

Simply Christ

Gospel Newsletter

Sharing the simplicity that is in Christ

January 1, 2017

PAUL'S DARK CHAPTER

Before he came to Christ, the apostle Paul was not an unclean man. To the contrary, all evidence suggest that he was indeed a good and decent man. He was very diligent, studious, and committed to his walk with God. Then known as Saul of Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem *“at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God...”* Acts 22:3 Paul assures us that before coming to Christ, he was, *“touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”* Philippians 3:6 He exceled in *“the Jews religion”* Galatians 1:13-14 and was not a sinner in the way that the gentiles were. Galatians 2:15 Even his part in Stephen's death and the persecution of the church was a testimony of his zeal for God under the Law. Yet somewhere, somehow, a few words from a passage of scripture he had known from his youth got his attention ...and destroyed him.

The words that brought Saul of Tarsus into darkness and despair were very simple. They were the words of the tenth commandment, *“Thou shalt not covet...”* I do not know what awoke Saul to these words. It is likely he heard someone in the early church declaring the work of the gospel. But however it was that he was awakened to their true meaning, these words began to trouble his heart and mind. The other commandments dealt with his actions, but this commandment dealt with the content of his heart. He could say that he had never committed adultery or fornication, but this

commandment said, “You shall not desire it in your heart.” Jesus revealed the meaning of this commandment when he said, “...*whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” Matthew 5:28 The Proverbs also agreed, saying “*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*” Proverbs 23:7 When Saul saw what this tenth commandment was saying, he began to comprehend that “sin in your heart is SIN!” This new understanding had to be disconcerting for someone like Saul who believed he kept the Law so perfectly, but now he knew what had to be addressed. Saul set himself on a course to eliminate the sin out of his own heart. The result of this pursuit, however, would soon shake him to his very foundations.

In Romans the 7th chapter, Paul the apostle describes the events that led up to his “Damascus Road” experience with Christ. He starts this chapter addressing “*them that know the law,*” Romans 7:1 and then continues addressing them saying, “*For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*” Romans 7:5 This was a reference to their condition before they came to Christ when they served God under the Law. Saul had once viewed himself as a spiritual person who had put all sin in his life to death, Romans 7:8 that is until he came “face to face” with the tenth commandment. He said, “*for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*” Romans 7:7 This commandment was not the source of his lusts. It was what revealed to him that sin in the heart was equal to committing the act of sin. Upon understanding this, Saul was attempting to “stamp out” these lusts from his heart when he discovered that these hidden sins permeated his entire being. He was like a man who

found a small sore, but through further examination he discovered this sore was a part of a greater cancer underneath. When he sought to remove the sore, the cancer began to fester and spread. Saul's efforts to eliminate the sin of his heart only brought it out of its subdued state and it began to rage in his every thought and desire. He says, "*when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*" Romans 7:9

It wasn't until Saul understood that sin in the heart is sin, that the tenth commandment was able to accomplish in him that which had always been its purpose. It stripped Saul of his self-righteousness so that in his own eyes the sins of his heart were now "*exceeding sinful.*" Romans 7:13 No longer were these hidden sins "little things" that did not matter. He now knew that these internal lusts were contradicting everything he thought himself to be spiritually. Saul began to see himself in a way that horrified him as a Pharisee. In despair he confessed to himself, "*...but I am carnal, sold under sin!*" Romans 7:14

The revelation that he was "*carnal, sold under sin*" was actually a truth Saul was forced to face about himself when he considered what was taking place in his heart and life. What was it that caused this man, who in his own eyes had been so alive spiritually, to admit to himself that he was not spiritual at all, but was a slave under sin? Saul began to see that he was living the life of a slave. You see, a slave may want to live his life one way, but because he is a slave, he lives his life as someone else wants him to live it. Saul considered his own walk. He said, "*that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.*" Romans 7:15 This proved to Saul that he was not a freeman, but a slave. Saul also

concluded that his “slave master” lived within himself. He said *“Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”*

Romans 7:20 It was the presence of sin in his heart that Saul ultimately found no way to overcome. He acknowledged its unending presence saying, *“when I would do good, evil is present with me.”*

Romans 7:21 Sin’s power is in its presence. As long as it is present in you, it has power over you. At this realization, hopelessness began to set in. From the depths of his soul, Saul began to cry *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* Romans 7:24 He found that deliverance from the presence of sin and its power on the road to Damascus where he met the great deliverer, *“Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Romans 7:25

I personally believe that the *“evil which I would not”* Paul speaks of in the 7th chapter of Romans was his hatred and wrath against the church. Nowhere does Paul ever mention immorality or uncleanness in his life, but he continually references his persecution of the saints. The scripture says Saul literally came to the point that he was *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.”* Acts 9:1 He could justify his actions as defending the Law, but nothing could justify the hate and spite that consumed his every thought. He saw Christians such as Stephen lay down their life with love, but he could not even lay down his head at night without the anger that raged within. I am sure that Saul began to hate himself for what he was doing to men, women, their children, and their families, yet he was compelled from within to do even more. That is... until he met Jesus, The Christ!