

XLVII. Romans in Biblical Perspective  
*The Gospel of God*  
“The Law of God and the Gospel of God – Part 4”  
Romans 7:21-25  
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November 13, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Look with me now in Romans 7 as we come to this concluding yet very challenging text. This is the Word of God, which is inspired, infallible, in errant and eternal. Romans 7:7-25 says [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.*

[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.* [24] *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* [25] *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Romans 7 is a challenging text and you probably felt it as you read it. It seems to be the contradictory statements or the conflicting statements within it concerning the Christian and the Christian life, as Paul gives testimony to it and brings us to deal with this. The reason we have taken four studies in this is because Romans 7 is your life until Jesus comes. Romans 7 with its conflict that is in it, its seeming contradictions that are in it, has a clear message, but it is your life until Christ comes again. It's not all of your life. I'm going to end up with that statement at the end, and I want to enlarge that statement, but I want you to understand that Romans 7 is your life.

There are going to be people who come to you within the professing church and say, ‘no, this doesn't have to be your life and the reality is you can get a second blessing and leave all this behind. The reality is you can get a baptism of the Holy Spirit, leave all this behind. You can

have an experience and leave all this behind. There's a higher life that you can get to. Here's all you have to do; let go and let God.' Then there are those who will say, 'you got to work hard and help God.' There are going to be those who try to get you out of this conflict, but you need to know that you do not get out of this conflict. You are going to make progress in the midst of this Christian life, but even the progress is going to show you more entangling, embedded sin that you hadn't seen before, because the closer you get to the light, the better you see what's around it.

Romans 7 is telling you how you live to the glory of God and walking in the triumph of Christ in the midst of this. In Romans 1 through 3, God has revealed to us our natural condition in this world. We are born sinners, with a sin nature, and the wrath of God is revealed against all godliness and unrighteousness. But God out of grace, not out of any need for us, not because we deserve it, God has given a divine, supernatural solution to our natural situation. Here we are dead in our sins, helpless and hopeless, unwilling and unable to be saved and all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). There is no one who does good, not one. There are none who seek Him. None will or can come to Him (Romans 3:10-12). We are dead in our sins and the reason we sin is because we're born sinners.

Yet God has provided Good News. I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God to overcome my helplessness. Romans 1:16-17 says *[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* So how can I be right with God? After Paul gives us the desperate plight that we find ourselves, he then gives us Romans 4 and 5 with that glorious declaration in Romans 5:1, 'having been justified...'

Justified is a legal term. It's not forgiveness, it's not, not guilty. It stands in opposition to condemnation. Condemnation is guilty. Justification is the legal term of innocent. How can I who is guilty, be innocent? God has provided that solution in His Son, who went to the cross, took all of our sin, its judgment upon Himself, paid the penalty and said 'it is finished.' Then He gives us His righteousness. So I am not only forgiven, I'm innocent wrapped in the righteousness of Christ. Now I'm right with God, but that's not all.

Romans 6 tells me I am right in God and God in me. It tells me one of the purposes of the theology of baptism is to declare to us our union with Christ. Baptism is a naming moment. Ultimately, the believer is named by Christ. We are His and He is ours. We are in union with Christ. We are not only are we right with God, but Romans 6 tells us God resides right within you, that you are in Christ and Christ is in you. When Christ died for our sins, you were in Him and died to sin. When Christ was raised to the glory of God, you and I were raised for the glory of God to live unto God. We have been instructed that in Christ where sin abounds, God's grace much more abounds. I cannot out sin, God for God's grace is greater than my sin.

His grace provides for me a new record – I'm justified. It provides for me a new heart – I've been born again. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17). We who were dead are now alive in Christ. We who were estranged for Him are now right with Him – justification, and we who were dead in our sins are now alive, been born again so that we can see and enter the Kingdom of God and follow our King and our Savior. We have died to sin and now live unto Him. And where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

Then we come to Romans 7 which says, 'You're not under the law, but you're under grace.' We are no long under the weight of the law's condemnation, why? Jesus took it away. He paid for it and the demands of the law that you must do perfectly to be saved are no longer for

you are no longer under that since Jesus did it for you. His atoning death took my sins away. His perfect life clothes me with righteousness. Paul is saying now, ‘until you get to heaven, let’s get real.’ You have a perfect record on your behalf, in heaven. You’re written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, but you’re not perfect here. You have died to sin, but sin has not died to you. No longer does sin have dominion upon you. You are not under the dominion of sin, but under the dominion of grace. While you are not under the reign of sin and reigning sin has been broken, remaining sin is ever evident. You are not under the dominion of sin, but sin has not departed.

Sin’s desire is for you. Sin wants to kill you. It wants to kill your witness, your marriage, your family, your ministry and it has a place not of enthronement in your life because it no longer has dominion for its power has been broken, but it does have a place of residence in your life. It is there within you. Because of grace, the law is now under you and can be used for what God rightly intended it to be used. You’re not under the law because Jesus has set you free. You’re under grace by the power of the Spirit, and the work of Christ. You’ve been set free from sin’s penalty and power. You are now at war at the remaining sin within you. Then Paul in Romans 7 resorts to a personal testimony to illustrate this by the presence of the word “I” continually, not that he was bringing you to himself, but he was using himself to tell you about this law that you’re not under and how it is designed to be used in and with the Gospel.

Let’s get into the text. Romans 7:7 says [7] *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! (Why?) Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. (Notice the past tense here.) For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”*

Here Paul uses an anathema there, and ‘by no means’ is probably better would be translated, ‘God forbid it!’ The law is not sin. The law exposes, defines and reveals sin. What is sin? It is the transgression of God’s law in thought, word or deed – sins of omission, sins of commission. Paul picks one commandment says, and basically says until the law came, I didn’t call this sin. I just called it my life. If I want my neighbor’s wife or my neighbor’s business, I’ll go after it. If I can covet I can want all of those. The law comes and says that is coveting which leads to idolatry and that puts you under the wrath of God. God reveals that sin through the law. It wasn’t the law that sinned. Let’s continue.

Romans 7:8-9 says [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.*

The law also exposes the depth and breadth of that sin according to verse 8, where we have a sin nature that seeks inventive ways to covet. So the law exposes and reveals sin and that my human nature is now under the dominion of sin before I come to Christ. We don’t even notice or recognize sin or it being there apart from the law. It’s our life that we’ve made peace with. According to verse 9 when the sin came alive, now is the time to die to myself and come to Christ. Now the law has revealed to me, not only sin, my sin, my sinfulness, but it reveals there’s no hope within me. I die. The answer to my sin is not in me. There are no Nike Christians with the catch phrase, ‘Just do it.’ Something has to be done to us, for us and in us which we don’t deserve it. The first step is the law that not only reveals, but sends us away from ourselves, to the Savior who can pay the penalty, break the power, and lead us to grow in grace.

Romans 7:10-12 says [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.*

Yes, sin deceives us for it's happening all over the place. Think of this; 'Eve eat this fruit and you can be God.' 'Buy these jeans and everyone will watch you walk around.' We keep getting sold a bill of goods that try to tell us sin brings a life, but Scriptures tell us the wages of sin is death Romans 6:23). When you embrace that life of sin in rebellion against God, all is vanity. It's wind, it's nothing, it's empty and then you think that you just need to go do more sin yet that's deceptive. The reason Paul says the law is holy and sacred is because exposes sin, its sinfulness, our sin nature, the sinful induced impotency in my life, showing the deception in my life and sending me somewhere else away from myself and that's to Christ, because the answer isn't in me at all. I have to die to come to Christ. Let's continue in the text.

Romans 7:13-14 says *[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.*

As the law exposes my sin, it also shows my need for a Savior. The law cannot save me. I'm a sinner in the bondage of sin. I need a deliverer, someone to set me free. I am sinfully impotent in the matters of spirituality. That is why the law is holy and good – it exposes our sin, shows us our sin, and sends us to a Savior who alone can save us in our sins. The law has a spiritual use to show us the sin, its power, its penalties from which I need to be saved and it points me to the One who alone can save me. Now Paul shifts from the past of his testimony of the use of the law in his evangelism to seeing the use of the law in discipleship now that I'm converted. Let's see what else the law says.

Romans 7:15-16 says *[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.*

There has been controversy after controversy, and one needs to understand that Romans 7:7-13 is the use of the law in the life of Paul in his conversion while he was being evangelized, and at verse 14 and following, it moves from his past, the use of the law and the power of God in Paul's conversion, to the use of the law in discipleship and then to sanctification. If this is not understood in a commentary, I don't get it. Paul now comes to his present life. He now says, 'I find this law is now showing me the sin that is ruling yet in my life. I don't have reigning sin in my life, but I've got remaining sin in my life and the remaining sin in my life is more powerful than me. I still need Jesus in sanctification as much as I needed Him in my regeneration and my justification.' It's not I'm saved so I'll take over. It's I'm saved now Jesus, You take over. I say this because Paul is showing us his new nature.

Paul told us in Romans 3 that there is none who seek God, no one is good, no one understands for all have turned aside and he was showing us there that is our old sin nature under sin. Now he's describing a man that's been changed. Now he loves the law for he doesn't reject it. Now he wants what is good. Now he delights in the law. This is a new creation, but he's still in a old body and the old principles of sin, not the power reigning, but the principles of sin, are still remaining in his life. He says 'I do not understand my own actions. I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.' This is a changed life for he now hates sin, yet before he didn't even recognize sin because he was dead to sin before. This is the converted Paul and now he finds himself doing what he doesn't want to do. He wants to follow Jesus. He has a new want in his life because he has a new heart in his life. He has a new record in his life and a new nature. His human nature is now not under sin but has been redeemed. Now he wants to do what's good, and now he sees that he's not doing what he wants to do so what's happening?

Romans 7:16-17 says *[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.* It is indwelling sin, remaining sin, for the old man that hasn't left me yet because I haven't left this body yet and he will be there until you leave this body and get a new body. This is the battle. This is the fight that's yours in Christ until He either comes for you or you go to Him and receive a new body for the new heavens and the new earth. We are at war against remaining sin. Let's continue in the text.

Romans 7:18-20 says *[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.*

Why does Paul give the qualification about nothing good dwells in the flesh? It is because there is something good dwelling in him. What is good that is dwelling in the converted Paul or perhaps I should say who is good that is dwelling in the converted Paul? It's the Holy Spirit, but there's not only the residency of the Holy Spirit in the man with the new heart, the new record and the new life, there is also the old man of sin. The principle of sin is still within him. Sin's dominion has broken, but it's not departed, nor has sin's desire to occupy the rooms of this house in your life. Now, the one that was welcomed has become a squatter claiming squatter rights. He wants to do good according to verse 19 do this is a converted, Paul. Sin still has resident, not reigning but remaining sin in my life.

Romans 7:21-25 says *[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 (his body) another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. [24] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Here we see Paul saying his delight is in the Law of God through the Holy Spirit internally but in my flesh, there is this dwelling of sin that lies close at hand. Paul tells us that he has the law of redemption at work and this remaining law of sin that's within the members of his body. The reigning of grace is there in my mind, my heart and my soul, but in my body there is a war against me and it wants to make me captive, not to the law of God, but to the law of sin and rebellion for that's dwelling in body.

So, what about your life in Christ? It's Romans 7. Romans 7 is telling us the right use of the law and it gives it to us negatively; The law has no power to save us, and we have no power to use the law to save ourself. Then he gives us the right use of the law; the Gospel. The Gospel use of the law of God in discipleship is the sanctification of the believer in Christ, the new creation in Christ. The Gospel use of the law in sanctification and discipleship is the same as the Gospel use of the law of God in evangelism and the conversion of the sinner apart from Christ.

What was the use of the law? It exposed sin, sinfulness, the sin nature, and then sent you to Jesus. What is the Gospel use of the law in your sanctification as you are being discipled? It is to show you remaining sin. Prior in evangelism it showed you reigning sin. Now it shows you the remaining sin, and it shows you that sin is more powerful than you if you try to deal with it on your own. Therefore, the law shows remaining sin and your impotence to remove it from your life without going to Jesus Christ. You need Christ in sanctification every day. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Listen to Him in His Word, commune with Him in prayer. Stay fixed on Jesus. That's the key to the progress in the Christian life.

I wish I could say, as you progress this challenging conflict is going to dissipate. It's not. In fact, the closer you get to Jesus, the more sin remaining in your life you're going to see and how deeply entangling, embedded, entrenched sin is, which is why we always cry out, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." This is Paul's utterance, 'wretched man that I am!' One might be thinking, 'I'm not sure I'm going to be a Christian for I'm not into wretched.' Paul is also gloriously saved, but is in the battle. Another way Paul says this comes from I Timothy 1:15, 'I'm the chief of sinners.' Paul knows he's redeemed. He knows he saved, but the more he's growing in grace, the more he sees the sin that still remains within him.

In Romans 8 Paul will say the same thing, 'Wretched man that I am' but will say it like this; 'I am groaning within me, Jesus, come and deliver me,' even the chapter that's walking in the triumph of the Spirit – Romans 8. Paul will speak of his groaning in the flesh to be delivered. Then he answers the question of 'who will deliver me from this body of death, this old man, this remaining sin' for it is the same One who delivered you from its penalty and its power, Jesus. Jesus is the same One who will deliver you from its practices. So instead of remaining sin killing you, in Jesus you can kill that sin, step by step by step as you come to the preaching of the Word, as you spend time daily in the Word, as you commune in prayer, as you come to a sacrament that shows you the body and blood of Christ displayed in the elements and sends you back to Jesus so that you are resting in Him alone in your warfare against sin.

The law is one of the gifts He has given you to expose the sin, the remaining sin, and expose your own impotency to get rid of it apart from Christ and send you to Christ. This is the Gospel use of the law in discipleship so that you who love Him can now keep His commandments by killing sin and walking with Jesus. That's the war you're going to be in as you walk with Him in sanctification.

Your life as a Christian is the same life of Christianity until Jesus comes again. Has Jesus saved His people from the cross? Yes, Amen! Has Jesus risen and ascended with all authority given unto Him? Yes, and Amen. But we're still having to take the Gospel throughout the whole world and Satan has now entered terrorist warfare. There are pockets of resistance everywhere, to keep Jesus and we are going in with Gospel weapons to wipe them out and bring them to Jesus. The same thing is true in your life. Your Christian life is like Christianity; we have won the war but now we're going hedgerow by hedgerow, village by village, town by town, person by person to bring the lost to Christ.

Jesus has set you free from sin's penalty and power. Jesus is setting you free from sin's practice and when you go to be with Jesus, Romans 7 will be done for the presence of sin and the ability to sin will be gone. Remaining sin will be gone with your new body in a new heavens and a new earth. But until you get there, you still have remaining, embedded, entrenched and entangling sin that's in your life. One of the gifts to show it and send you to Jesus every day is the law of God for the Jesus whom you love is there to show it to you. That's one of the great blessings He has given to you.

Remember thought, there are pockets of resistance. Have you ever noticed how hard in a terrorist warfare it is to defeat the terrorist? It is because they are camouflaged, they don't wear uniforms. Satan doesn't show up with uniforms and neither does sin. It has to be exposed. That's why God calls preachers to expose sin and exalt the answer, Jesus. That's why the Word of God exposes sin and exalts Jesus. Terrorist warriors know the landscape. They know the terrain. Remaining sin in your life knows the terrain, knows the places to hide in your life. You need every day and every Lord's Day, the light shining to expose that sin, and send you to Jesus – in discipleship just as it happened in conversion.

What the law did for Paul to bring Him to Christ, now the law is being used to make sure he stays focused on Christ – Wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ (Romans 7:24-25). There's where Paul takes us now, but Romans 8. I can hardly wait to get there because the One who takes you to Jesus every day we will study for about five more studies – the Holy Spirit.

Right now, Paul has just uncovered one instrument for you – the right use of the law of God in the hands of the Spirit to keep you focused on Jesus. People try to explain the conflict in the Christian life of sometimes we do what we don't want to do and they try to tell you what you need is a second blessing. There isn't any second blessing. If you're a Christian, you have every blessing that are in the heavenly places in Christ. They may say you need a baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, for the Christian's baptism is with the Spirit and the Christian was baptized with the Spirit when they were converted for He signed and sealed. They may tell you that you need a higher life. No, there's the life where Christ is our life. I don't have a converted life and then a higher life. I have Christ has my life. They may say to let go and let God or take hold and help God. No, you stay fixed on Jesus through His Word and by His Spirit making use of the instruments that He's given you like the law of God.

The conflict is not that you have two hearts. The old heart has been cut out. You have a new heart. The conflict is not that you have two records. No, your old record has been expunged by the blood of Jesus. You have a new record which is the righteousness of Christ. It's not that you have two natures. You have a nature and prior to your conversion, it was under sin. Once you were converted, it's now under grace. You do have two residents – the Holy Spirit's dwelling and the previous owner is still trying to stay in the rooms. You now want to evict the old man every day, in every room and you set the table at the border you love – the One who now lives within you, the Holy Spirit. With that Spirit fixing you on Jesus, every day you're evicting the squatter, every day you're getting rid of sin and when you get him out of one room, you're going to find out he's in another room. You get him out of another room, you're going to find out he's there.

Again, so Romans 7 is with you for the rest of your life, until Jesus comes again, but Romans 5:1 is with you that says *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Romans 6 is with you and tells you that you are united to Christ. Christ is in you and you are in Christ and that is the hope of glory. Yes, you have this war of Romans 7 with remaining sin, knowing that reigning sin has been broken because of your union with Christ. Romans 8 is yours as He tells us in Romans 8:1, *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Romans 5, 6, and 8 enables us to take over Romans 7 for the glory of God and start killing sin and evicting sin out of our life until we go to be with Jesus and then He casts it into hell.

Until then, we welcome the new Resident, the new Owner, the Holy Spirit, who's not there for a fixer upper in your life. He's not there to do a makeover. He's there to do a takeover and get rid of sin. You will never perfectly do it. Don't let anyone take you to Romans 7 and tell you it will offer you sinless perfection. Paul wasn't perfect in his conduct on this side of glory, and neither will you be perfect this side of glory, but you can make progress. You will never be sinless, but by God's grace, you will sin less with your eyes fixed on Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Speak to the hearts of Your people. Father, all of this is by grace and for Your glory. Today, if you've not yet come to

Christ, I plead with you to come to Him. You might be thinking, 'I'm not sure I want that war.' Oh, yes, you do. What you want are the instruments to kill sin before it kills you and when you come to Christ He will deliver you from its power, its penalty and gives you the instruments to kill its presence. Then He brings you to glory where not only we will not sin, we will not be able to sin, and we will now see the Savior whom we behold by faith for that Day we see Him by sight, but come to Him this day. He, by His Spirit, will dwell within you so that you might follow Him. Kill sin and keep the commandments because you love Jesus who first loved us. God, please strengthen Your people. Please help us understand the Christian life in all of its dimensions, for Your glory and to God be the glory in Jesus' Name, Amen.