

God's Gospel and Sin's Hijack

January 10, 2010 - Romans 7:7-25

It's Sunday number two of 2010. In a week or ten days, they'll start arriving. You might get them in your mail box at your house, at the community mail box or on email. But they're coming. They might bring happy memories to some. But they are likely to bring groans to most and when you look at them, you might say, "We spent that much on the gifts? That Christmas party cost what? Now that was an expensive turkey!" What are they?

Credit Card bills. They're coming and for some they make the winter bluer. Not only is the holiday season over. Not only are the days short. Not only is it cold. But it's time to pay bills; big bills for some; maybe even monumental bills.

For others, the bills might not be greater than we expected. We were pretty good at staying within budget. But were all those purchases necessary? Were they essentials? Or might one or two or ten of those items have been spur-of-the-moment purchases because we just wanted that?

Or to put it another way, might we have made some purchases that violated the 10th commandment. "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbors." Got to get an ox and now you've got the bill and the big animal in your back yard. But the tenth commandment is part of God's moral law. Is it okay to break His law once in awhile?

Well friends, though these examples might seem a little light, they point to something that goes on inside of everyone. Our issue might not be overspending. It might be a sharp tongue or a wagging tongue or a judgmental heart or a real problem with that person. We desire to do good in that area of struggle. Yet we often blow it. What's going on?

Today's Bible passage explains what's happening. It reveals that inside of us there is a powerful force that opposes our desires to do right. What's worse, this force uses God's law as an opportunity to head off our good intentions and direct them in a different direction. This force is Sin. It often hijacks our good intentions.

In fact, this passage will reveal that this force is so powerful that we are unable to overcome it on our own. But the good news is that God has provided a rescue. In fact **“Only God’s Gospel rescues us from Sin’s hijack.”**

We continue in Romans today. Last week we saw how the Gospel moves us to a new place, from the realm of sin and death to the realm of Christ and life. We saw that the only way to move between those realms was through two deaths; Christ’s death and our own death to sin’s reign. We pondered how we needed to embrace life under Christ and bear fruit for God there.

In that discussion, Paul, the author of Romans raises this question of the law of God. How are we supposed to view God’s law from this new realm especially in light of his statement “Now we are released from the law?” We saw that we’re released from the law as solely a condemning agent in our lives. Now Paul continues by exposing how Sin hijacks our good intentions and uses God’s law in a twisted way to do it. This passage is disturbing on one front. It reveals the reality of the struggle going on inside of us. This passage is in one sense like a visit to a doctor who tells us we’ve got a life threatening illness. No one wants to hear that. But we need to hear it if we’re going to fight the illness.

Then the doctor reveals treatment options with varying success rates. We choose one hoping that it’ll work. Yet this is unlike getting a diagnosis of a serious physical disease that you may or may not beat. With this “spiritual disease” there is a certain cure. Paul points us to that after the diagnosis.

So today, I want you to see how sin hijacks our intention to honor God and His moral law. We’ll conclude with the hope of God’s rescue plan for us. Then we’ll meet at the Lord’s table to remember and celebrate what Christ did so we could be rescued.

Only God’s Gospel rescues us from Sin’s hijack. Let’s start with some definitions.

What is a hijack?

To hijack means “to take control of; to take over” especially a public transportation vehicle like a plane, ship or bus; taking the passengers hostage and diverting the direction of a vehicle to another destination.” A hijacker changes the direction or intention of something. In this passage, the hijacker is sin.

What is Sin?

Sin is “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature.” In this passage, Paul is talking about our Sin nature. He portrays sin as a force or power that dwells within us. He’s not talking directly about our personal sins. You’ll notice Sin is never presented in the plural.

What does Sin hijack?

Sin hijacks our intention to keep God’s good moral law. Indwelling sin tries to take over and at times succeeds in preventing us from honoring God. Sin is a power that wages war against any attempt we make to live holy lives. To explain this, Paul turns to his own testimony. He describes his own spiritual experience in the past and the present. We start in Romans 7: 7-12 – Reading from the English Standard Version.

7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Here we see: **Sin successfully hijacks any desire to live a holy life before we come to Christ. (7-12)**

I interpret verses 7-12 as Paul describing his life before he came to Christ. Paul has just written in 7:6 – “But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive.” So readers might conclude “the law is sin.” The law was bad because it held us captive. But Paul immediately deals with that. By no means! No way!

In fact, if it was not for the law, Paul says he would not know the make up of sin. Then Paul gives a personal example. “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had said, “You shall not covet.” To covet means to want what someone else has and think about how to get it even if it would do the other person harm. Without the commandment “do not covet” how would we know it was wrong in this culture? God’s law says it’s bad, our land says it’s good! And God says don’t covet! If you don’t know the law, you might not be

aware that you're breaking it. But what often happens in us as soon as someone says "don't do that?" We want to do it!

The same thing happened to Paul as soon as he really grasped the commandment "you shall not covet." He started to covet. How did this happen? Sin dwelling inside of him hijacked any intention he had to fight coveting. Sin seized the opportunity; it jumped; it pounced and used the prohibitions or don'ts of the law as a springboard to break the law. So he laments in verse 10 – "the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me". Most commentators think he's referring to Leviticus 18:5 here – "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules: if a person does them, he shall live by them." But sin used the law to bring death.

In fact, Paul claims that Sin deceived him in verse 11, the same word Eve used to describe the serpent's actions in the Garden of Eden. And through that deception it killed Paul. Kill means spiritual death or separation from God. Before Paul came to Christ, he was a zealous law keeper. But the more he tried to keep the law, the more he found himself breaking it. He zealously lived up to the law over here yet became arrogant in doing so over here. So he was dead spiritually. But it wasn't the law's fault. The law is holy and righteous and good.

Verses 7-12 describe, I believe, anyone apart from Christ. They may desire to do maybe even good things in God's sight. They do some good. They may even be viewed by others as "good moral people." But the problem with that is the standard for good is other people. God's moral law compares us to God. He's completely holy. So if we've coveted anything we are not a "good moral person" according to God's law.

We also saw last week from Jesus that its not enough to refrain from the act of sin; we must also fight the battle in our minds; So do not murder and do not hate your brother in your heart; do not commit adultery or lust after another. It's not only do not covet by refusing to buy the ox, its fight the battle to even want the ox. No longer is it okay to love your neighbor and hate your enemy; its love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

When we really begin to grasp that God's moral law requires we live holy lives in action, attitude and thought, we recognize our desperate need for God's help. Sin successfully hijacks our desire to live holy lives

before we come to Christ. The rest of the passage shows us **Sin sometimes hijacks our desire to live a holy life after we come to Christ. (7:13-23).**

13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. 15 For 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 with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Paul changes from past experience to present reality in these verses. In verse 14 he confesses “the law is spiritual but I am unspiritual.” Then comes that classic confession in verse 15.

“I do not understand my own actions. For what I want to do (honor God and live a holy life) I do not do, but what I hate (sinning) I do. This is the struggle of every Christian. Here’s a test to see if you’re growing in Christ. Do you hate sinning? Not, have you perfectly conquered sin. Do you hate sinning? If we do, that’s a sign the Holy Spirit is at work in us through this struggle. We live in two worlds at the same time. We live in this world subject to the conditions of our mortal life. We still have sin dwelling in us and a sinful nature we inherited from Adam. But the Gospel has moved us to a new place. We have passed from death to life, from darkness to light. We have been raised to walk in newness of life. We now have the Holy Spirit to empower us to live a God honoring life.

One day this old order will pass away and the tension we experience will be resolved. But in this between time, our lives provide the battleground for this conflict. Paul expresses the agony of this conflict inside of him. He desires to live a holy life and honor God’s law. But there’s another law at work inside of him. This law or reality described in verse 22 and 23. ““In my inner being, I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”

It's like whenever he delights in God's law in his mind, it triggers this automatic counter law and its battle on. A good example of this battle is a cranky shopping cart. You know when you go shopping and you get a cart that turns in one direction? I don't know how I do this. But it seems I'm never smart enough to plan my shopping route so that my turns match up with the shopping cart's desire. It often wants to turn the opposite way from where I'm turning. So the whole trip is a struggle.

That's kind of like Paul's experience. He delights in God's law in his mind. But when he wants to act on it, sin pounces and tries to go the opposite way like a cranky shopping cart. If the passage ended at verse 23, it would be pretty bleak. In fact, to emphasize the desperate nature of his need he cries out in verse 24; "Wretched or miserable person that I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Finally comes verse 25. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank you God that through Jesus Christ our Lord, You rescued me." Only God's Gospel rescues us from sin's hijack. That sets the stage for the cascade of hope and encouragement that flows out of Romans 8; one of the mountain top chapters of the New Testament. But that's for next week.

I want to mention a couple of quick points for clarification. Then we'll get to what this means for us today.

Though this passage declares it is sin that dwells in us that causes sin, it does not free us from responsibility for our sins. Yes, there is this power of sin in our lives. But we have a choice and responsibility to decide whether or not we will let sin rule in our lives.

It is not okay to surrender to some sin in our lives. "Sin sometimes hijacks our desire to live a holy life." Sometimes it wins. But it should be winning less and less as we grow more and more in Christ. So please don't use this passage to justify continually struggling with the same sin. Don't use it as an excuse to give in. Romans does not end in chapter 7. It describes our desperate need so we don't try to win this battle by ourselves.

So what can we do? (7:24-25)

We must cry out to God and acknowledge our hopeless state. Then we turn to God for rescue. Together with His Spirit we wage war against sin. This is why the Gospel is necessary for non Christians and Christians.

We need God and His Spirit to take up the battle going on within. We need to recognize there is a battle and not just give in. I love C.S. Lewis' words on this.

“No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of an enemy army by fighting it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of the wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. That is why bad people know little about badness. They lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside of us until we try to fight it. And Christ because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.”

This whole battle applies very directly to our desire to become a church living on the Jericho Road. Oh, it's a noble vision, but that doesn't mean it's going to just happen. Do you think Satan and Sin dwelling in us are just going to remain passive while we reach out with God's Gospel in mercy to those around us? Do you think they'll just sit there while more people are exposed to God's Gospel and might turn to Him.

No way. There is a mortal battle going on for souls. So they're at work to prevent us from acting on our desires. One of their best strategies is to get us to over schedule our lives with plenty of good things.

So we've got every kid into 2 or 3 extra curricular activities and school and programs. Then we've got email, Facebook and Twitter to check; We've got our jobs or school work and socializing and recreation to pursue.

And there's nothing left for God; no time to stop on our Jericho Road for that wounded traveler because we've got our list to get done. That's a perfect environment for Satan and sin to pounce on our good intentions.

I felt convicted about this in my own life. That's why we're starting back into a small group tonight – I need to be with Christians in a smaller setting so we can spur each other on in the faith. You do too. John Piper said recently “if you're not part of a small group or community of believers, you're missing half the Christian life. Some of you are part of something like this maybe in a small group; or in a Bible Study or maybe Sunday evening worship or through your worship team or at a Ladies Morning Out study; many of you are not.

Our group is simply going to briefly review the morning message; talk about what God said to us through it and then what difference it makes for life this week. But I will make available follow up questions that I hope to include on the insert and my blog on the website. If you want to take them as a couple or with an accountability partner or with a group of Christians, you too can join together to engage in this battle. Build into your life time for other believers – it's much more likely we'll have eyes open for the Jericho Road.

Some of you here today feel defeated, not because of your sin but because of what's happened in and around your life. Whatever you're going through today, God's gospel still remains to rescue you from sin's hijack. You might be going through some suffering. Sin has seized that to whisper "God's forgotten you". You might be going through some difficulty at work and you're tempted to blast the people or management there with some untrue claims. You might be suffering physically or exhausted; you desire to worship God; And sin pounces condemning your feeble attempts or sowing seeds of doubt about God's character.

You don't have to rouse up something from within yourself. You don't have to psyche yourself up to take on the fight. You simply need to cry out. Lord God – rescue me through Jesus Christ. Empower me by the Holy Spirit to honor you in this situation. Holy Spirit, continue to grow your fruit in me of love, joy and peace, patience, kindness, and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

If you're not a Christian, verses 7-12 describe you. You may think you're a pretty good moral person compared to someone else. You may even desire to honor God in some way. But apart from the rescue of God, you can't. Will you call out to God through the truth of His Gospel today for rescue?

May 2010 be a year where by the Holy Spirit's strengthening God's gospel rescues us from sin's hijack and we grow in holy living.