

Summer of Sin, (The Apostle Paul)

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Father in Heaven, I am asking Lord that you would do a supernatural work. I am asking Lord that You will pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us. I pray that You will send angels to fill this auditorium with an atmosphere of Heaven. And Lord we have come to be in Your very living, loving, presence, and we pray that You will manifest Yourself in such a marked and dynamic and powerful way, that all of us, young and old, will be affected. And we are asking that You will be miraculous in Your power that our hearts will be changed for eternity, and we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

When I went into the military, I discovered that in a boot camp, they are many things they want to teach you. And some of them are useful, and some of them, you know, I don't know how they apply to a civilian life, but one of the things we learned is how to march. Well, when I was pastoring where they had a Pathfinder Club that was good to know because I became the marching instructor, the drill instructor for the Pathfinders, and that was good. I enjoyed that. Another thing they thought us is how to take orders. And I've been married happily for 28 years... So I benefited from that one. And then, they thought me how to clean. Now, you may think your mother teaches you how to clean? But not how you learn in the military. I mean they are obsessed with cleanliness. And I think part of it is that they don't have anything else for us to do. So you just clean, and you clean, and you clean. And military likes to buy brass. They have a brass lamps, and brass decorations, and brass handles, and things, and brass tarnishes, so you have to clean it.

If any of you had been in the military, you'll be able to answer this question. What do you use to clean brass? Brass-o that's right! It's the only thing that really works. And I don't know if they still use it or not, but that's what we used back in the early 70's. And you took the brass-o and you put it on that brass, the brass was kind of tarnished and ugly looking, and you rub that brass-o on it, and it turns a little green and dark, and after a while you keep rubbing, then you take a dry cloth and you wipe it, and wow, it just shines. It looks like it's gold, it's beautiful. And so we would shine everything that was brass, even our belt buckles because we wanted to look good in our uniform.

You know I was thinking about that this week, and I looked up the word "tarnish." Tarnish in the dictionary has several meanings: to dull or destroy the luster of something by air, dust or dirt. Another one is: a film of chemically altered material, on the surface of metal. Another one: to detract from the good quality of something. You know dreams can be tarnished. Have you ever had a dream, and it became tarnished. It can mean, to bring disgrace or to sully. A life can be tarnished by some of the decisions we make.

Now I want to say something to you today and I am going to repeat it because the first time you hear it, you are going to say: "he didn't really say that." So the second time you are going to hear it, you are going to say: "he did say that." But listen carefully: strange as it may sound. Our works of righteousness corrupt and tarnish us. Strange as it may sound, our works of righteousness corrupt and tarnish us.

Let's turn to Romans chapter 7. We are continuing our series this summer in a study regarding sin. And as I looked at the writings of Paul, it seemed that Romans chapter 7 would be a fitting chapter for us to study. You'll see why in just a moment. When we read the verse 1 it identifies us. Romans 7 verse 1 Paul says: "Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" Now, that's us. We know the law. Why are you here on Saturday, why? You know the law. So what better chapter to study than one specifically written for us? "I speak to those who know the law that the law has dominion over man for as long as he lives."

Now, dominion is how it's phrased here in the New King James Version. In the Amplified Version it says: "legal claims," New American Standard Bible it says: "jurisdiction" in the NIV it says: "authority." The law has authority, jurisdiction, legal claims over a man as long as he lives. Then Paul is going to give an illustration. He says in verse 2: "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband, as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man."

So Paul is saying, you know, as regards to law, let me give you an illustration. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, if he dies, she is welcome to re-marry. Now, folks, this is not a treatise on divorce and re-marriage and stuff like this; he is using an illustration. So if you want to study divorce and remarriage, you'll have to go to other places of the Bible, he is using this as an illustration that a woman is free to marry another man when the one she is married to has died. Well, that makes sense. Now verse 4, he says: "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."

Now it is saying here that we have become dead to the law. So we are free from the law! Oh well, that then forces us to have to ask some questions. What law is he talking about? Surely, he is talking about the law of oral traditions where you know, you had to do things this way, or you had to do things that way, and you had to wash your hands the certain way, ceremonially to be clean and all that kind of stuff, surely he is talking about that, we would be dead to that. Or maybe he is talking about the Old Testament in general, you know, just the law, just kind of making it the big sweeping thing. Maybe he is talking about the law in principle, in general? You know because you are in Christ, you don't keep the civil laws. I don't know about that one. On the way here this morning, I got 30 seconds before the service began. And I was pushing it, and I was praying: "Lord, please, not today." I don't need the sermon illustration today; I just need to get to church.

I was mindful of the civil laws and I knew, if I got arrested I couldn't say, "Lord, take this away." It was my fault. Maybe he was talking about the torah? You know the first five books of the Bible, and yeah, that would make sense. Notice the context here,

Romans 7 verse 7, he says: “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” Now what law says that? That’s straight out of the 10 commandments, that’s the 10th commandment. In verse 12 he writes: “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” That’s describing the very character of God. That’s what the law does. The law or the 10 commandments are the righteousness of God. It’s describing His character.

Now Paul says back here in verse 4, “you have become dead to the law!” Those of you who know the law because of the resurrection of Christ have become dead to the law. Now this is a strange thing. How is it we are here today if we are dead to the law? Why do we care what day we worship on if we are dead to the law? Now I want to show you some supporting text here, just look at Romans 3, really quickly. Romans 3 and we’ll read a couple of verses. Romans 3 and verse 20 it says: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” And it goes on in verse 21: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.”

So we can’t be saved by the law! And here in Romans 7 it is saying that when we are in Christ, we are dead to the law. We are allowed to be married to another who is raised to life; we are allowed to be in Christ. So what about the law? Well, I suppose we could even tolerate what has been said so far, but when you come to Romans 7 verse 5 it almost becomes incomprehensible. Romans 7 verse 5, Paul says: “For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sin were aroused by the law,” wow, “Which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” Now he is going to associate law and sin. In a way that is just unbelievable. He says here, verse 5 let’s read it: “When we were in the flesh, the passions of sin, which were aroused by the law.” What was aroused by the law? The passions of sin; so the law worked sin in our lives, that’s what he is saying.

Now notice this in verse 5 he says, “When we were in the flesh;” the flesh means our sinful nature, when we were being run by our sinful natures. Three things I want to share with you as to how the law and sin are associated together. First of all, we’ve already read, Paul says: “I did not know coveting until the law told me.” So sin and law are identified by definition. We find out what sin is by looking at law, and that makes sense. The second one you will recognize immediately because you have sinful nature. You were born with the sinful nature, and that is this: because of the sinful nature that we have, when we hear “thou shall not” what’s the first thing that comes to our minds? I would like to. We become curious. There is something so compelling to sinful nature about that which is forbidden. You can not do that! Why not? And immediately creates an interest in what we are not supposed to do. Forbidden things appeal to the sinful nature. And I want you to know something brothers and sisters, all of us who have followed that path, can testify, that that which was forbidden, really did not bring any satisfaction at all. It’s very bitter, it’s sad, but there is something compelling about it. I just, you know, in fact they tell us in youth ministry, that if you want kids to do something, tell them they are not allowed to or they can’t or what ever, and somehow you

are going to have some event but they can't come to it? They'll show up! There is something about our sinful natures that if it's forbidden, wow; now I am interested. And by the way, this has tremendous ramifications about how we raise our children. If you want to know how, you have to ask somebody other than me. If you want to know how not to, you can talk to me. I know many "how not to's."

Now here is something that is far more subtle yet at the same time, so pervasive that will support what I started out with by saying; "strange as it may sound our works of righteousness corrupt and tarnish us." You see here is what happens. If I become aware of the law, and I discover wow, here is God described in law, here is what righteousness is described in law, logically it makes sense, if I do that, then I can go to heaven, right? And so I look at what law is, and I say well, there are the requirements, or the rules, okay; I am going to keep those rules and I get to go to heaven. There we have it. That brothers and sisters creates self absorption. Where we become so selfish that, listen to me, we actually will become a worse person ultimately, than we were before we even tried to be righteous.

Now, everybody I know that's ever wanted to be perfect in our denomination has always had an element of health reform associated with it. I am one of them. I tell you how I used to preach about it. Just pretend that this is a dinner plate, I used to preach this. The stirring wheel of sanctification which is being sat apart for a holy purpose; the stirring wheel is your dinner plate. You gain the victory there, and you'll have victory everywhere. And so, perfection by diet! Just hold your hand here and turn to Romans 14 really quickly. Romans 14 verse 17 it says: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The Kingdom of God is not health reform, but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Everybody I know that has been trying to make themselves perfect by keeping the law does not have peace and joy! They don't have it! I didn't have it, and I know many who don't have it. And so the law which was there to bless us, actually becomes that which corrupts us because in our sinful nature, we seek to keep that law, and we become so filled with self, that I actually started to think I was making it to perfection, and I knew you weren't. That's what happens when myself becomes the standard. I know why I do things, and I know why I don't do things, and they make sense to me.

I'll give you an illustration of how insidious this can be. Karen and I were pastoring in a distant city from here, and we were building a church. In the process of building a church, we had some folks in that congregation who were into this perfection thing. And I never met anybody into perfection that didn't start with diet in some way. And boy, I tell you, those potlucks are great. But any ways, I told Karen, we could always tell when somebody figured out righteousness by faith because we'd see them at the Dairy Queen.

Well there was a group there, and they said, you know when we build this church, our statement to this community, to the county, even to the entire state would be, we can build this church in a healthy environment. It will not have any man made fibers, or glues, or substances, which create problems for some people, everything will be just natural. So, they got this vision that people are going to come from miles around to sit on

these hard wooden pews because it's natural. And that's next to Godliness and everything will work out that way. And every business meeting we had, every discussion we had about the church they would come up with this; and frankly it was getting irritating. So I asked this question to the group, I said, look! If somebody asked you to come to their home and give them Bible studies, but they smoked cigarettes in their home, would you go in their house and give them Bible studies? Without a moment's thought they said, no way! Why not? That would be unhealthy! And we don't want to subject ourselves to things that are unhealthy. You see how for trying to keep the law for righteousness, we become the worse person than we were before.

And you know, as we were having this discussion, it really got clear in my mind when one of our other church members raised his hand and said "well, I don't know about all this, but I'll say, it was not a very good health reform to hang naked on the cross!" Right? Here we go, these folks wanted to become righteous by keeping the law. Let's look at Romans 7 verse 6 Paul says: "but now, we have been delivered from law." Have you ever heard this preached in our denomination? We've been delivered from the law? We usually don't hear that do we? "We've been delivered from the law, having died to what we've been held by," died to keeping the law, that's what it says: "So that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

Let me describe to you what it means to be in the newness of the Spirit and the oldness of the letter. When I turned that age, I forget what age it was, but puberty begins its own slot, and strange things happen to a young boy's body. The one that affects the family is odor. He begins to have body odor under his arms. And you know, I didn't know it that was me, I was used to me. And I remember my father, coming home one day and saying Jerry, I need to talk to you. Sure Dad! He had a sack and in the sack he had a can of "Right-guard" spray. He said, "Son you need to use this every day" and he showed me how to use it, told me why I needed to use it. I didn't see it. The only thing it kind of related to, the older boys used it, so I thought okay. Well, I can be cool like them because I smelled that smell before in the locker room. And so I started using Right-guard. Didn't really have my heart into it, in fact, like most young boys that age, I can wear the same dirty clothes every day, brush my teeth when I felt like it, and comb my hair when ever. Who cares?

Then an interesting thing happens a few years later, you see a girl. And there is a newness, it's no longer the letter of the law; mom telling me I have to brush my teeth, or comb my hair, or use deodorant. There is a girl, and the rules change. Instead of them telling you to get into the bathroom, they tell you: "You spent enough time in there." Why? Motivation, motivation changes! You see when you are in love; everything is different when you are in love. The law does not create love for God; the law creates love for self if it is kept as a methodology to try to get from here to heaven. And consequently the law and sin are so closely associated that we would be better off in the eyes of God to not even be religious than to be trying to get to heaven by observing His commandments. Do you understand what I am saying? This is amazing. I was told after the first two services, Pastor, you could not preach this in a lot of our churches. Yes, I imagine they are right.

Let's continue though, this chapter is an amazing chapter about sin. Verse 7 Paul says: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? No the law is not sin; on the contrary I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known the covetousness unless the law had said, 'you shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead." Before I knew and understood all that stuff, I wasn't worried about it, Paul says, but when the law came and I decided okay, I am going to keep that law, I became selfish and more corrupt than I was before.

Now you may know this, and you might not know this, but there is the story in the Bible, it's recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and when you added all together, you come up with this title, "The rich young ruler." None of them used that title, but when you put all of them together, that's what we come up with. This young guy comes up to Jesus, and he says "hey, what do I have to do to go to heaven?" Jesus says, "Keep the commandments." He says, "Hey, I've done it from my whole life up." And Jesus says, "Great, sell everything you have and give it to the poor." And the man went away sorrowful. Are you aware that there are many theologians who believe that was the apostle Paul? And even if he wasn't that was his experience. "I've kept the law from my youth up, all that I've done." But it made him a man who was willing to kill innocent people in order to serve God. It made him a man who was destroying homes in order to serve God. That's what he is talking about. The law corrupts us if we try to keep it in our sinful nature.

It goes on, in verse 9 it says: "I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me." Do you know what he is saying here? He is saying in a poetic way that sinful nature that we are born with is so powerful and so profound, that it can even bring down the sacred, holy law of God to a level where it brings death to us instead of life. Isn't that incredible, and that's what we are wrestling with within us. He says in verse 13, "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."

Now Paul is going to begin talking here about an experience. He says in verse 14, "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, and sold under sin." What does he mean; he is carnal and sold under sin? Keep your hands here; we are going to look at three texts very quickly in the book of Galatians. Galatians, chapter 5 verse 17, when Paul talks about the flesh, he is talking about the sinful nature. He says in verse 17: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish," can anybody say amen? Now, the next verse I want you to look at is chapter 5 verse 4 of Galatians. "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Now that phrase, “Fallen from grace” we often use, when we talk about somebody who was in the high position and they fell really law into sin, no the Bible says it’s just the opposite, it’s somebody trying to get to heaven by keeping the law, they’ve fallen from grace. Because you are saved by grace in Christ, and faith in that grace. Look at Galatians three, verse three, Paul says: “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” That describes many, many people in our denomination. Yes, they have started out by faith, they believe it, but now they are trying to add all their works to it. You can’t get perfect that way. The good news is, in Christ, you are already there.

Now go back to Romans 7 because we are going to read an experience that has been hotly debated by theologians; hotly debated by theologians and also armed chair theologians. People who think they know. We are going to read an experience that many people say is pre Christian experience for Paul. Because you really got Christ in your heart, you can’t have this going on. Verse 15 he says: “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. If then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” You see, I got a fight in me, I got a struggle within me, my sinful nature is there, it’s always wanting to express it self, and he goes on to say: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.”

That’s the evidence that this is an experience of the Christian man, it is not pre Christian. I have been pre Christian, I can tell you the day I accepted Jesus as my Savior, I can tell you the difference that it made when I accepted Jesus as my Savior. Prior to Christ I did not seek to do what was morally good, I sought to do what was pleasant to me, what gave me pleasure and what I can get away with. That’s what I sought to do. He is describing somebody who’s got a battle inside of him because inside, he is convicted now, he wants to do something good, he wants to do what is right, but he is not having the ability, he is unable to perform it. This is the Christian experience, brothers and sisters.

Prior to Christ who cares about doing what is morally good? Notice that he says nothing good dwells within him. Do you agree with that concerning yourself? Do you understand the capacities for evil that lurk within your nasty, sinful nature? If you did, you would understand there is no way on earth you could climb away from that, and somehow stand before God and say, “See I made it God.” You can’t! In fact, the closer we get to Jesus, what happens? The more sinful we will appear in our own eyes.

I was trying to make myself perfect, and as I said, I was doing pretty good. Most of the people around me weren’t but I was doing pretty good. And I am sure I was fun to live with. Verse 19, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Do you see that fight that’s going on? Man, he is really just struggling, that’s a battle. Now I want to ask you a question? When would the sinful man or a sinful nature, when will it stop? When does it stop? Does it stop when you accept Christ as your Savior? Does it stop when you die to self? How many of you have ever heard that phrase,

“We must die to self.” I’ve heard it until I am sick of it. I don’t know how to kill my self. I don’t want to kill my self to be honest with you. The sinful nature will be gone when you are dead. And I mean that kind of dead, you are physically gone, you are done, you are not breathing anymore. It’s over, praise God, you finally have victory. Right? And Jesus comes and raises you up, you are incorruptible, and you’ll not have to fight with this evil, wicked, sinful nature that you struggle with now, that’s the victory. And that’s what we have to look forward to.

He goes on to say that he delights in God after the inward man, but in verse 23, “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” You can just hear the frustration, “Man this is terrible, this battle that’s going on, these powers are raging within me and I am trying to do this, and trying to do that, “and then he asks an important question. I’ve been told that answers, answers that help us, come as a result of the right question. Paul asked a question, he says in verse 24: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

In my attempts to be perfect, I could say, “O wretched man that I am.” But I would never ask that question. I would say, “What can deliver me from this body of death?” What method would get me out of this? What process would get me out of this? What can I do to get victory over this? And Paul has a right question, it is not a “what” question, it is a “who” question. It is not a process, it is a person. It is not the law, it is the Lord, it is not good works, it is grace, that’s what we need. That’s a person, it’s Jesus Christ! And our sinful natures are so corrupted, and so evil, and so vile, the only way we can go to heaven, is to have a Savior. The only way!

You know Paul will write in one of his letters that he is the chief of sinners. As I am growing spiritually, I would argue with him. I think I’ve taken over that spot. I have learned of sinful capacities within my heart that absolutely horrify me. And I have tried hard, but the harder I try, the worse it gets. And it’s like that song says, “It’s not in trying, but in trust.” You see, today as I stand before you, I can bear just a short testimony and that is if I were to have aneurism right now, have a major heart attack right now, or one of you shoot me because you don’t like the sermon, if I were to die right now, I am going to heaven. It’s not because I put in a good day, it’s not because I am not selfish, it’s not because I haven’t been battling sin within me while I’ve been preaching, oh, all that goes on! It’s because of Jesus, He is my Savior, and He comes below the sinful nature, and covers us with His righteousness.

You can read the next 4 verses in chapter 8, the answer to the question, “Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” Jesus Christ! And he goes on to describe how He came, and was obedient in the flesh. That obedience is granted to us when we accept Him as our Savior. And I don’t know if you even care? I don’t know where you are at? You might be here because somebody dragged you here? You might feel like the law has been crammed down your throat for so long, you are sick and tired of us, and people like us. I want you to look to the Lord today, see a different picture. He wants to come into your heart and give you an experience that is nothing other than a miracle. It’s called newness.

And when God makes things new, they are really new. And if you would like to experience salvation by Jesus Christ, I am going to ask you to stand right where you are at.

Father in Heaven, we may have tried all kinds of ways to clean ourselves up. We may have tried, discipline, diet, dress, You name it, what ever it is, we may have tried it. But today, we want to go to Jesus Christ. And we ask Him to come into our hearts, and to save us from the sinful nature that we have. To give us a newness, a love for You, and we thank You and pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.