is thus applying the principle to all people.

Sin is being personified to show us how the devil worked in the Garden of Eden and how he continues to work through various things and people. The deception he is speaking of, which takes occasion through the commandment, ends in death. Solomon shows us how this works when describing the flattering words of an adulterous woman -

With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,
With her flattering lips she seduced him.

Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,

Till an arrow struck his liver.

As a bird hastens to the snare,

He did not know it would cost his life. Proverbs 7:21-23

Sin's deception is so powerful that we simply follow its lead like dumb animals to the slaughter. This is exactly how it works in us time and time again. In the coming verses, Paul will show us how the conflict rages and the confusion which results. But he will also show us the remedy for it. There is victory over the power of sin and it is to be found in Jesus.

Life application: Sometimes something seems so right and yet it is deadly to our soul. We need to be on constant guard against the deceitfulness of sin, but the only way to do so is to know what in fact is sinful. Reading and meditating on God's word is the surest way to be grounded in our faith. Be like the psalmist of old and "meditate day and night" on the precepts found in the Bible.

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Romans 7:12

Five verses ago, the question was asked, "Is the law sin?" The answer was, "Certainly not!" Since that question and response, a defense of the law and an exposure of our troubled nature has been given. The result of these comments is our "therefore" in this verse.

The law is holy. If the law came from God, then it must be holy because He is holy. "The commandment" is speaking of whatever part of the law is being referred to. In this case, "You shall not covet." The commandment, which is a portion of the law, is holy. In other words, if the law is holy, then all of the law is holy. This is why James could say in his epistle that whoever keeps the whole law, and yet

stumbles in one aspect of it, he is guilty of all. If a holy precept found in the law is violated, the entire law is broken.

And not only is the commandment holy, but it is also "just." What God determines is just because it stems from His righteous nature. Therefore, the penalty which comes from violating the standard is holy and just.

And equally true is that the law is "good." What it expects is good, and when it is adhered to then good will result. There is no failing in the law. All that it entails is right, but when we don't obey what has been given, then fault results. The goodness and beauty of God's law is described in detail by David in the 19th Psalm -

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward." Psalm 19:8-11

Life application: Like Psalm 19, the 119th Psalm gives a beautiful and lengthy discourse on the nature of God's law. It is 176 verses which are subdivided into 22 octaves. Take time each day before your Bible reading to read one octave of this Psalm. By doing so, you will set a proper tone for the rest of your Bible reading. Make this be your daily habit for all the days of your life.

Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. Romans 7:13

In response to the previous verses, particularly the logic which follows from 8-12, another rhetorical question is now proposed. If the law is good and yet death came about through the introduction of the law, then has "what is good become death to me?" Again, he is proposing a question which seems obvious on the surface and yet which is based on a misunderstanding of what has occurred. Thus the answer is, "Certainly not!"

Instead, sin (the thing which brings about death, not the law itself) "that it might appear sin" is what produced the death "through what is good." The fault isn't in the law, which is good. The fault is in the person's disobedient will.

In order to completely understand this, we can look to what Thomas Aquinas wrote in the 13th century. He said, "...evil never follows in the effect, unless some other evil pre-exists in the agent or in the matter... But in voluntary things the defect of the action comes from the will actually deficient, inasmuch as it does not actually subject itself to its proper rule. This defect, however, is not a fault, but fault follows upon it from the fact that the will acts with this defect."

The astonishingly profound thought of Aquinas is merely an explanation of Paul's thoughts here in Romans. "The defect of the action" – in this case disobeying the command, "comes from will actually deficient." In the case of Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden, this was a result of the lack of the knowledge of good an evil; they were in a state of innocence - this is their deficiency.

But was this God's fault? No! Aquinas says it is "deficient, inasmuch as it does not actually subject itself to its proper rule." What was the proper rule concerning their state of innocence? It was to obey their Creator and not eat the fruit; the good commandment which they were given.

When they disobeyed by using free will, was it because of a fault in them as created by God? Again - No! It "is not a fault, but fault follows upon it from the fact that the will, (meaning their free will) acts with this defect." The blame is placed squarely and solely on man.

And nothing has changed since then. When we act with our free will in a manner contrary to whatever good law is given, it produces "fault" or "sin." And the sin produces death. It is not the law, but the exercising of our free will which brings this about.

Did God know that this would be the case? Of course He did, but He also knew that free will in man was a necessity for an honest, reciprocal relationship of love. In the end, free-will, despite all of the evil which has come from it, is still the better option for man. Because with the fall comes the hope of restoration through Christ. And with the introduction of the law comes the final point of this verse. The commandment was given "so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful."

In other words, by giving a commandment, sin is known to be sin. By giving the Law of Moses which included many commandments, sin "might become exceedingly sinful." The law shows us our desperately fallen state and thus our desperate need for Christ. Through Him, we receive imputed righteousness and through Him we aren't just saved from this body of death, we are eternally saved from it. Through sin we see our unrighteousness. Through much sin, we see it all the more. And the more we see it, the more glorious appears the grace of God through Jesus!

Life application: Your life is one marked with failure and sin, but through Christ what was so desperately fouled up can be purified, made spotless, and restored completely. Through Christ, the past is gone and a new path is found. We can now exercise our free will to the glory of God and not for a life of sin.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:14

There are many viewpoints as to who Paul is speaking about in this verse when he says "I." As we've seen, he used the term previously, not specifically speaking of himself, but as a way of showing the struggle which exists in all people.

Some scholars look at what he is saying in this verse as any individual's struggle against sin under their own power - be it Jew under the law or gentile who simply understands man's depravity and his wars with the unwritten code. Others see it as the difficult struggle of those who have called on Jesus and yet continue to struggle with sin in their lives. This would be those ranging from "carnal" Christians - meaning those who are saved and yet are immature in their faith and practice, all the way to those who are fully mature but not yet completely sanctified; they still struggle with the "old Adam" in their life.

The debate about who Paul is referring to is actually unnecessary. It was demonstrated in verse 9 that Paul was using the term "I" in regards to his humanity. He used "coveting" as a means of demonstrating the conflict which arises, but coveting doesn't cover the entire law; it was used to represent any commandment in the law and thus any law.

He hasn't changed tracks in his thoughts and the "I" in this verse follows along the same line. The law God gave to Adam and Eve was spiritual, but they were in innocence. When they ate of the fruit, they attained the knowledge of good and evil, sin revived in them, and they died. Since that time, the knowledge has caused a war in the members of humanity. When a good law is given - be it conscience or be it the Law of Moses - the war rages.

All that God has done is good and the "law is spiritual." However, we as humans are "carnal, sold under sin." This is an inherited state. We aren't born to fall; we are born fallen. When we see a good law, our carnal selves war with it because of our sin nature.

Life application: As you progress in your Christian life, maturing from infancy to maturity, you will continue to struggle with sin. Although it's natural, it is also something you can overcome, but not in yourself. The struggle we're told about is a struggle between our earthly selves and that which is spiritual. By being filled with the Spirit, we allow the spiritual side to reign. We will continue to learn and develop this in the chapters ahead.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. Romans 7:15

There is a war in our lives which rages on, regardless of whether we are saved believers in Christ or not. We are earthly beings, bound to our fallen bodies. Having been saved by Christ allows us to see our fallen state for what it is and it causes this battle to rage all the more sometimes. Despite this, Paul has been talking about the state of one under the law. He's on the same path here, but is using this state to show us how the law highlights our sin nature.

In verse 13, we saw that sin, so that it might appear sin, was producing death in us through the law. This was so that "through the commandment" sin "might become exceedingly sinful." To see this as the Bible demonstrates, we can go to the account in Exodus where God gave the law to the people. In Exodus 24:7 we read these words - "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient.'"

The very thing they willed to do though is the thing they didn't practice. In short order, they had fallen into disobedience of the very law that they proclaimed they would obey. They went out and corrupted themselves, not fully understanding the nature of their actions. When they made a golden calf, they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4)

In their confusion of who God is, they violated the very covenant that they had sworn to. The thing they willed to do, which was to worship God, they actually did

not practice. And the thing they hated, which was to bring reproach on the God they desired to honor, this is the thing they did. This is the nature of sin and the death which is produced by the law. When a law is given, it naturally leads to this state.

As noted, this doesn't automatically change when one calls on Christ. If it did, Paul could not have elsewhere said in Ephesians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" He isn't hinting that we could lose our salvation by saying this, but that we will continue to have this struggle. Coming up in the verses ahead, Paul will show us the remedy for our situation, but the following verse in Ephesians 2:13, hints at it. "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

Life application: Since you called on Jesus, have you struggled in your inward man? Have you done those things you wish you hadn't done? And the things you wish to do, are they seemingly out of your grasp? If you have this conflict, understand that it is normal but that it can be defeated. Allowing yourself to be "filled with the Spirit" will set you on the right path. But one must understand how that happens. Being filled with the Spirit is a passive, not an active, occurrence. We have all of the Spirit we will ever receive the moment we are saved. But the Spirit can get more of us. We must yield to Him through prayer, study of the word, fellowshiping with other believers in worship of the Lord, etc. Make a concerted effort to do these things and the war in you will diminish until it is gone.