

ROMANS 7

Message 7

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Scripture: Romans 7:7

INTRO: I had planned to cover chapter 7 in a few messages. But the study it has required to understand the individual verses has been far beyond what I expected. If I gave this in a few messages I would have had to study a long time, only to give a small part of what I studied. So I threw all plans to the wind and decided to go through in detail, verse by verse. There are such great truths in this chapter for all Christians that I trust you will find it beneficial.

In the last message we looked at a modal of man based on Scripture. I sought to show what walking in the flesh is. In verse 6, which we were looking at, walking in the flesh is serving in oldness of the letter. And then I sought to show what walking in newness of the Spirit is. When we walk in newness of the Spirit the Holy Spirit controls our lives through our spirit. The basic tool He uses is the Bible. We must feed ourselves on the Word of God and then He can use it to guide our lives.

Now we come to verse 7 which says:

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."

Now we are entering a new section in this chapter. If you would study the personal pronouns you would find the plural "we" 3 times in the first 6 verses, and only 2 times in verses 7-25. You would find the pronoun "I" once in Romans 7:1-6 and 15 times in 7:7-25. In this passage we find Paul's personal account of his own experience. And the part of his life experience that is recorded here is, as I see it, his early life as a Christian.

In his early Christianity, like all new Christians must, he began to make his way through the wilderness. It is most expressly stated in verses 14-21. It goes like this:

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

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.

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

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

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.

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

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.

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

In verses 1-6 we have explained to us how the believer is released from the law. And we might then ask the question of verse 7: What shall we say then? Is the law sin? If it only aroused my evil passions and we have been freed from it, should we not throw it out then?

So in our second main point of chapter 7 Paul will show that though we have been freed from the law, the law has a continued benefit in the Christian's life.

So we will call this point:

B. The Believer's Benefit from the Law (7:7-25)

Intro: Let me briefly introduce the section from 7:7-25. One of the biggest questions students of this passage struggle with is, does this passage speak of Paul's experience before he was saved or after. We won't take time on that question other than to tell

you that I view it as speaking of Paul's experience after he was saved.

It is my understanding that what is in view in this chapter is the sanctification of the believer and the benefit the believer experiences from the law after salvation. God seeks to make His people holy. He wants us to become like Christ. And God will use the law in the life of the believer to do that. So before God can make us holy, He has to free us from the condemnation of the law. As long as I am under the condemnation of the law, I can never become holy. So Paul has explained in verses 1-6 how we have been freed from the law.

When once we become holy in any area of life, we are now not only justified, but we have now become actually righteous with regard to that issue. So I have given you the example of my smoking habit and how I am now as righteous as Christ with regard to smoking. But there are many other things to deal with yet, things in which yet need to learn to be like Christ.

1. The Explanation (7)

So, we begin in verse 7, where, as I see it, Paul explains the continued value of the law in the life of the believer. Paul will illustrate this from his own personal experience.

Verse 7 says:

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."

Now why does Paul raise the question as to whether the law is sin? Well, it has been viewed as a bad marriage partner from whom we needed to be delivered. So, having found Christ, we are now married to Him and that has freed us from the law.

And we have become dead to the law with this purpose, that we should bear fruit to God. Before we were saved, our sinful passions were stirred up by the law and we bore fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law. And that raises the question: Well, what shall we say then, is the law sin?

And once again we have the expression, *Certainly not! Mee genoito!* Why not? Well, because actually quite the opposite is true. So Paul says, "On the contrary." Paul is saying, "No, no. It is quite the opposite." And then he answers why it would not be a good idea to get rid of the law. He says: "*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.'*"

When he says he would not have known sin except through the law, as I see it, he is now speaking of his experience after he was saved. We will look at this further later, but after he is saved, the law discovers to him just how very horrible he is. He did not know this before. And so he says, "I would not have known sin except through the law." In other words the law has this continued value after one is saved to show one just how sinful one is inside.

Let me illustrate the truth he is trying to make here. Let us say you have this certain pain. It does not feel normal and you get concerned. But you are afraid to go to the doctor because of what he might find. Then it gets to the point where going to the doctor begins to look like a good idea. So you go. And he says, "We have found a tumor and we will check it out." So they do. And then he tells you that it is cancer. Then he says, "This tumor is also malignant and if you do not have it removed very quickly, we think you have at the most, two years to live."

Now that is the news we never want to hear. That only arouses more anxieties. Going to the doctor made things worse. So, should we come to the conclusion that the doctor is bad? Was it not he that gave me the bad news? Did he not arouse all kinds of new anxieties in me? And Paul would say, "On the contrary. You would not have known that you needed to look after this unless the doctor told you what the problem was."

Now you see, the only chance I have to live longer is if I find out what my pain is about. And if I do something about it, I will have even more pain, but in the end I will have a longer life.

So, when the law points out my sin, what shall I say then, is the law the problem? No! If the law had not pointed out my sin, I would not even have a chance to correct the problem. If the doctor had not told me the problem, I would not have lived much longer. If a new Christian does not begin to learn what dwells within, that Christian will never be sanctified.

If the law shows me up to be a sinner, is it the law's fault that I am a sinner? Many years ago I took a course on Romans by LE Maxwell and in it he gave this little story: "The lady chief of an African tribe when told that the face she saw in the mirror was her own demanded that the missionary give her the mirror. Smashing it on the ground she said, 'You will no more lie to me.'" So if the mirror says, "You are ugly," is it the mirror's fault?

Should we fault the law because it has driven sin in me out of hiding? I only become aware of what I am like inside by the law. Does that make the law bad? No, it shows me up for what I am. So Paul says in Ephesians that whatever makes manifest is light.

It is a big question among theologians as to what time of Paul's life is spoken of here. Does it

refer to when he was a child? Does it refer to when he was a Pharisee? Does it refer to before, or after he was saved? And I believe it refers to his life shortly after he was saved.

The law of God drives us to Christ before we are saved. It reveals to me that I am a sinner, and lost, and need a Saviour. If an unbeliever does not learn that he or she is a sinner, which is what the law does, they will never be saved. This is their only chance for salvation.

If the law does not show the new believer what he or she is like inside, then that person will never become personally holy. And in our verse it is the law's continued use in the life of a believer that is in view. What we must learn is what we are like in our sin nature, and then through tears and sorrows and repentance, we become like Christ through the work of the Spirit of God. There are no pretty or handsome faces when the new believer looks into God's mirror. There is enough ugliness to make anyone want to smash the mirror.

Now notice Paul's words when he says: *I would not have known sin except through the law.* Is he saying he would not have known there was such a thing as sin if there had been no law? That is clearly not what it means. The non-believer knows there is such a thing as sin without the law. Their conscience tells them there is. So what does he mean then? This is most important. He means, I believe, he would not have known his inner sin nature if it had not been for the law of God. He is saying, as I interpret it, he would not have known the depth of depravity within him, if it had not been for the law. The law had revealed to him that in his very own nature he was desperately wicked. Later he will say he knows that in his flesh, by which I think he means the sin nature, dwells not even one good thing. I am horrible inside. I would not have known this apart from the law.

I think Paul is saying, "Until I was a Christian, I did not really know what was inside of me. I did not know the extent of the sin nature I have indwelling in me. I became a Christian, and I thought everything would forever be better in my life. And then I learned the real nature of sin within me. I am corrupt and ugly inside. I have made this horrible discovery by the law. There are things in me I did not know were there. Now I know." So Paul says, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law."

We might say it like this: I would never have gotten to see what lurks inside of me; that is in my flesh, if it was not for the Word of God. Now I see how bad I am. What a thing to learn! Once we learn that, now there is hope for us to begin the process of sanctification! Before we learn that we will not grow in sanctification.

Then Paul goes on by saying something like this in verse 7, "Let me give you an example: I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" Now let me point something out in this verse. The first word translated "to know" is a different word than the second one translated "to know." This second word speaks of a full knowledge, a complete knowledge, an absolute knowledge.

Paul says:

For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

This is what I see here. Paul has gotten happily saved. He was rejoicing in the Lord. Having been a Pharisee, one who worked for his salvation by keeping the letter of the law, he has now been gloriously saved. He thought life from now on would be wonderful. And then one day he found himself coveting. He desired things he should not desire.

And with horror he realized there is something wrong inside! And he is thrown into a tailspin. In him dwells something very bad and it has been revealed to him, and it has been revealed by the law! Where is this desire coming from? And then he learns it is in his very own nature to be like that!

When he said he would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet" he learned something shocking about his inner being. He was a Christian now, and there, inside of him was this very wicked thing. And the law said, "Don't do that. That is wicked."

Does anyone know what commandment he is referring to? Turn to Exodus 20. Paul is speaking about one of the Ten Commandments. We begin in Exodus 20:1:

1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD
your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your
son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor
your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your
stranger who is within your gates.

11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and
the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and
rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed
the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your
days may be long upon the land which the LORD your
God is giving you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your
neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you
shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male
servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor
his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

The tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet."
Then it lists a number of things man is not to
covet, and then it adds, "...nor anything that is
your neighbors." Now we have to look at this word
'covet.' The Hebrew word is *chamad*. Its major
meaning is *to desire*. The NT word is *epithumia*.
Pastor Daryl spoke on the word "longsuffering." It
is the word *makrothumia*. The roots of these words
are the same. One of the words for anger is
described by this word *thumos*. The key idea of this
word is *passion*. And so the word in our text,
epithumia, is passions of desire.

In our verse, Paul says, "I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" Now this word translated *covetousness* could be translated like this: "I would not have known *strong desire* unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" So we would ask, "Well, is there anything wrong with strong desire? I strongly desire some things." When we desire that which is forbidden, it is wrong.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 22:15:

15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;

The word translated "covetousness" in our passage is used twice in this verse. Why is it translated differently then? When we desire that which is wrong, in English it is called lust or covetousness. When it is used for desiring things that are good or acceptable, then it is simply called desire.

So, to covet is to desire things that we should not desire. Now is it wrong to desire things that are wrong, if you don't do that wrong thing? Well, what that desire does, is it reveals to us the sin nature we have within us. When Paul says, "I would not have known sin except through the law," I think he is saying, "I would not have known the corruptness of what is in me if the law had not said, 'You shall not desire that.'"

Do you ever sense pangs of jealousy? Do you ever sense pangs of envy? That thing that caused you to be jealous or to envy reveals what is there in our sin nature. So someone will say, "What is wrong with this? I was born this way." That is true. That is what is wrong with it. That is why we need the new birth.

Now we could go through the Ten Commandments and say, "Well, I keep the law. I don't murder. I don't steal. I don't use the Lord's name in vain" etc... Turn to Matthew 19. A certain man came to Jesus to see what he had to do to have eternal life. We'll read from verse 16:

16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

18 He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'

19 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

There was something this man did not realize that Paul had learned. No doubt this man knew the commandment that he was not to covet. But he had not yet learned to know it of himself in his own heart. How do most rich people get rich? And this man had yet to learn what Paul had learned when he

said, "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" Paul had not only learned the mental truth of this sin, he had learned of it as residing in his own heart. He had gotten to see himself.

Verse 23:

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Is it possible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? There is only one answer. It is, "No." Oh there are efforts to explain how it is possible, but the answer is so simple it needs no explanation. A camel cannot go through the eye of a needle.

Verse 25:

25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

And how can God get a camel through the eye of a needle? How can a rich man be saved? Well, first, like everyone else, he must recognize his sinfulness and repent and be saved. And then, to sanctify this man and make him holy, he must learn that in him, that is in his flesh there is not even one good thing. He is wicked, through and through. Do you know how hard that is for rich men? Is it harder for rich men than poor men to come to that? Yes, much harder.

And when a rich man learns to know his inner sin nature, and he comes to where Paul was, though he was as big as a camel, he will now be small enough to pass through the eye of a needle. Only God can reduce a big man enough to get through the eye of a needle. And God will use the law to do that.

Let me give you another example. Turn to Philippians 3:

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

There is Paul the Pharisee, the trained, conservative, biblical, scholar. Concerning the righteousness of the law, he was blameless. Paul, you shall have no other gods before Me. I don't. You shall not steal. I don't. You shall not, I don't. You shall, I do etc... You shall not covet. I don't. Yes, Paul was a good man. Concerning the service of the letter of the law, you could not fault him.

Then he got converted. Then, as a new Christian, all of a sudden he found himself face to face with this command, "Thou shalt not covet." Listen now to the first commandment:

4 *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;*

5 *you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,*

"Oh," Paul the Pharisee would say, "I don't do that." Now listen to Colossians 3:5:

5 *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*

I quoted the KJV because of the word they have translated as "evil concupiscence." What is that? Well, look at Romans 7:5. The word here is modified by the word *sinful*, and thus called *sinful passions*. But then in Colossians 3:5 it has covetousness, and then it says that it is idolatry. And sometime, probably not long, after Paul's conversion he found himself an idolater. He was just like those who bow down to false gods. God's law had revealed something in him. And now he says, "I would not have known sin except the law said, 'You shall not covet.'" And there stood Paul, made naked before God by the law.

Commandment #2, verse 8:

8 *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

I do not know how Paul the Pharisee handled this command but the Pharisees had all kinds of ways

they could break this command without technically breaking it. And why did they have those ways? Because of wrong desires.

Next command:

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

But again, the Pharisees had their teaching of corbon, and they could get around this command. Why did they make up these ways to get around a command? Wrong desire. And what did Paul discover as a Christian?

The next command, Exodus 20:13:

13 "You shall not murder.

Turn to Matthew 5. We'll read verses 21-22:

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Well, Paul stood by when Christians were murdered. He was extremely angry with Christians. And his desire was to exterminate these people.

Exodus 20:14:

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

What did Jesus say? Matthew 5:27-28:

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 *"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Now the word translated "lust" is the word of our text. We could go through all of these. It is good for us to hear these things. You see what Paul learned? The desire itself is a revelation of that which dwells within.

Well, I read to you earlier from Philippians 3, where Paul gives his list of what he had to glory of in the flesh. We saw that concerning the righteousness of the law, that is the letter of the law, he was blameless. And then one day God struck him down as he was riding along with evil desires in his heart to persecute Christians.

Philippians 3:7-11 then goes on like this:

7 *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.*

8 *Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*

9 *and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*

10 *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*

11 *if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Here is his cry now, as a Christian: "Oh, that I might be found in Him not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that

which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Oh may that be our great *epithumia*, our great desire.

Look at verse 10. He now wants to know Christ and the power of the resurrection. The power of the resurrection gives the Christian victory over sin, even covetousness. And then he says, "that I may know the fellowship of His sufferings." Oh, do we want to know those? And what happens when you know the fellowship of His sufferings? You become conformed to His death. But when we come close to the fellowship of His sufferings, how many cry out, "No! Oh Lord no!"

Now I want us to look at one more thing in our verse. He says in verse 7: "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" It is the word "to know" in this sentence we want to look at. It is used in a tense that is rarely used, the past perfect tense. It shows that something happened before something else happened in the past.

What happened first is that he knew the law that said, "Thou shalt not covet." And then another event occurred in the past. He got to know something, and this is the word we mentioned earlier. He got to know by experience what this meant. Evil desires were there in his inner nature. That desire itself is a revelation of something dwelling within that needs to go.

Let me quote here from an earlier message:

"Now these sinful impulses, pushed by our sinful nature, which reside in the flesh, cause us to sin and thus bring forth fruit to death. James puts it like this in James 1:13:

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*

15 *Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

A temptation is when something comes before the Christian that one desires or longs for, but it is forbidden. God cannot desire something that is not good or right, nor will he ever tempt us with something that is not right. So what causes us to want something that is not right for us? It is our sin nature, of which Satan and demons make much use. Now desires, like various impulses, may be good or bad. When the desire is for that which is wrong, it is bad. James gives a seven step progress of sin. There is first a desire. Then there is enticement. What is that? The picture the words James used are that of a trap with bait on it. To be enticed is to be baited.

Then one is drawn away by a desire for the bait. Then when one reaches out to take the bait, then comes the snap, and one is caught. As soon as one is caught, sin is conceived. When desire and the bait come together in intimate embrace conception takes place and conception then gives birth to sin. The sin grows and brings about death," end quote.

Step 1, temptation. Step 2. Let desire take hold. Well, we might say, "It is not sin to desire that." Here is what I would say, it is not the temptation that is wrong. When we let the desire grow, now we find that sin dwells within us.

There is a saying that is most appropriate here. It is this: Nip it in the bud. The internet said this saying was first used in a play in the early 1600's. It speaks of an early frost that gets a bud before it can blossom. Sin must be nipped in the bud before it can blossom. That is right at the earliest stage. Once desire has taken hold now every sin becomes possible.

CONCL: We conclude for this time and we will complete verse 7 in the next message. So, since we have been delivered from the law and it was pictured as a bad marriage partner, shall we conclude that the law is sin? Don't even think it! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. Paul is not saying he would not have known that there was such a thing as sin. Everybody knows that, even the unbeliever.

I believe that from the whole context we learn that he is speaking of the sin nature. He would not have known the sin indwelling in him by his sin nature. To the lost, the law reveals that all are sinners. To the Christian, the law reveals the extent of sin lying there in one's sin nature.

When we, as new believers, begin to learn of this indwelling sin nature within each one of us, we enter the wilderness. How do I overcome this sin nature? How do I overcome the desire for things forbidden? I have told you about my cigarette smoking, but that is an easy sin to overcome compared to some desires we have with us. And these desires, though they may be good, can so easily go wrong.

The desire for revenge is not a wrong desire. But taking revenge on our own is what is wrong. We are to leave that to the Lord. And it is so very easy to let that desire go astray and it becomes wrong.

The Christian life is, as A.W. Tozer has said, a battleground, not a playground. And the area the battle is waged is in the heart, which we call the mind. All is won or lost there and we will see more of that yet.