

ROMANS Part 58

Chapter 7:5-14



Law Causes Offenses to Increase

by
Martin Zender

For, when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which were through the law, operated in our members to be bearing fruit to Death. 6 Yet now we were exempted from the law, dying in that in which we were retained, so that it is for us to be slaving in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter. 7 What, then, shall we declare? That the law is sin? May it not be coming to that! But sin I knew not except through law. For besides, I had not been aware of coveting except the law said, "You shall not be coveting." 8 Now Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, produces in me all manner of coveting. For apart from law Sin is dead. 9 Now I lived, apart from law, once, yet at the coming of the precept Sin revives. Yet I died, 10 and it was found that, to me, the precept for life, this is for death. 11 For Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, deludes me, and through it, kills me. 12 So that the law, indeed, is holy, and the precept holy and just and good. 13 Became good, then, death to me? May it not be coming to that! But Sin, that it may be appearing Sin, is producing death to me through good, that Sin may become an inordinate sinner through the precept. 14 For we are aware that the law is spiritual, yet I am fleshly, having been disposed of under Sin.

When we were in the flesh." What a statement of faith because obviously the Romans were still wearing skin. I think modern Romans still wear it, even the whole of Italy. We ourselves still inhabit these irritating birthday suits. This statement, therefore, does not concern the literal occupying of flesh, but rather the human tendency to live *for* the flesh, be disposed *to* the flesh, to think in accord with what we see in the mirror and, worse, letting our bodies and desires define who we are. In spite of our bodies, desires, and the treachery of reflective surfaces, we are members of Christ's body. Thus, we are to walk

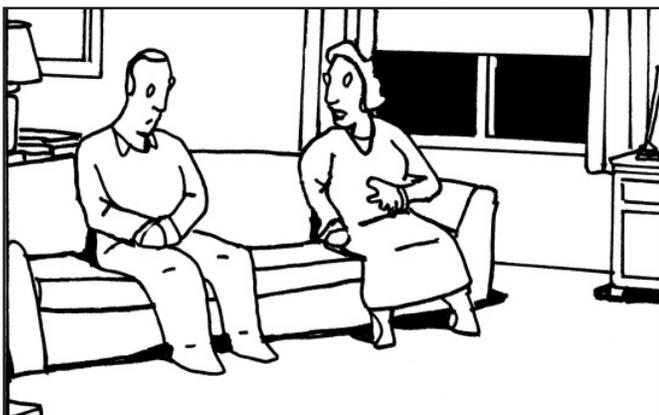
now by faith, not perception (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Paul must be speaking specifically to the few Jews in his audience when he says, “the passions of sins which were through law.” Only the Jews in his audience were under law. Isn’t it an odd statement, though? Who would expect to see the phrase “passions of sins” occupying the same context—sharing the same sentence, even—as the phrase “which were through law.” This shocking statement introduces Paul’s next point which, although it is not called a secret, I believe was never disclosed by any Bible writer as it is here. This is an elaboration of Paul’s pioneering statement in Romans 5:20 that, “The law came so that the offense would be increasing.”

SECRET PASSIONS

The law came so that the offense would be *increasing*? No one knew that before Paul. I think that every Israelite knew it by experience, but no one ever dared utter the thing in polite company. Certainly many an Israelite over the many centuries must have confided to a companion at the adjacent bar stool, “You know, Steve, this is a weird thing but—just between you and me—every time I get this righteous and holy desire to do the law, I feel another—well—I just ... I feel this other ... *thing* rising up inside of me that wants to do the *opposite* of the law. It happens every damn time. I’m starting to think I’m nuts.”

Of course Steve would say, “*That’s* really weird, Jim. Have you asked your doctor about it?” Then Steve would go home to his wife and say, “Beth, you’re not going to believe what Jim just told me down at Sarno’s. You know that weird thing we’ve been talking about, how the commands of the law actually make us want to do the opposite thing? Well, guess what? Jim said it happens to him, too!”



“Did Jim actually say which commandment he flouts?”

It happened to all of them. Only the brave ones had nerve enough to discuss it, and only then in the privacy of their homes or in the shadows of drinking establishments after one or two adult beverages. No one had the guts to put it down on paper, let alone attempt an explanation of why it happened, let alone associate it with God, let alone teach that such a phenomenon was God’s ultimate intention—

Until Paul. And all without beer!



EXEMPTION AND REDEMPTION

“Yet now we were exempted from the law, dying in that in which we were retained, so that it is for us to be slaving in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter” (Romans 7:6).

Paul sneaks up on his radical revelation by telling his few Israelite readers (his audience was a mixed bag of Jews and Greeks, but mostly Greeks), that they are exempted from law. To help explain this shocking announcement, he draws upon the well-known example of a widow’s exemption from all connection to a dead husband. In Paul’s inspired analogy, the Jewish believers are the husband who dies. The wife is the law, and “she” continues living. Nothing is wrong with the wife; nothing is wrong with the law. The law continues to live because it’s healthy; it is righteous and good. It’s the husband who dies.

Everyone to whom Paul wrote are said (in chapter 6) to have died with Christ. Died to what? To the Jewish believers, this meant dying to the law. It meant that they were no longer to be burdened by the law’s impossible dictates. The law had retained them at one time, but that time had passed. There had been a “death in the family,” a metaphoric death with Christ that freed them from law’s hold. They needed the reassurance from Paul that they would not be considered adulterers if they now ignored the law and clung instead to a “new lover,” namely the glorified Christ. This glorified Christ, Paul assured them, would put His spirit of love in their hearts. As with the nations, this would accomplish the just requirements of the law, though apart from the agency of the law. After all, if you love someone you will not murder them, covet their stuff, or steal from them. Imagine how difficult it would have been for an Israelite, steeped in law, to even consider

forsaking it. One of the first thoughts of an Israelite entertaining Paul to this point would have been, “The law must be bad then. It must be sin, which is why we’re being asked to walk away from it.” Paul anticipates this, writing in verse 7—

“What, then, shall we declare? That the law is sin? May it not be coming to that! But sin I knew not except through law. For besides, I had not been aware of coveting except the law said, “You shall not be coveting” (Romans 7:7).

Paul will soon say, in verse 12, “So that the law, indeed, is holy, and the precept holy and just and good.” But for now he will explain to everyone, but especially to Israelites, that the secret purpose of the law was to decimate self-confidence and drive people to Christ. Paul jumps on the objection that the law *could* be sin, saying in effect, “Ah! You want to talk sin? Okay, then. I didn’t even know about sin except through law.” This is a killer saying un-uttered by either the prophets or the Earth-bound Jesus. God always presented the law to Israel as, “Do this, or else.” That Israel failed was not a matter of the failure of law, but of the failure of Israel. That God ultimately and secretly *wanted* Israel to fail, setting all the “traps” so that she *would* fail, is the “big bang” revelation. More on this later.

As soon as Paul said, “Sin I knew not except through law,” the Jews in his audience would have—to a man—felt the jolt and then the long sigh of recognition and relief: *Yes. Wow. We know what you mean.* Paul could then have asked for a show of hands: “How many have felt this way?” No one would have wanted to publicly admit their inner conflict, so Paul spares them the embarrassment by recounting his own experience. Some commentators insist that this is Paul being theoretical. They think that Paul is merely putting himself in the place of a person having this reaction to law, as though the almighty, religious, super-human Paul—a man who would have cathedrals named after him—would never have succumbed to so human a reaction in the face of divine prohibition. Oh, no? Paul was as human as everyone else, perhaps even more so. We will even find that, by the end of this chapter, Paul still sins. Horror! The law remains perfect, while Paul—along with the rest of us—remained

a perfect sinner.

Law must be left alone, then. It must not be prodded and poked. Put it in a museum behind glass and simply admire it, then walk away slowly as though you were escaping a sleeping tiger. Even better if you die because God would never expect a dead person to stop coveting or defiling the Sabbath.

“THAT GUY AIN’T WEARING NOTHING!”

The apostle Paul becomes the child in the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” In that fable, an emperor is tricked into paying an exorbitant sum for clothes purported to be so superior and fine that only the wisest of humans can see them. The tailors/con-artists of these magic clothes “dress” the emperor in them, acting out the pantomime as though they themselves can see the rare garments. The emperor is alarmed because he can’t see the clothes; sure as he is born, he is standing naked before the mirror. Oh, no! It means that he is not wise, not even as wise as these common tailors. This must not



be. Rather than risk exposing his ignorance to these supposedly wise clothiers, the emperor pretends to see his new duds. He extols them with many and varied adjectives. He decides to parade himself in his new array. The people are told in advance that only the wise can see the emperor’s new clothes. No one wants to be thought of as unwise, so the population lauds and applauds the “dress” of the emperor, employing adjectives that not even he had thought of. What a bunch of fakers. What a mangled mob of dissembling, dizzy-eyed drones. The emperor is obviously buck-assed undecorated, but no one wants to say it because no one wants to be thought of as

stupid. Only one person on that parade route eschewed the folly and spoke truth; one beautiful little kid. It required the honesty of a child to expose the ruse and awaken the populace to the mass hypocrisy. In the story, an innocent child on the parade route says loudly, “The Emperor has no clothes!” Only then are the pretenses of the citizenry exposed and everyone is compelled to face facts now, including the shame-faced emperor.

In my analogy of this analogy, Paul is the child who finally says it: “The law makes me sin more.” Once someone has uttered these words in such a public forum, then everyone can come out of the woodwork and admit to the facts. Paul says, “I had not been aware of coveting except the law said, ‘You shall not be coveting.’” What happened next?

“Now Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, produces in me all manner of coveting. For apart from law Sin is dead” (Romans 7:8).

And all the congregation saith: “Amen!”

The question may now be asked how Paul could have said in Philippians 3:6 that, “in relation to the righteousness which is in law, [I became] blameless.” If no one can properly do law, how could Saul the Pharisee have done it? I believe that, like every other Israelite, Paul struggled mightily against the Mosaic decrees. His successes were obviously not of the heart, but of the letter. Paul’s coveting never showed on the surface. He kept the outside of his cup as clean as the other Pharisees so that the casual observer might have said, “Oh, yeah, *that* guy’s blameless.” No one could pin anything on the Pharisee of Phari-



sees. Yet this same whiz kid admits here in Romans that the law that said, “Thou shall not covet,” not only made him covet, but “[produced] in me all manner of coveting.” The Pharisee Saul coveted for a living—in his heart. Since there were no X-Ray-like “covet detectors” in Israel, Paul “got away with it.” But did he really? Of course not. No one does. The reality of one’s true condition surfaces eventually. Something’s got to give. As George Bernard Shaw said concerning the pretense of being good all the time: “Virtue is insufficient temptation.”

The difference between Saul and his contemporaries was his great powers of self-control. Saul fought the standard Israelite inner demons better than anyone. Did this make him happy? I don’t know; ask the people he killed. “Doing everything right” turned Saul into a murderer. This is what the law that said “thou shalt not commit murder” does to a person who takes it so dead seriously.

PRETTY PORCELAIN

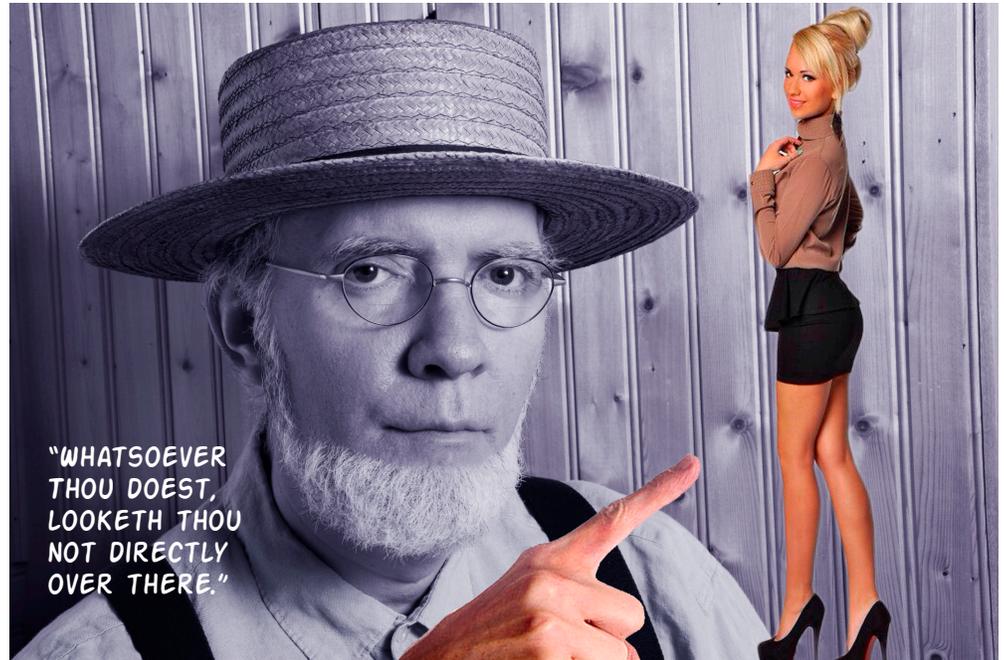
The one thing that all religious people have in common is that they strain to clean the outside of their cup while within they are all filled with greed and wickedness. This was Paul’s condition to a T. Maybe he knew this, deep down, but managed to fool himself for years. Rather than help his condition, the law worsened it. Such is Paul’s testimony in Romans chapter seven. Clearly Paul needed another answer. He did not find that other answer until Jesus Christ called him on the Damascus road. When Paul finally realized that deliverance from Sin comes not through victory over it but death to it, he wished this marvelous revelation upon everyone. He could never stop babbling about it after that.

Paul’s pet nation became the “test case” for law, the proof that flesh and blood cannot accomplish the righteous dictates of God (Romans 8:7). They never got the lesson, themselves. Even to this day, Israel keeps trying to perform. Saul, after his conversion, became the only honest Jew to finally admit to and officially unveil the secret purpose of law.

Before the arrival of law, “Sin was dead.” Sin takes up permanent residence in the hearts of mortals but lays dormant until an outward force excites it. Let’s return to the sleeping tiger in a tree analogy, for this is Sin lurking in our hearts. You may be born with a desire to covet, but this desire lays dormant until an agitator pokes it with a stick. You see a television commercial that says, “Do you have the latest television technology? If not, why not?” and suddenly, you want it. My favorite definition of advertising

comes from Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock, who said, “Advertising is the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it.” Advertising employs the power of suggestion to sickly summits of success.

Law has the same effect, though in the opposite direction. Instead of telling you, “You can’t live without this,” law says, “Whatever you do, don’t *do* this.” The result is the same. To hibernating Sin, the command to control it has the same effect as the command to do it. For Sin, there is no such thing as bad publicity.



STEALTH AMISH LUST (SAL)

I have spoken before about the Amish tract I once read on the topic of sin. I’m not sure I’ve ever written about it, but if I have it’s a fun topic to revisit. I’m not sure how that tract fell into my hands; I’m just lucky, I guess. I am supposing that the author’s last name had to have been Yoder; I can’t remember, but it’s a good enough guess. The title of the tract was, “How to be Holy,” or “Foolproof Methods of Resisting Sin,” or “The Key to Resisting Tight Leather Miniskirts”—something along this harrowing line. Mr. Yoder hated sins of every flavor, but the most irritating to him were what he termed “sexual sins.” The poor Amish are so infatuated with sexual sins that all they ever think about is sex. Mr. Yoder was especially vexed about the lust of the eyes. Thus, he just absolutely hated the way modern women dressed. He felt that the clothing of modern women was so loathsome and reprobate that he couldn’t help but describe it in living color to the best of his testicular ability. I am paraphrasing the poor man now, but the following was the gist of his premier paragraph:

It is shameful the way women dress nowadays, in their short skirts and their long, tanned legs, with their blouses halfway unbuttoned, strutting and swaying their hips in their high-heeled shoes, letting down their long hair so that it will waft seductively in the wind as they purse their pouty, candy-red lips.

Thanks, Mr. Amishman! I had been calmly minding my own business that afternoon, enjoying some rare, blissful moments of sex-free musing when this paragraph incited a fire within me that set off a nearby smoke detector. All I could think about for the rest of the afternoon were these evil, strutting women in all their damnable, unbuttoned, candy-red malevolence. I am looking forward to telling Mr. Yoder when I next see him what I did to cure myself of the “problem” he created for me that afternoon. As he will be standing at the Great White Throne at the time of this disclosure, the bearded man without a mustache will shrug and say, “Zender. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it, my lad.” With an air of grace befitting the mind of Christ, I will respond, “Never mind, old boy. You spiced up a dull evening.”

Well-meaning people today remain ignorant of this purpose of law, still imagining prohibition and outrage to be primary weapons against flesh. It is no secret that these things don’t work. I take it back. It is still a secret to most of the world, especially the religious world. Prohibition and outrage against flesh serve only to inflame the flesh. These things serve chiefly to tick Sin off, making it more volatile than before.

The first answer to flesh is to leave it alone. Let it lay dormant. Stop exciting it with laws. Stop poking the tiger. This will at least keep things at an even keel, idling along in neutral. Do you want to actually curb the flesh? Well then, try something Scriptural that actually works: exercise grace. That’s right. What I wanted Mr. Yoder

to do in his tract was to shut up. He would have been better off with ten blank pages; now *that* would have engrossed me. Ten blank pages would have improved my opinion of the Amish. What I really wish he'd have done was tell me, with joy in his heart, that I am free to admire whatever beauty in the world God offers. Speak a word of freedom, Mr. Yoder! But no. The dully-clad, dimly-souled Yoder couldn't do it, and neither can many others. These sorts don't trust grace. They don't trust freedom. They trust only outrage. They must "tsk-tsk" the opposition; shame it into submission. They need their dirty little fingers deep into "the problem," so they wrap these digits around a stick and poke, poke, poke the sleeping tiger. The beast attacks, and they're mystified. *Why did the tiger do that? What a mean tiger!* For such tiger-poking souls, I recommend a reading of Romans 7. My suggested cure is rarely, if ever, tried. It is too counter-intuitive, I guess. It seems much too sensible to curse, threaten, poke.

Well then, prepare to be eaten.

STUPID CHURCH SIGN

Sorry for the redundancy of the above sub-heading, but I once saw a church sign at the United Methodist Church in Greenwich, Ohio back in the late '80s that said, "Obey the fourth commandment!" The fourth commandment, of course, gently reminds us, under penalty of death, to "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." The idea behind the church sign was to guilt people into attending that particular cult. Christians never have learned the lesson of law as they forever resort to thinly veiled threats and outrage—while fondling small rocks. I remember telling friends at the time, "I expect attendance to fall away at this church, as a direct result of the sign. Look for a mass exodus." Sure enough, it happened. My friends thought I was a genius. Not really. I simply trusted human nature, which never changes. I trusted Romans 7, which also never changes. I trusted law, which hasn't lost a jot or tittle in thousands of years. I have been told by supposedly mature believers: "Stop using Romans 7 as an excuse for the flesh!" I respond, "Yes, fine. I will do that as soon as you stop using gravity as an excuse for falling down."

I told my friends back then that if I ever had a church sign in front of my church, the sign would say, "You are under no obligation whatsoever to set foot in this building. Have a nice day!" My friends immediately saw the

appeal of it. "My God," they said, "you'd be the pied piper of converted souls, the maharishi of modern church growth." Indeed. It's reverse psychology, isn't it? Not at all. It's straight-ahead psychology. It's only reverse if you've bought into the lie that law works and grace fails.



NATURE AND CONSCIENCE

"Now I lived, apart from law, once, yet at the coming of the precept Sin revives. Yet I died, and it was found that, to me, the precept for life, this is for death. For Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, deludes me, and through it, kills me" (Romans 7:9-11).

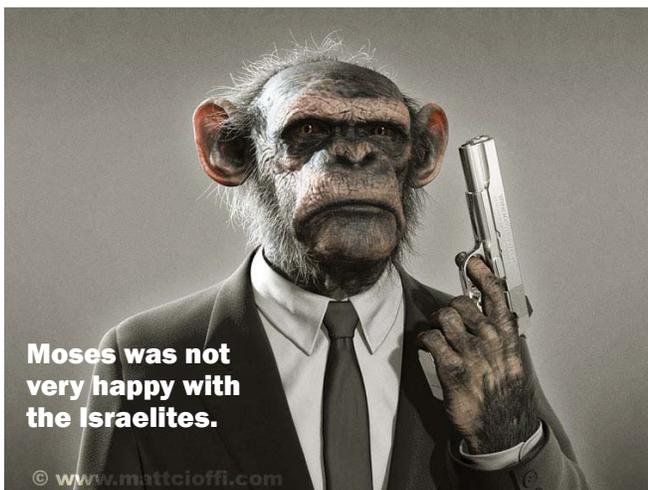
Here I think Paul imagines a time when he was not under law. This is the only way I can explain it. As a Jew, he was born into law, but he's probably putting himself in the place of someone who never knew it. God bless such people. Apart from law, we all live. If nothing is prohibited, then nothing is sin. We may all still have Sin within us, but Sin is dead apart from law. That's what Paul just said, so let's believe him. Without law, people act in accord with nature and conscience. Nature and conscience are much better guides than law, for nature and conscience—apart from death and Sin—work in accord with God. Paul says the following in Romans 2:14-16—

For whenever they of the nations that have no law, by nature may be doing that which the law demands, these, having no law, are a law to themselves, who are displaying the action of the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying together and their reckonings between one another, accusing or defending them, in

the day when God will be judging the hidden things of humanity, according to my evangel, through Jesus Christ.

The human conscience, left alone, operates in accord with Paul's evangel of grace. Even before Paul's gospel was announced, a perceived grace of God existed within people. This is me talking; I am merely surmising this. Pre-law or no-law people saw in the sun and in the moon and in the sea and in the green grasses of meadows the ever-present grace of God. Everything God made was good. Human nature—apart from mortality—operates similarly. Life is simple this way. Something within tells us not to kill another person, not to take his or her stuff, and not to lie about other people. Mortality screws this up, but vestiges of conscience remain so that most people have an “inner voice” (my phrase for “conscience”) telling them the difference between right and wrong.

What screws this up? Law. It is almost as though God got tired of waiting for the worst of Sin to flourish, so He brought in the Ten Commandments as a catalyst to cause offenses to increase in the hurry God needed to finally produce His Son. Don't shoot the messenger—not unless you plan to shoot Paul in Romans 5:20, “The law came that the offenses should be increasing.” This purpose of law was hidden until Paul. Law not only poked the tiger in the tree—that is, incited Sin—but turned mere sin into an offense against God. Not only were people now rebelling against their consciences—as in the days before the Flood—but they butted up against a decree of the Deity. This made sin even worse, by design. The design was to increase helplessness against so staunch an enemy as Sin and create dire need for deliverance.



Paul was doing just fine apart from law, living in accord with human nature and conscience as best he could. Coveting was the farthest thing from his mind. At the coming of the precept, however, the Sin sleeping inside him awoke. Paul was now no longer alive, but dead. He had come up against an impossibility and began coveting like a lunatic. This couldn't have happened apart from law. But here it came in implacable stone. Not *just* law, but impossible law—impossible because of the nature of prohibition and its effect upon the nature of humanity. Paul could pretend to do law; he could fancy-up the cup and impress people, but deep down he knew his own heart. His aorta and ventricles waxed worse and worse until the very thing that the law told him not to do (Commandment #6) he did: murder. The surprising result: “It was found that, to me, the precept for life, this is for death.”

In this case, Paul meant that literally.

INSTINCTIVE REBELLION

Why did the divine precept do this to Paul? “Blame” it on human nature. I put “blame” in quotation marks because human nature does what God made it to do. Without more and more Sin and offense, no one needs a Savior. This same human nature that knows right from wrong instinctively rebels against prohibition, especially the divine variety. God imparted to us this nature and a man is stupid and deceived to think either that he is immune to it or can successfully fight it. It is one thing to tell another human being, “I wouldn't do that,” but quite another thing to say, “God will despise you if you commit this crime.” Humans hate laws of any kind, but they are more inclined to obey human-breathed prohibitions (“Speed limit 45”) than those emanating from an invisible Deity; *Who is this invisible God to tell me what to do?* As Paul testifies in Romans 8:7—

For the disposition of the flesh is enmity to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither is it able.

Paul can't put it much plainer when he says that Sin “[gets] an incentive through the precept.” This is the second time in this passage he has used this exact phrase (verses 8, 11). Sin loves law. Get it? Law incites Sin. Get it? Sin sits quietly in a corner until a law walks up, pokes it in the ribs, and dares it to behave itself, at which time Sin goes apeshit. Get it? The result is always the same: “Sin, getting an incentive through the precept, deludes me, and through it, kills me.”

THE DELUSION OF SIN

How did Sin delude Paul? How does it delude us? I think that Sin pretends that it can do law. Sin says, "Hey, really, there's no risk in this. Bring in the law. I know I can manage it. Prohibitions are no problem. My human nature is different than everyone else's. I've got lots of willpower, you know." It's like an alcoholic who, knowing Paul and the devious power of prohibition, nevertheless tells his wife, "No, really, I'm happy to go to church with you. I know they condemn alcoholics and rail against all kinds of sin there, but I can handle it. I'm strong. My human nature is different." I warn people all the time to stay out of church. People think church is neutral. It isn't. It's humming with the demons of human philosophy. Church turns normal people into stealth sinners. No one believe this can happen to them. At the same time, it happens every day to millions of people. How can the danger not be detected in a place nailing the Ten Commandments to the wall right beside the nailed Jesus? And so the blind lead the blind.

Sin deludes people into thinking that prohibitions help rather than hurt. Sin will bombastically say, "Send me into the very den of 'thou shalt not.' I'll be fine." How does it work out? Ask everyone at the 12-step programs how it works out. It's simple to know why. Well, maybe not, because Paul repeats it twice in one passage: "Sin gets an incentive through the precept." It's simple, just unknown. Want to raise sinners and breed criminals? Then take your kids to church. Make your kids memorize the Ten Commandments. Send them to Summer Bible Camp or Vacation Bible School. I am free of their blood, and so is Paul. We tried to tell you. Sin has deluded you into thinking that both you and your children can handle the precept.

THE LAW IS GOOD

"So that the law, indeed, is holy, and the precept holy and just and good. Became good, then, death to me? May it not be coming to that! But Sin, that it may be appearing Sin, is producing death to me through good, that Sin may become an inordinate sinner through the precept. For we are aware that the law is spiritual, yet I am fleshly, having been disposed of under Sin" (Romans 7:12-14).

A.E. Knoch writes in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*:

The mistaken deduction from the foregoing (Romans 7:5-11) is that the law itself is sin. Else why cease to serve its letter? Or else how does it make sin more sinful and transform it into an offense? Sin is not known in its true character except through law. Instead of sin being ignorant inability, it becomes the opposite. It is active hostility. The law which seemed to be given to regulate, only roused it. Sin is dormant or dead until law comes and gives it life. The law which should have given the sinner life, gave life to sin. It should have been the death blow of sin, but it became the death of the sinner. All this shows how futile it is to try to reform or regulate or conquer sin. It not only acts in darkness and ignorance but transforms the very light into an agent of death. The law offered life to those under it, on terms which, apart from sin, were all that could be desired. But sin not only disabled them so that they could not take advantage of its provisions, but involved them in its condemnation by stirring their passions against its just decrees.



Paul is careful to insist upon the flawless and righteousness of law. The law is holy, just, good. Did this good then become death to Paul? The question may be posed: *Was it law that killed Paul?* Paul's answer is an emphatic, "May it not be coming to that!" It wasn't law that killed him, but rather indwelling Sin reacting *to* law. Sin had to show the whole of its ugly face and law provided it ample opportunity. Sin produces death, which in turn produces a desperate need for resurrection life. But why does Sin act this way? Ironically, it is because of the goodness of the precept, thus, paraphrased, "Sin is producing death to me through that good." It is by this means that Sin becomes an inordinate sinner, that is, it not only increases but now becomes an offense, a spitting in the face of the Law-Giver. "The law is spiritual," Paul says, and that's true. The problem, Paul continues, is that "I am fleshly, having been disposed of under Sin." Who put Paul there? God did, through Adam. Yet Jesus Christ is greater than Adam. Who would know that, though, apart from Adam?

Again, A.E. Knoch—

From the supposition that the law being holy and just and good, involved him in death, it seems that

what is good may become the cause of death. But such is not the case. It was not the law which produced death, but sin, misusing law. The real law and apparent functions of the law are very different. And, in order to effect its real object, it was necessary that it should not appear on the surface. The apparent object of the law was to give life to all who consistently and constantly kept it. As it never gave life to anyone, for no one was able to fulfill its demands, it appears as if the law has failed of its primary object. And, further, as it revived the passions of sin which were dormant, it seems to have defeated its own aim. But the real object of the law was to reveal the inordinate sinfulness of sin, and in this it was most successful.

It is so difficult for people to wrap their heads around the difference between the intended effect of law and the proposed effect voiced by God at Sinai. God outwardly proposed the law to make Israel righteous. It would have done just that, had Israel been able to fulfill it. Yet God made Israel so that she could not fulfill it. He kept this secret from her. In order for the law to carry out its hidden design—that is, to cause people to fail even worse than they would without it—it was necessary to temporarily but for a long time hide the design from those given the law, namely Israel. This may at first seem like a cruel trick. Were it the ploy of a man rather an exercise of divine wisdom, it would be. Israel had to learn by experience rather than theory that flesh and blood cannot at any time subject itself to divine precepts. Merely *tell* this to Israel, and she would not believe it. Such was and is the extent of her self-confidence. The blessed shattering of this confidence cannot occur apart from real-life experience. This, God has mercifully provided. In the meantime He has whispered to us His secret counsels through Paul's pen.

How secret can this truth be when it is broadcast so plainly in Romans chapter 7 and published in millions of Bibles around the world? This is nothing less than a miracle of divine blinding. God has done this. People, left to their own, cannot be this stupid. The verses are right in front of them. See the many Christians, blinded

by their own ambitions to the true purpose of law so plainly stated in Romans—people who have the Word of God, who study it, and who therefore should know better—grabbing megaphones and still promoting law as a viable means to righteousness. The same God Who blinded Israel (Romans 11:25) has done it to Christianity with remarkable success. Christianity, like Israel, has a veil over its heart whenever Moses is read or his commandments are stuck with nails, thumbtacks, and putty-balls to supposedly sanctified walls. The modern delusion I speak of was well at work in the days of Paul, as the apostle testifies in 2 Corinthians 3:12-15—

Having, then, such an expectation, we are using much boldness, and are not even as Moses. He placed a covering over his face, so that the sons of Israel were not to look intently to the consummation of that which is being nullified. But their apprehensions were calloused, for until this very day the same covering is remaining at the reading of the old covenant, not being uncovered. For only in Christ is it being nullified. But till today, if ever the reading of Moses should be reached, a covering is lying on their heart.

We can say the same thing, Paul. Until this very day, the same covering which blinded Israel in your day blinds the modern Christian. For at the reading of the old covenant, their hearts leap within them in dark joy at the prospect of obeying God's rules. According to Paul, only in Christ is this errant desire nullified. Whenever the desire is present, therefore, mutely testifies to the Savior's absence.

The sins of the world are terrible, but none so bad or malignant, none as gangrenous as those inspired by and encouraged within the Christian assembly.

May God deliver us from every evil, especially that of the depreciation of human nature, the oblivion to God's absolute intention, and the popular misuse of His just precept. —MZ

