

ROMANS 7

Message 8

Words: 6109

Nov. 8/20

Scripture: Romans 7:7-8

INTRO: It is a while since we were in Romans 7. In verses 1-3 Paul shows that through sin, man is married to the flesh. This is another way of speaking of the sin nature. Then he showed that through Christ, the flesh dies and we are married to Christ. As long as we were in the flesh, the law held us captive and the passions of sins worked in us by the law. But now, according to verse 6, we have been delivered from the law. The purpose of all this is so that we might serve in newness of Spirit.

But the new Christian goes through a very difficult experience in learning to live entirely by faith. This difficult experience, we have likened to Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. For the new Christian too, it is a wilderness experience. And now, in Romans 7 verse 7 we have entered, in my view, the wilderness experience of the new Christian. In the last message we began to look at that verse. It 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."

Paul is saying, "I would not have known how deep my depravity went except through the law." And then he illustrates what happened to him. He learned by experience that he was a covetous man. He desired things he should not desire. And I believe that right there, which would have been not too long after his salvation, he discovered something inside him that shocked him. The law revealed this to him about himself. But he learned that the law was not a bad thing because it revealed to him the actual state of things. He would never have known what he was like inside if it was not for the law. And in order to be sanctified, the believer must learn his particular sin nature.

You see, some, in their sin nature inherited through their father, are cheats. Some are thieves. Some are given to the modern gender issue sin. It is not a new sin. It is as old as

mankind. And here we could list sins without end. Most people are not given to all sins, but all are given to a number of those. Some people cannot understand why others are drawn to certain sins. Some of us might find certain sins extremely offensive, while others are so drawn to those things they cannot help themselves. Some, through their background and teaching are kept from many sins. But put any person into certain sinful environments, and something will come to life in them they had no idea was even there. Such is the sin nature.

The mirror that reveals what one actually looks like inside, is not a bad thing. The doctor, finding out one has a malignant tumor is not a bad doctor because he discovers that. He is good. The difference between the mirror and the doctor is the mirror, like the law, can do nothing to fix what is wrong. It can only reveal what is wrong. It is powerless to help.

1. The Explanation cont'd (7)

In the last message we left off in 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."

And here is what I propose: The Christian's wilderness experience begins when he or she begins to understand from the Word of God just how desperately, wicked he or she is within. This new understanding of how deep the sin nature has gone begins a bewildering experience for the new believer. Envy, jealousy, the desire of things one should not have, a sudden desire for things one might never have been troubled with before suddenly reveals this indwelling sin, which we call the sin nature. We may also call it the flesh, as does the Scripture.

In the experience of Israel, they had just come out of great danger. And when the sea closed up over Pharaoh and his army, they sang a great song of victory. So it is, especially with those who are

saved out of deep sin and have been under huge conviction. Oh what a glorious thing is salvation. And then, having thought that life would now be wonderful forever, they find themselves learning of the depth of the depravity within them. And it is here that Israel's 40 years of wandering began.

And right here, in this tangled wilderness of discovering how depraved we are it is helpful to understand that God wants to make us actually righteous, not just positionally righteous. He wants us to learn to live according to the law, not to get saved, but to become like Christ. He never set out the law that the lost would get saved by keeping it. Nor did He give the law that the Christian would be sanctified by keeping it. He gave the law to point out that we are lost sinners, and when we get saved, He wants us to learn to overcome the sin that is revealed. When we are driven to salvation, He saves us so that we will be enabled to keep the law. The law had the ability to point out my sin, "Thou shalt not covet." But it could not help me overcome coveting.

It is the condemnation of the law that drives me to Christ before I am saved. And after I am saved the law keeps driving me to Christ! So would we say the law was bad because it would not let us go without condemning what is wrong and pointing out what is right? No. If the law had not said what we did was a sin, we would not have known it was sin. If the law did not say, "Thou shalt not covet" we would not have known it was a sin to desire that which is another's. Only by learning what sin lies within us will we realize we need help.

If a highway had no sign that posted the speed limit, we would not know we were going too fast. The police could not fine me for something that had not been made known. But now that it was made known by being posted on a sign, I cannot plead innocence because I did not see the sign. The sign can tell me what I am doing wrong, if that is what I do, but it cannot help straighten out my sin nature.

So John Bunyan, the man who wrote "Pilgrim's Progress" said this:

To run and work **the law commands,**

But gives us neither feet nor hands.

But better news the gospel **brings,**

It bids us fly and **gives** us wings. - John Bunyan.

So what happens to the new believer? After he was gloriously saved he thought life would forever be wonderful. And then one finds that within one there is a sin nature that goes much deeper than one ever realized! Oh, what a horrible revelation! Oh what a blessed revelation!

Turn to Galatians 5. Here Paul explains the difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh. If you remember the overheads I showed you in a previous message, you will remember the body on one side with the five senses, and the spirit of man on the other side, and that we are to be operated by the Holy Spirit through our spirit.

We begin now in Galatians 5:16:

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Here is how it is. We either walk in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, or we live after the desires of the flesh.

Verse 17:

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

The things we wish to do is to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. And the flesh lusts, *epithumew*, desires in evil ways against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires against the flesh. And these two are opposites.

Verse 18:

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

That is the subject of our passage. We are freed from the letter of the law. It was this that bound the man who asked Jesus what he must do to be saved. He claimed to have kept the whole law, and yet he knew something was wrong. It is this which bound Paul the Pharisee. But then he learned what a wicked man he was within and now he desired nothing but the righteousness which is through faith.

Verse 19:

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,

What is adultery but a desire, a coveting of something forbidden?

Next:

fornication,

May I remind all internet users? Adultery. Fornication. Desire of the forbidden. Somewhere you will have seen the sign, "Do not feed the bears?" Here is the sign for us: Do not feed the desires of the flesh.

Next:

uncleanness,

The desire for all kinds of physical and moral uncleanness are signs of sin within.

lewdness,

Shameless conduct. When the foregoing sins are practiced in secret they eventually lead to shameless conduct among other people. That is an ugly desire. Our age sees it all.

Verses 20-21:

*20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions,
jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions,
dissensions, heresies,*

21 envy,

Envy. What is this? Vines says it is the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of another. Jealousy, a twin sin to envy is not listed here but it is a little different. Vines says, "...envy desires to deprive another of what he has..." So someone got the girlfriend or boyfriend or house or anything else that you wanted and you would like to deprive them of it. Jealousy, on the other hand, he says, "...desires to have the same sort of thing for itself."

What do these desires reveal? Indwelling sin. We go on:

murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And here is the upshot, it is the unholy desire within that is a revelation of what dwells in our own sin nature. It shows what potential dwells within us and we need to "nip it in the bud" until it does not have power over us.

2. The Problem (8-12)

And now we go on to verse 8. Verse 7 explained the value of the law for the Christian after one is saved. Though the Christian has been freed from the law's condemnation and he is no longer under the law, it still has value for the believer. But now we will look at the problem the law created for Paul after he was saved in verses 8-12.

We begin by reading verse 8:

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

Now you will recall from verse 7 that when Paul said he would not have known sin except through the law, I understood the word *sin* to refer to indwelling sin, or the sin nature, or the principle of sin. There is a difference between sin as an act, and sin as a principle. There is a difference between indwelling sin and sinning.

So let me picture the sin nature like this. For a number of years I cut down trees. If the tree skidders would hook up the trees at the stump end the aim was to always have all trees aimed in the same direction. If the trees were to be hooked up by the top end, they were always felled so that the top was in a trail that had been made through the bush.

Well, there is almost always a general lean to the trees, depending on from which direction the prevailing winds come. And that was the direction the trees were aimed if at all possible. Now if you had to cut down the trees against the general lean every tree had to be wedged over, or you had to push it over against its will. When you were trying to get trees to go against the lean, they always wanted to go in the wrong direction. You could get your saw pinched in the cut and if it was a big tree it was a lot of work to free your saw. The sin nature is like a tree which leans in the wrong direction. It always wants to go the wrong direction. It will never naturally go in the right direction.

Verse 8 now is evidence that the reference to sin in verse 7 refers to the sin nature. It says, "But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire." This is not talking about sin as an act. This is the principle of sin within. It is that which is there, always leaning in the direction of wrongdoing. Wrong desires are created through this sin principle from within. The sin nature is in a child

at conception. It is not sin as an act, but sin as a principle. And when a righteous standard is raised, my sin nature wants to kick in.

So how does this sin nature work within me? According to verse 8 it uses or takes opportunity by the commandments of God to produce evil in me! So look now at the word "opportunity." The original word is *aphormee*. And what is that? The online Bible says it is, and I quote: "a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations." The sin nature makes God's commandments the base of operations against me!

Let me explain this base of operations. I remember an event that took place in 1982. Argentinian forces invaded the British Falkland Islands and claimed sovereignty over them. They did not think Britain would travel 8,000 miles to defend this territory. Margaret Thatcher, the leader of Britain at that time, got a fleet of ships together in very short order and headed over to the islands.

Now when you want to take a country, and you do it from ships, you first establish what is called a beachhead. And what is a beachhead? It is an area taken on the beach of the country you are attacking. It is an *aphormee*, "a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations."

Now note, it does not say that the devil establishes this *aphormee* in us. Sin, or the sin nature does so. So where does the sin nature within us make its *aphormee*? It uses the commandments of God! The sin nature takes its opportunity by the commandment. This is why Paul said earlier, "What shall we say then, is the law sin?"

Now Paul says that the sin nature, setting up its base of operations in the commandments, produced in him all manner of *epithumia*, evil desires. You see, we might become a Christian, and be gloriously saved out of all kinds of sin and think like the

young man at some revival meetings who said, "Oh, I'm so glad it's all over." We might be like Israel, when the Egyptian army floated in death in the sea and they sang a wonderful song. They were delivered. But only a few days later, the sin nature among them became evident and they murmured. When we become Christians, the battle is not over, it has just begun.

When God's commandment comes to us, sin will set up camp in the commandment and produce or work all kinds of evil in us. The word translated "produced" means to work or to do. Look at a few other verses in this chapter that use the same word:

Romans 7:13 Has then what is good (the law) become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing <working> death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

Romans 7:15 For what I am doing <working>, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Romans 7:17 But now, it is no longer I who do <work> it, but sin that dwells in 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 <work> what is good I do not find.

Romans 7:20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do <work> it, but sin that dwells in me.

So the sin nature, using the commandment as a beachhead worked all kinds of *epithumia*, evil desire in Paul. Now all this evil desire that is worked up is evidence of what is inside me. How does sin, the sin nature work up sin in us? It is the rebellion that is aroused in us by the setting up of a righteous standard.

Now since we have had the Bible taught among our people for over 500 years, we do not find many things offensive. They may not raise up rebellion in us, unless we are living contrary to them. But bring the commandments to any culture where the Bible is not known, and it will raise up rebellion in almost everything. Let me demonstrate that. We now have entered a culture in our country where you can claim to be any gender you want. You can even claim to be a cat or anything else. And our society says that if you are a man and you feel you are a woman, you got the wrong body and you are a woman. And our country says we may not speak out against that or try to straighten them out. Now you take such persons and you read certain Scriptures to them and you will get a reaction, a reaction of rebellion. The law will stir up all kinds of rebellion.

Let me give an example related to Christians. We may be Christians and we have many things in common and things on which we might agree. But over the years we have let some things drop because of the stress on love over the last 100 years or so. And then you see a Christian beginning to live in deep sin. And everybody just loves them. They are nice to them and trying to win them back. There are Christians who are comforting and encouraging such professing Christians. And you say to this loving believer, "The Apostle Paul says we are to separate ourselves from sinning Christians."

The sin nature will very quickly set up an aphormee in that instruction. You will hear all manner of arguments why that Scripture does not mean what it says. And in their arguments, so called love will override clear biblical commands. This is not agape love, mind you. Agaptee love would obey the Word of God. Agapee love rejoices in the truth! The love they are talking about is not agape love, it is a feeling and emotion based love.

And so you say, "Let me read for you 1 Corinthians 5:10-11:

9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people (i.e. fornicators).

10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people (fornicators) of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

You set up a righteous standard like this to almost any Christian in our age, and you will meet a rebellion. You will hear all kinds of explanations why that verse can't mean what it seems to say. Why? It is an area where the sin nature has not been conquered by the teaching of God's Word. And if you are one who is obedient to such a standard, you will find Christians around you in strong opposition to this command.

And what does the sin nature do in those who do not like this standard you have shown from the Scriptures? It raises up a beachhead in that which the Bible plainly says, and from that beachhead rebellion will be aroused to bring resistance to the Word of God. And what so affects people? The standard you have pointed out has stepped on their toes. This is how the sin nature works.

When we have been brought into conformity to a righteous standard, and have acknowledged it is right and now agree with it, it no longer has that power in us. It can gain no beachhead. But until that happens, whenever that standard is met, it will meet with rebellion.

Let me take you to 1 Corinthians 15 for a moment. We go to verse 56 which says:

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

The first part is clear enough. It is sin that brings about death. But what of the words, "The strength of sin is the law"? Let me give you a personal example. I was given an assignment in class when I went to Bible school. He was the kind of teacher to whom you would fear to have to confess doing something wrong. He gave an assignment, which I did. But for some reason I did not realize we were not to use helps on this assignment. So I used commentaries and then, I don't know how, maybe somebody pointed it out, but I found out that we were not to use helps. And a feeling washed over my whole body that I can't describe. I had already done the assignment, and I think maybe it was turned in already. My mind fought this thing in every imaginable direction. Isaiah 51:20 talks about a wild bull caught in a net. You can imagine the thrashing that happens in such a net! That is what my mind was like. The strength, the energy of sin is the law. If only I had not been made aware.

It is amazing the gymnastics one's mind can do to make that which is wrong right. But take now what energy that same law produced on the students who obeyed. What did it do to them? Nothing!

Romans 4:15 says, "...because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression." Where there is no law, there is no transgression. So if my teacher had not said that we were not to use helps, I would have been perfectly fine. But now that there was a standard, and I had failed of it, it created a huge amount of energy.

When one has failed, and one takes care of the sin, an amazing thing happens. The wild bull is out of the net and grazes contentedly. No more thrashing. So one day I got up the courage and made an appointment with this teacher. In those days one could be disqualified for graduation by cheating. Well, the teacher probably saw that I had done this in all innocence and he accepted my repentance and let me go. And guess what? My mind was at rest. Peace came again.

Now you see, beyond all question, all over this community there are people who carry hidden things. Some may have forgotten many of those already. And then when the preacher preaches, and those things are brought back into memory, instead of dealing with sin they may dislike the preacher, or try to get rid of him, or leave for another church. And a church where sin is not exposed is a more peaceable place for such people.

The law works wrath. But if one bends one's stiff neck and one repents and learns to live in obedience, now one is free from the law. It works no energy. The conscience does not kick in when sin is preached or taught. The strength of sin is the law.

Now let me read our text once more:

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

Now what does the last sentence in this verse mean, "Apart from the law sin was dead"? Once more, as in the context, I take it to refer to the sin nature. When Paul said he would not have known sin apart from the law in verse 7, I see it as referring to his personal sin nature. Not everyone's sin nature is given to the same sins. It depends a lot on one's forefathers. Listen to Exodus 20:4-5:

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,

God says he will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. You say, "Well, that is unfair." I ask you fathers, have you seen your weaknesses in your children? Do you want generations to come to benefit from your life? Then live right and teach your children to live right. It takes a long time to work some things out of the sin nature of a family.

Now Paul says, "Apart from the law, sin was dead." I think we could say it like this: apart from the law, the sin nature was dormant." Don't tell Christians that the Bible says we are not to fellowship with sinning Christians and they will not be riled up.

In verse 7, when Paul says he would not have known sin except through the law, he is not saying he had no idea there was such a thing as sin unless the law had told him what sin was. I believe he is referring to his own indwelling sin or the sin nature. He learned what was in Him. God used the commandment regarding covetousness to show Paul what was in him. And now Paul goes on in verse 8 still speaking about sin, and in the context I believe he is still referring to the sin nature. And apart from the law, revealing in him what was there, he would not have known what he was like inside.

Maxwell, speaking of another verse in Romans 7 says, "God's people must first realize sinfulness in order to realize true holiness. Most of us have

made little or no discovery of our sinful self-centredness. Ours is but a shallow-pan, happified, experience where one says, 'How beautiful to have no desires, to let God desire for me!' Only to find out at every turn that we want everything in sight" (Page 275).

Paul had no idea what all was in him after he became a Christian, but God's faithful law revealed in him that which made him sick. He was a covetous man! And now he says that apart from the law sin was dead. I understand him to say that apart from the knowledge of what the law revealed in him, which he had now come to know, his own sin nature lay dormant. Until I knew what was in me, sin is dead. It is not that it was not there. It was there, but dormant.

Let me illustrate. When we get saved, in our sin nature are all kinds of things we have no idea exist there. When we get saved all seems wonderful, just like Israel, after Pharaoh's army drowned and they were across the Red Sea. But Israel had no idea how much of Egypt was in them, and that God would have to remove it from them. And to do so, he had to let them go through all kinds of difficult circumstances in the wilderness. And over and over again they murmured. Each of those circumstances revealed something in them they had no idea existed there until this circumstance came along.

Just so are we. And until circumstances come along that cause us to do that which the law says is not right, we have no idea what is in us. Dad, did you know you would have such a temper with your child? Mother, did you know what you could become like after having a number of children? How much do we have to learn about ourselves in order to become Christ-like?

And until we learn what is in us, and which is only exposed or revealed when the circumstances are right, sin is dead. And then comes some

circumstance and we learn something about ourselves we might find shocking. Have you learned some shocking things about yourself? Have you said, "I did not know I was like that?" But when I stole that, or when I exploded, or when I lied about some silly thing, or when I made an excuse for myself and felt sick later, I learned something about myself.

I do not want to run down my mother. In her older age I saw something in my mother that shocked me. When the right circumstance came along she could not hide what was actually dwelling within, and I was saddened to learn that. I have had to learn such things about myself. But when the sin nature within me is exposed the law says, "Guilty." And I hang my head in shame. Apart from the law, sin was dead. It lay there unexposed. For those who are not Christians and possibly for many Christians, these things can be exposed in our lives, and rather than repent, we defend our actions and sin is hidden a little deeper than before, and it could be that generations to come will be troubled with this rebellion.

Many times when a young believer is troubled about his or her failures when learning what is inside, we try to comfort them with all kinds of kindly advice and this advice is actually detrimental to their growth. Maxwell writes this:

"We as God's people are sometimes told never to look at ourselves or our own sinfulness. Since God sees us as justified persons 'not under law, but under grace,' our only need is to keep looking at Jesus. All of this may be good theoretical advice." He then quotes another who says: 'Tis well to be bidden to keep our eyes upon the Lord, but what shall we say when in every attempt to walk and to please God we find ourselves defeated by the power of indwelling sin? Do we in such an hour just keep looking to Jesus?'"

In my preaching I watched one man in particular. Oh, how he rejoiced when the Gospel was preached. Salvation by grace through faith, oh how he loved it. But as soon as the messages would go deeper, and sin was dealt with, and the process of sanctification or other deeper things were taught he no longer enjoyed church. He only wanted to get back to the Gospel.

So Maxwell writes, "Most of us have made little or no discovery of sinful self-centredness. Ours is but a shallow-pan, happified, experience where one says, 'How beautiful to have no desires, to let God desire for me! Only to find at every turn that we want everything in sight (Stifler).'"

And to quote him once more, "No matter how easily we try to dismiss sinning and self-centered saints with the assurance that they 'are not under law, but under grace,' the Holy Spirit will not dismiss us so lightly. He will use the tenth commandment to penetrate them with a shocking 'Thou shalt not covet' - shalt have no unholy desire—until they find themselves under conclusive conviction of original sin as against a law which is holy, and just, and good. But that conclusiveness of conviction only reaches its climax in our final section of Romans 7." (276-275).

So let me summarize with an illustration the last part of verse 8. It says, "Apart from the law, sin was dead." You have a piece of land you want to bring to where it will be fruitful. And so you clear the land and get rid of everything that is hindering you from seeding that land. And when you are ready, you seed it, and there, dormant in that soil were seeds of very bad weeds. Without clearing the land for seeding you would never have known those seeds were there. And not only that, but now they are reproducing like wildfire. Would you say, "Well, I should never have cleared that land." And so now you have the added task of getting rid of those weeds. And then you finally get rid of those weeds, and now, to your amazement, that land becomes very productive.

You see, the law has this potential of clearing everything you can see. And by doing so, has the potential of revealing a lot you can't see. Do you think God ever says, "Wow. I wish I had never saved that person!?" Sometimes we are amazed to see that He brings fruit out of some of the most unexpected people.

CONCL: So let us review a little. What chapter in the Bible so reveals the sin nature as Romans 7? What an exposure of indwelling sin! No time in man's history will ever so devastatingly reveal man's sin nature as the millennium. The Lord Jesus Christ will rule with %100 pure righteousness, and yet He will have to rule with a rod of iron. Why? Not because of the devil. The devil will be bound. It will be that man has an incurable sickness, a disease within that only salvation by grace through faith can fix.

So Romans 7:7 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."

In the first verses of this chapter the believer is bound by the law to the flesh, the sin nature. But when a lost person repents from sin and believes in Christ, he is set free from the law. So the question is, is the law sin? Answer? No! Without the law we could not have known sin. And in order to be saved, sin must be exposed in us. And so God gave His law to man so that sin might be exposed in us so that we might get saved. Paul then tells us that when he got saved the law revealed his sinful nature by the command, "You shall not covet." He was a Christian now and the law exposed to him what he was like on the inside.

So Romans 7:8 says:

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

The sin nature sets up its camp of attack in the commandments of God and produces all kinds of evil desire. In order to be saved from sin, sin must be exposed and dealt with, and only the law can expose it. But the law cannot deal with it, only the blood

of Christ can do that. But the sin nature sets up camp in the commandments and from there wages war against us.