

House of Wisdom

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Covetousness

In Paul's teaching on the law, he often used allegories (Rom 7:1-4) or actual stories or experiences (Gal 4:24) as allegories, to illustrate the difference between keeping the letter of the law as opposed to keeping the spirit (inward application) of law. To only keep the letter is to be in bondage under the authority of the law and man's interpretation of it. Whereas, when we keep the spirit of the law as God instructs the heart, we are delivered out of spiritual death into spiritual life. **Rom 7:6:** *But now we are delivered⁽²⁶⁷³⁾ from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.* The oldness of the letter is the old understanding of the letter, and opposite to serving with a new spiritual understanding, which is life. The proper meaning of katargeo⁽²⁶⁷³⁾ is "to be entirely idle." In other words, with a spiritual understanding of the law, the letter of the law no longer has power to hold me in bondage.

THIS is the concept of the law Paul iterates in Romans 7 when he quotes the 10th commandment: **Rom 7:7-9:** *7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: Paul answered the question: Is the law sin? with God forbid, or, no it is not. The point made here is that sin is not the law, but in the person and his understanding of the law. The letter of the law gives a general view of right and wrong. However, Paul takes it a step further: for I had not known lust⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾. 8. But [the] sin (nature), taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾. Most of the time in chapters 5, 6 & 7, "sin" is used with the definite article. It is not the outward or inward act of sin in view here, but the natural man in a sinful state - or, the sin nature. It is the natural propensity of fallen man to do that which is contrary to God's ways. For without the law [the] sin (nature) was dead. 9. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, [the] sin (nature) revived, and I died. [original] (supplied) It is our sin-nature which deceives us (verse 11).*

For without the law [the] sin (nature) was dead. Paul was raised a Jew (Phil 3:5), so he is not saying that there was a time he did not know about the law. But without an understanding of the law he did not recognize the depth of his sin. There was a time, when living a worldly life, that I understood adultery as only the outward act (letter of the law), and I considered my sin nature in that regard to be under control. But when I came to understand that adultery begins in the heart with a lustful thought, then I realized that I was alive without a deeper understanding of the law once, but when I considered the depth of the law I was really spiritually dead.

Jesus used "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and applied them inward to the heart. He also applied other parts of the law inward (cp Mt 5:31-32 & Dt 24:1; cp Mt 5:43-44 & Lev 19:18, Dt 23:6; cp Mt 5:38-42 & Ex 21:24-25). So then, not any part of the law has been abolished or discarded (Mt 5:17-18). Not only are the Ten Commandments to be considered as applying to the heart, but the feast days and all the Jewish rites are types of our spiritual development. Misunderstanding of the law keeps people in bondage to their sin nature today. It is the Spirit of the Father through Christ that causes a change in the heart when a person responds to the correct understanding: **Jn 5:24-25:** *24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. 25. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and*

now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. It is Christ's understanding (faith) that gives us life.

In paragraph two above, the three English words underlined are all translated from the same Greek word: *lust*⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾, *covet*⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾ and *concupiscence*⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾. *Epithumeo*⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾ is the verb form and the root of *epithumia*⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾. The proper meaning of *epithumeo*⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾ is "to set the heart upon, long for." It can be used of a bad (Mt 5:28) or good desire (Lk 22:15). In Paul's example, it is negative: *for I had not known lust*⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾, *except the law had said, Thou shalt not lust*⁽¹⁹³⁷⁾. 8. *But [the] sin (nature), taking occasion by the commandment, [caused] in me all manner of lust*⁽¹⁹³⁹⁾

Why did Paul use "Thou shalt not covet?" He expanded the idea of verse one wherein he stated: *Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he lives?* Remember he also said in verse 9 - *For I was alive without the law once* - alive without the spiritual understanding of the law. Why would the law have dominion over you if you were ignorant of its meaning? Because your sin nature deceives you into thinking you are right with God, when you are not. By reading the Bible with a man's understanding of it, you put self "under the law" (Gal 3:23) until you learn what it means to be led by the Spirit of Christ (Gal 5:18) instead of the spirit of man. If you hold any kind of grudge or resentment against another person, no matter what they have done, you are not totally out from under the law and under grace.

Here is the entire commandment from the Old Testament: **Ex 20:17:** *Thou shalt not covet*⁽²⁵³⁰⁾ *thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.* The underlying Hebrew word for 'covet' is similar in meaning to the Greek. It has been discussed in previous studies how that a woman is a symbol for the mind-set of a person (i.e. new Jerusalem = mind-set of Christ; Babylon = mind-set of the world). The "servants" represent thoughts subject to the law; the "ox" is a clean thought with which one tills the land (between the ears); the "ass" is an unclean beast representing burdensome thoughts. So, when you lust after another person, you are manifesting spiritual adultery against God in your heart.

Another way of seeing the point being made is to define "neighbor." In Luke 10:25-37 is recorded a dialog between Jesus and an expert in the law, who very well could have been Paul. When asked, "Who is my neighbor," Jesus told the lawyer a parable: *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.* (Verse 30) A man leaves Jerusalem, city of peace - a symbol for the mind-set of Christ, and goes down to Jericho, city of the moon - a symbol for the law, and fell among thieves. A thief is defined as a person teaching falsehood and stealing God's word from others (Jer 23:30-32), i.e. stealing what God speaks to one's heart. Your neighbor is one who has been lied to, the truth stolen from him (naked), he is spiritually wounded by the error he has been taught and spiritually half dead. When I realized that Jesus described my experience, now I can look at my neighbor as being in the same spiritual condition. Then I can become the good neighbor described in verses 36-37: *Which now of these three, thinks thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.* To love your neighbor is to treat them with the compassion and kindness which God has shown to you.

Every human heart starts with lust (Jam 1:14-15), which we all have allowed to lead us astray. When we understand and apply the spiritual law to self, we acknowledge that we love God. When we apply it to others and show mercy and kindness, we are loving our neighbor. May God bless your spiritual growth as you *Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.* (2 Tim 2:7) Amen.