

ROMANS

7:1-25

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 19th March 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Galatians 2:17-21

Introduction

We are studying the book of Romans, the 45th book in the Bible — and jointly the apostle Paul's longest letter — written to the Christians in Rome in approx. 57-58AD.

Chapter overview of Romans

- **Chapters 1-8:** Christian doctrine
 - Sin (1-3), Salvation (4-5), Sanctification (6-8)
- **Chapters 9-11:** Israel
 - Israel - Past (9), Present (10), Future (11)
- **Chapters 12-16:** Practical Christian living
 - Practical Christianity

So far we have have studied the first six chapters, and we've seen Paul building a case that will ultimately conclude in chapter 8. So comprehensive is Paul's argument, that in the early days of the United States the book of Romans was taught in some law schools as the way to build a legal case.

In chapter 1 we saw God's righteousness revealed, His wrath revealed, and the problem of sin in the unrighteous man. In chapter 2 we saw the argument of the self-righteous man completely disassembled, and chapter 3 concluded that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, leaving no-one righteous in God's eyes - no, not one.

So that left everyone in the same boat — whether Jew, gentile, male, female, master, slave, free, servant, rich or poor — all are in need of a Saviour. But the *great* news that Paul tells us is that we have a Saviour in Jesus Christ, who alone is able to justify us through *faith* in His death on the cross, and in His resurrection from the dead.

Through this we have new life, in which we have peace with God, and hope in God. But then comes the question; what now? Shall we sin more so there may be more grace? No. Shall we sin more because the grace God has already shown is sufficient to cover *all* our sin? Again, Paul says "certainly not!". Indeed, there should be a *difference* in us — sin is no longer king, so we're not to let it reign like one. That is a choice we each have. And we're told to consider ourselves dead to sin (sin itself having been paralysed in its power that we don't *have* to sin any more).

Does that mean that is easy? That there is no struggle? Also no. As we'll see, Chapter 7 is a very honest chapter that speaks of this struggle that every Christian has — whether to yield to sin, or yield to God. And we'll see that while we are saved from the penalty of sin, and freed from the power of it, we're not free from the presence of it - and actually, we don't have the power to deal with it ourselves. Furthermore, the law still cannot help us - leading us to ask, who can? That answer is emphatically and clearly - Jesus Christ.

Over the next few weeks we'll see that this chapter and the next are starkly juxtaposed against each other. In chapter 7, Paul will mention the law or analogies of the law 23 times, but only mention the Holy Spirit *once* in passing. Yet in chapter 8 he'll mention the Holy Spirit 18 times. There's no accident in that. Here, Paul is going to show us the result of trying to live for Christ by our own efforts, which will lead into chapter 8 where he will explain to us the necessity of the Holy Spirit living in us. He will demonstrate to us the dynamic, the activity of the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

Overview of chapter seven

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- v1-6 — We are dead to the law
- v7-12 — Sin used the law to bring death, not life
- v13-25 — The law is still good, we are still not

In the opening 6 verses then, we'll read that we are now dead to the law — it can place no further demand on us than was already paid for by Christ's death in our place. From verses 7-12, we'll not only see Paul say that the law is not sin, but that sin actually took advantage of the law to produce yet more sin in us.

Then, in the final section from v13-25, we'll see Paul be incredibly honest about his struggle with sin, to help us understand *our* struggle with it. He'll use the words *I/me/mine* 47 times. And will say *I* 31 of those times. Some say that Paul is talking about his experience before being saved, but that can't be the case — as while in verses 7-13 Paul gives us everything in the past tense (saying, *this is the way I was*) — verses 14-25 are in the present tense, plus these verses use terms that are never applied to unbelievers elsewhere in scripture.

Chapter seven

So then, keeping in mind that this is not only Paul's relationship with sin described, but ours too, let's pick up our study in verse 1 of chapter 7, where we read:

Romans 7:1

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?

That is, the long arm of the law cannot reach into the grave. If you're dead, the law cannot chase you. There's nothing it can do to you. You'll never see a dead body on trial in a court of law.

And Paul gives an example:

Romans 7:2

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.

Clearly, your marriage covenant is in effect while you are both alive - it is to be for life. So a warning to the unmarried here - don't rush into it. It's a serious lifelong covenant that you're making. And for those who have married, you know that the part of your marriage vows that you might not have wanted to think about, is *until death do us part*. Because there is a parting there, and at that moment the marriage bonds are broken - you are no longer bound, knit and tied to your spouse.

And Paul is using that as an analogy to show how we are no longer bound to the law. It has no hold on us any more...

Romans 7:3

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 that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

So, if your spouse dies, you are free to remarry. *Should* you remarry? That's a whole other question.

Simply put, we read in 1 Corinthians 7 that there is advantage in singleness, but there is freedom for those single or widowed to marry - marriage itself being a good thing.

However, Paul's point in Romans is not about what to do or what not to do regarding marriage, other than that a marriage covenant is to be for life, and that it doesn't extend beyond that. Put another way; if your spouse dies, you are free to remarry — and Paul is using that analogy to explain how the law only has jurisdiction over us while either we are alive. We are no longer bound to it. And he continues...

Romans 7:4

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.

So as Christians we are not bound to the law. Rather, as the church, we are now the bride of Christ, who loved us so much that He gave His life for ours, that we might not face the demands of the law, and the consequences of not keeping it. He is now our Bridegroom. As such, our relationship to Christ is now so close that we should bear fruit. We should live in a way that pleases Him. We have moved from legalism to love. As has been well said, the law can chase a man to Calvary but no further. Our motivation to live a holy life is not fear, but love.

And we read...

Romans 7:5

For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

Previously, we were entrenched in the world, and our desires were all over the place. It only made matters worse that we were told by the law — or our parents! — that we couldn't or shouldn't do something. You know what it's like; you see a button labelled "don't press" - and you feel the urge to press it! Like moths to a flame, we were under bondage to sin, and the law revealed that sorry state — and in doing so only made matters worse for us because of our own sinful nature.

Romans 7:6

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

That is, having been set free from sin, and from the demands of the law that was taking aim at us, we are now free. Not so that we can do as we please, but that we can do what pleases God. Not through obligation, but through love. Not through our strength, but through Christ in us - through His Holy Spirit that He has given to us.

But that being the case, what do we make of the law? Paul asks rhetorically:

Romans 7:7

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."

Is the law a bad thing? No! It was precisely the law that told us what we should and shouldn't do. And it wasn't wrong for doing so.

I remember hearing one story, that I'm as sure as can be was told by Joe Focht, pastor of Calvary Chapel Philadelphia. He and his wife, Cathy, were heading out for dinner, leaving their young children at the time with a babysitter. As they walked out the door, Joe turned to one of his boys and said "don't put beans up your nose". He remarked he had no idea what made him think of saying that. But sure enough, as they are part way through dinner, they get a call from the babysitter that their son had a bean stuck up his nose... and so dinner turned into a trip to the hospital.

In that scenario, was it wrong to say don't put beans up your nose? No. Was it a bad idea to put beans up the nose? Yes. The act didn't make the instruction bad. And in a far more serious sense, a good law isn't made bad because someone rebels against it. As Finnis Dake put it "*The law itself is not sinful in demanding me to live right. The law only makes known what sin really is.*"

And as we previously read in Romans chapter 3;

Romans 3:20

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The law was there to reveal our sin, not remove it. Indeed, the law didn't produce righteousness, just as a mirror doesn't produce cleanliness. And as we read in Galatians, the law was our schoolmaster (or tutor) to bring us to Christ — but it is Christ Himself that we needed as our Saviour.

Romans 7:8

But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

So then, our sinful nature took advantage of the commandment — God's law — and rebelled even further. What God instructed against, our sinful nature took as an opportunity to entice us into it. What a rebellious nature we have in that, when we're told something is wrong, sin rises up from a lifeless state to a raging desire to act contrary to God's commands. Verse 9 says...

Romans 7:9

I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

Want to see this in action? Tell someone they can't do something. Or worse, tell them that God says something is sin and hear "You can't tell me what to do, or what God says. I don't believe God said that. That's outrageous, it's bigoted, it's unloving, it's unkind - not only will I carry on sinning, but you should accept me doing so." And so on. So corrupted are we that sin flares up at the slightest suggestion it is wrong.

And so Paul says:

Romans 7:10

And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

Paul had been a Pharisee. He knew the law! And he was proud, thinking that the law was what would save him. And indeed the law *is* good... we read in Galatians 3:21 that "if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law."

But what he hoped would save him, actually condemned him. It wasn't that the law was faulty, but that there was faulty thinking that it would bring life. And rather than bring him life, it consigned him to death.

Romans 7:11

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

Sin promised much, but delivered death. And that's always the way. For sin will take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay. It's deceptive. You won't get what it promised. Sure, in the moment you might think you're having a great time, but the pleasures of sin don't last long. There will indeed be a day of reckoning, and the law is rightfully set against us and our sin.

Romans 7:12

Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

The law is good. It was good, even though it rightfully condemned us. And it is still good. But Paul then asks...

Romans 7:13

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.

That is, was the law responsible for his spiritual death? No, it was his sin. To blame God's law for his spiritual death would be like blaming criminal law for the resulting prison sentence, when all it did was confirm the offender as guilty. The law simply showed him the full extent of his sin before God, and how wretched sin itself was. And that's what it shows us too.

Furthermore, sin showed *itself* for what it is - producing death, not delight.

So then, sin is the problem. The law exposed that problem. And Christ dealt with our problem on the cross, by paying for our sin in our place. So how do we relate to sin now? Well, we read in chapter 6 that we're to reckon ourselves dead to it — that when it comes calling, we don't yield to it. For it is no longer king. However, as mentioned last week, while it isn't king, we do have a choice as to whether we let it reign like one. And the struggle of whether we yield to sin, or to God is a daily one.

And here in chapter 7, Paul now switches from past to present tense as he talks about his daily struggle with sin. And this will be all too familiar for us as Christians. While we don't have to sin, temptation to sin is still there. The old nature still flares up, looking for opportunity to sin.

We read...

Romans 7:14

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

So then, the law is spiritual - it's not just dealing with our actions, but our thoughts. It's not only adultery that's sin, but lust too. It's not just murder that is sin, but hate also. It's not just what we do with our actions, but our thoughts.

And though our sin is paid for, we still wrestle with it. Paul here describes himself as carnal. What does that mean? Well, he's not saying he isn't a Christian. But rather, *as a Christian* he and we have two ways to live; either in the flesh — that is carnality — or in the Spirit. And these two natures war against each other. James in his letter tells us that wars and fights come from *"desires for pleasure that war in your members"*. Paul further talks about this warfare in 2 Corinthians 10. And Peter writes in his first letter *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,"*.

The carnal Christian is the one that tries to come out on top of sin in the energy of his flesh. That is, through his own efforts - which are often small. And it's a bad strategy. The one that walks in the Spirit, however, is the one who, through the power of the Spirit, is able to walk worthy of their Saviour. Friends, you are never going to have an easy time trying to please God in your own strength. Actually, you'll fail if you try. And that's what Paul describes next, showing how futile our own efforts are, that we might also cry out — *"who will save me from this body of death?!"*.

He writes:

Romans 7:15

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.

We know this well, right? We genuinely want to do right things — to show love, hospitality, patience and kindness at all times. And we hate the idea of ourselves being selfish, argumentative, difficult, or rude. But which do we do?

Paul doesn't say anywhere that this is the sum total of your experience. But it is part of it. Do you hate the things you do, knowing those things are sin? That's a good sign — not that you do those things, but that you hate doing them. For dead men don't wrestle. The very fact that you wrestle with these things and not relish them - is evidence that you have been born again. You're no longer a slave to sin.

Romans 7:16

If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

That is, if our stance is that wrong things are wrong, but end up doing them anyway. We agree that the law is good - that it is right to condemn us.

Romans 7:17

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Is this an excuse? No it's explaining that it is our sin nature that does this. That's what we're like by default. This is the old man that we're supposed to put off. And Paul is saying, the problem isn't with the law - but with me.

Romans 7:18

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.

In our own strength, we're going to be overpowered by sin. Our passion will be stronger than our reason. And we'll find the same result as Paul:

Romans 7:19

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

Not only do we do the things we don't want to. But we don't do the things that we DO want to do. Whether it is reading our Bibles, getting up early to pray, or forming healthy spiritual habits - whether it be meeting with other Christians, or praying with our spouses.

Romans 7:20

Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Is Paul saying we are passengers? No. This is our sinful nature. OUR sinful nature, that is causing us trouble.

Romans 7:21

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

So, while we may have escaped the penalty of sin, and power of sin, we have not yet escaped the presence of it. While sin no longer calls the shots, it will make suggestions. And it will do it all-the-time. Our eyes will yearn to lust, our tongues will yearn to gossip, our hearts will long to covet. And in those moments we'll either yield to sin, or to God.

This is why we must bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It's why we *have* to go before the throne of grace to find help in our time of need. J Vernon McGee went as far as to say:

Every child of God, regardless of his state, must admit that in every act and in every moment evil is present with him. Failure to recognize this will eventually lead to shipwreck in the Christian life.

J Vernon McGee

Paul continues explaining this struggle...

Romans 7:22-23

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 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.

The inward man, the new birth has a love for God and the things of God. But our old nature, the old man, is warring against it, trying to take it captive.

So then, you either take your thoughts captive, or you are taken captive by them. And this isn't hypothetical - Paul is saying this is happening to him on a daily basis. Don't you know it to be true too? You make up your mind you are going to treat everyone kindly, and you are arguing before breakfast! You start your day eager to work hard, and before you know it you're falling into laziness. You sing on Sunday how much you want to please God - then come Monday morning you're joining in with the dirty jokes at school or in your office. You talk about purity, but Google for anything but.

Paul concludes:

Romans 7:24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

I once heard of a mum whose child was stood next to her in church, and as they sang Amazing Grace, the child turned and asked "Mama, what's a wretch? Are you a wretch?".

We don't like to think of it, but we are wretches. We say we love God, but what do our lives show?

This is the reality of every Christian. We want to do good, but in our own effort, our own strength we are still not able to do so! And worse than that, we find evil is present with us and we continue to sin. Look, this is not about the intellect. This is about the heart. That's how you can have a PHD that commits adultery and says "I don't know why or how this happened to me". Like, duh!? You played with fire, and got burnt. Paul sees the reality of this in his life and speaks with an air of exhaustion, asking "who will deliver me from this body of death?". What's he talking about? This is an analogy;

In Paul's day, if you were convicted of murder, you would be handed a death sentence - and sometimes the punishment would be for you to be strapped to the dead body of the person you had killed. Arm to arm, palm to palm, belly to belly, chest to chest, leg to leg. And then you'd be put out in the sun until you'd die from infection of this dead, putrid body. That's quite the picture.

But that's our reality spiritually. Paul's saying "I'm tied to this traitor within - and I can't get away! I'm tired of being strapped to the stinking, dirty, rotten, filthy old nature of mine." And so again, Paul asks, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

And here is the key. In verse 18 Paul had said "how to perform what is good I do not find". But now he has moved from how, to who. *Who* can deliver me from this body of death?

And the answer is immediate:

Romans 7:25a

I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Let God be praised that He has not only saved us, but He will also sanctify us. He will set us apart for Him, for His purposes, and to do His will. Not through our own efforts, but through Christ in us.

This is the hope we have. That not only do we have an eternity to look forward to in Heaven with our Saviour, but that we can live in the Spirit now - not having to let sin reign, not yielding to it. But yielding to God.

Paul concludes:

Romans 7:25b

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

We may want to please God, but our flesh is going to war against that. And the phrase “our flesh” is a helpful description – for while sin starts in our hearts, it certainly manifests itself in our physical frame. Our tongue, our words. Our faces, our glares, the attitude written in our expressions. Our sexual sin, our drunkenness, our gluttony, our abuse of drugs. Our lethargy and unwillingness to work, to serve, to help, to fellowship, to study. Even our sleep, when it turns to laziness.

Conclusion

As I wrap up then, I want to underline that you cannot be saved by your own efforts. But also you cannot be sanctified by your own efforts – it *has* to be Christ in you. We need to be filled with His Holy Spirit. Nothing else will do.

Next week, we’ll begin chapter 8 – and we’ll take a couple of weeks to get through that one incredible chapter, as that is what Paul has been building towards. I urge you; read ahead. Make some notes before we get there. Write down your questions. Think about the implications of what it says. It’s one of those chapters that I’m especially pleased is still there each time I open up my Bible.

Application questions

In closing, here’s a couple of questions to ponder this week:

- Are you bearing fruit to God?
 - Are you trying to please God through your own efforts?
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