

XLVI. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“The Law of God and the Gospel of God – Part 3”
Romans 7:13-25
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October 16, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

This is the Word of God, which is inspired, infallible, in errant and eternal. Romans 7:13-25 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. [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.

We are in Romans 7 is so crucial. We have already said that Romans 1 through 5, give us the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness and we are helpless and hopeless. Then from the end of Romans 3 through 5, God's solution to our predicament, which is the Gospel, that's the power of God and the righteousness of God and that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. What we couldn't do, God did for us, out of a unstoppable, unmerited love that He has sent to us to meet the requirements to save us so that we have now been set free. Then Paul says three things. One, we're not under the wrath of God. The wrath of God has been exhausted against our sin. It was all poured out upon Jesus in our place. Secondly, we're not under the dominion of sin any longer. It's no longer the tyrant. It's no longer reigning or having dominion for we now are under grace. Thirdly, we're no longer under the weight of the law. We're now under the grace of God that sets us free, not in the abolishment of the law, but in changing our relationship with the law. We're no longer in Adam married to the law. We are now in Christ; we've died and are married to Christ by grace. The law is dead in its hold over us, but now we are free to use it by grace in its Gospel use.

God's Gospel is the power of God that gives us a new heart – we're born again and God's Gospel is the righteousness of God to give us a new record so that we have peace with God, access to God, suffer for God, rejoice in our sufferings for God, and are sealed by God. Now, in all of these blessings that we have, we now get to our new life in Christ that is unfolded for us in Romans 6, 7 and 8. Romans 6 is an essential text. It is a crucial text because it gives us the foundation, the formation, and the motivation of our Gospel life in Christ. What is that? It is

that you are in Christ and Christ is in you. You are in union with Christ. When God saved you, He took away your sins. He gave you His righteousness. He caused you to be born again to a living hope and Jesus, from the right hand of the Father, is interceding for you and resides within you by His Holy Spirit. He dwells within you. Paul says 'this is the hope of glory.' Amen!

So to get this across, Paul reaches for the illustration of baptism. The theology of baptism is when Christ died for your sins, you died with Christ to your sins. So how can you live in sin? When Christ was raised to God, then you were raised to God in the newness of life to follow Christ. In Romans 6, you are declared to be dead to sin. You're done with sin definitively and the Christian baptism is that declaration, but sin is not done with you. Paul then says sin no longer reigns over you – in principle, its power and dominion is no longer the tyrant in your life. You have been delivered from its dominion. That dominion has been broken. You sin because you were born a sinner. Now God has set you free with a new record and a new heart and now you don't have to sin, but you will, because there's something called the principle of sin that still resides within you. Paul has a number of names for this and he's introducing it to us in the Book of Romans – the old man, the principle of remaining sin, the body of death, entangling sin, embedded sin, entrenched sin and it's there in our life, no longer in our heart, but in the members of our body.

The apostle Paul now takes this on. Romans 7 takes us from this essential understanding of we're not under the law but under grace, to build on it because you need to know who you are in Christ. In Christ, you are a new creation – you have a new record and a new heart. Paul says so many times 'do you not know' but he never says 'How do you feel?' With all due respect and with all patience displayed because people have displayed it with me – our Christian life can never be built on what we feel or what we think. We are people of the Book. We build our life on what God has revealed and that's what we know. We know that we are dead to sin and alive to God. We know we have a new heart and a new record. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). We have been justified by faith, we have peace with God and we have access to God (Romans 5:1-2). We're not separated from Him. Not only are we right with God, but God resides right within us. We know that.

Now Paul wants us to know something else. There's another resident in your Christian life that you have to deal with until you get to heaven. In heaven he's gone with no more presence of sin, but until you get there, you have to deal with remaining sin all the way to heaven. Its power has been broken, but its presence is real. Now Paul takes that on in Romans 7. He wants you to again understand your union with Christ and this time, instead of going to baptism, this time he illustrates it in marriage. We're married to someone legally as long as we live and if we engage in marital sexual relationships with someone else, then we are adulterers. But if that person dies, then that marriage legally is done. Therefore, we are not covenantally bound. We may be emotionally bound or relationally still bound, but we are not covenantally bound. We're not legally bound before God's law. Therefore, if we enter into another marriage and relationships with intimacy, there is no adultery. It is holy and sacred before God.

Paul said that's what happened to you for in Adam you were married to the law and its weight pressed you down. Now, in the second Adam, Christ, you have died and you have died not only to sin, but to the law and its weight upon you, because Christ came under the law for you to set you free. What has changed, is your relationship with the law. You're no longer married to it, you're married to grace in Christ. Now, what is the Gospel of Grace's right use of the law? Paul begins to tell us, because he's not only reminding us of what we need to know and be, he now is ready to deal with what we do. We don't do until we know, because what we know

is what sets us free to do what we do, not thinking we're working our way to heaven and salvation for we're working for our Savior. We're doing for our Savior. What we do is an act of worship, gratitude, love and thanksgiving and that does not make it less intense for that makes it all the more intense.

Now, what is that gracious use of the law married to Christ? Now the Apostle Paul, just like in Romans 6, he introduced us to his framing filter, his framing work of know – be – do and now in Romans 7, he does something else in his teaching. Paul not only uses illustrations but in Romans 7 he uses his personal testimony as an illustration and he's not giving you his testimony so that you it's his research material for his biography or to build doctrine. He is giving you his testimony to illustrate the doctrine of reigning sin canceled, remaining sin mortified and the challenge on mortifying and killing remaining sin as you put off the old man to put on the new one. That's what he's doing right now in this text.

Now I want to show you why I believe that. I believe that he is now using another teaching device from Romans 7:7 all the way to the end of the chapter. I want to show you a couple of things from this text. Number one, from Romans 7:7-25, all of the pronouns are personal pronouns except one.

Romans 7:7-12 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.* Does the use of personal pronouns continue in the next part? Yes.

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.*

The only exception is verse 14 where it uses the pronoun 'we' but it's still a first person pronoun, it's just a plural. So, not only are there personal pronouns, but they are all singular referring to him except for one first person that is plural – 'we' which includes him. Let's continue in the text.

Romans 7:15-21 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. [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.*

When you read a literary piece that consistently repeats the word 'I' we call this a testimony. It is not only a testimony, it is a personal testimony. It is not giving you his personal testimony to establish Christian doctrine. He is giving you his testimony to illustrate what he's trying to teach you. You also need to see that as he is giving this personal testimony, it takes on two different presentations for in Romans 7:7-13 Paul is speaking in the past tense. That is what he dealt with in the past but beginning in Romans 7:14 all the way to the end of the chapter, all the verbs are in the present tense except one and that's in Romans 7:24 when he says 'Who will deliver me in the future from this body of death?'

This is a teaching device. It is an illustration not to establish doctrine, not to give us biographical research material, not to give us an exhaustive declaration on how to live the Christian life, but to deal with something specific. What is Paul doing? He's answering the question; what does it mean to be not under law, but under grace and what is your new relationship with the law? Paul gives his testimony as he gives us his pre conversion in Romans 7:7-13. Is the law sin? No, it's not sin. I used to sinfully use the law. The law only becomes sin when we sinfully use it thinking the law has the power to justify us or save us. The law does not have power to justify us in salvation, but the law is holy, good, sacred and righteous. It's not sin. I'm the sinner. The law's holy, good, sacred and righteous use in this fallen world is to expose my sin not to save me from it. It has no power to save and I have no power to take the law to save myself. The law of God in the hands of the Spirit of God has been given to show me why I'm under the wrath of God, why I need to flee the wrath of God and to whom I need to go, not the law, but Jesus. It's a tutor to lead me there.

The law does five things. One it defines sin. You don't know what coveting was until the law came and said 'you shall not covet.' Secondly, it shows us the sinfulness of sin and the majesty of God, the Lawgiver. Number three, it shows us our sin under the wrath of that Holy God. Number four, it shows us the deceitfulness of sin to send us to the truth of God's grace. Number five, it reveals where the problem is – in my heart. I have a sin nature. When it does those five things by the Holy Spirit, we call that conviction. What's the next step? Confession. After that is repentance from sin, not to do better, but to Jesus Christ. Paul outlines this in his personal testimony in Romans 7:7-12. This is so exciting. Let's look back at the text.

Romans 7:13-14 says [13] *Did that which is good (referring to the law), 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.*

Why is there death? It is because of sin. Why is there sin? The sin doesn't come from the law, sin is revealed by the law. The sin comes from me, in my heart. Wait, I've been converted. I have a new record, a new heart and I'm not under the dominion of sin. I don't have to sin but I'm still sinning. Now Paul moves from the past tense of the right use of the law to lead us to conversion, salvation and justification. Now he shows us how to use the law in the Gospel through sanctification in which he goes to a testimony in the present tense.

There are those who have a difficult time with this and one of the reasons why is the difficulty of the text. Okay, I now understand the evangelistic use of the law as it defines sin, reveals my sin, reveals the sinfulness of sin and the holiness of God, reveals the deceitfulness of sins but the trustworthiness of grace and reveals my sin nature from which my sin is coming. But now I'm a Christian. I have a new heart. I have a new record. I'm a new creation in Christ, but I'm still sinning. Then Paul uses language that has been the cause of writing, I guess, thousands of commentaries on Romans and this is the text.

If you are a preacher, teacher or discipler that ever goes to Romans, you're always going to be asked – what do you think, is that Paul's pre conversion or post conversion in Roman 7? My answer is yes. It's his pre conversion testimony on the right use of the law in order to bring him to the Gospel and the Gospel use of the law in his conversion and then it's the right use of the law post conversion. Then they would say 'Why would you say that? That can't be post conversion.' If you adopt the position that I'm proposing to you this is what they're going to take you to – Romans 7:12-13 where God's law was used in rebellion instead of rightly, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure for, we know... The law is spiritual because it comes from God who is Spirit and it comes to address to our heart, mind, soul and spirit. It has a spiritual use. The law has a spiritual purpose from God to us but I am of the flesh. That's a technical term in the Bible, meaning living independent of God. It starts in Genesis 6 when all flesh has gone astray. It becomes a theological term right then to display man in rebellion against God.

Paul goes on in Romans 7 by saying 'for I am of the flesh sold under said. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.' 'Pastor that doesn't sound like you're out from under the dominion of sin and the reign of sin. How can this be post conversion?' Paul goes on 'I do what I do not want, I agree with the Law that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me.' I've got this issue of indwelling sin. My remaining sin is resident sin. It isn't reigning sin, but it is resident sin. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, meaning I don't bring anything to the table even after I'm saved.

Do you think that by God's grace you're a saint? Do you think that you're a sinner? I hope you answered the same for both. I'm a saint. I'm a sinner. I have God right within me and I have sin right within me and that means I'm at war till I get to heaven. The law nor me can do anything about it. I need grace. I need the power of God, not only in my regeneration, not only in my justification, but also in my sanctification.

Romans 7:19-20 says [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.*

I need to start coming to a conclusion so I want to give you some takeaways here and we'll pick back up on this in the next study. I want to tell you how this can be possible, why it is actual and why he is using this as a personal testimony to it. The reason this isn't about his pre conversion is because he says 'The good that I would do, I don't do.' How many of us want to do Biblically for God's glory what is good prior to our conversion? None of us. In fact, Paul has already told us pre conversion that there is none righteous and none who seek Him. So clearly this is a believer with a new record, a new heart and sin's guilt is gone, the wrath of God is exhausted and the power of sin has been broken, but there's something left in him on the way to glory and the question is; what's the use of the law in dealing with this?

Paul is being honest with us here. This remaining sin is more powerful than you, even born again you. It's more powerful than your new heart. It's more powerful than remembering your new record. So what do you do and how do you deal with this? Paul tells us we need God's grace and sanctification, just like you needed it in regeneration and justification and God's law, in its right use to bring you to salvation and justification, is used the same way in sanctification. It doesn't have the power to save you or justify you, nor does it have the power to sanctify you. You didn't have the power to use it to save yourself and justify yourself. You don't have internal power to use it to sanctify you. You still must have the power of God in the Gospel of grace and

that where you flee to and rely upon even as you endeavor to love that which is good and hate that which is sinful.

One commentator actually said this was Paul obviously backsliding - backslidden Christian. Most backslidden Christians never slid forward to start with. Paul is not a backslidden Christian here but if he is, then he still won at the end of his life when he identifies himself as the chief of all sinners where he is still seeing his sin on the edge of eternity. Notice Paul never says 'I'm the chief of saints.' Why is he doing that? It's because the longer you're a Christian, the more you see your sin and the more you see the sinfulness of it, and the more you love your Savior who is greater than it.

The first takeaway is the law has no power to justify us in salvation, and it has no power to sanctify us in sanctification. Paul wants to do what is good and he has the law which is spiritual. It tells me what's good. It shows me what is sin but I can't do it. To go onward, Christian soldier, I have to go backwards – know, be, do. I have to get back in my sanctification where I was for no good thing dwells inside me. I don't bring assets to this endeavor. I bring liabilities. I need God to deliver me. He's not a backslidden Christian wondering how to get out of this mess. Some even say this is mature Christianity where you walk around in despondency and despair.

There's a song I love except for one line which says 'Brokenness is what I long for.' Is Paul longing for brokenness? No, he's longing for deliverance. That's why he writes Roman 8. He doesn't stop at Romans 7. No, he's going to go to Roman 8 where he tells us how to walk in the Spirit and the triumph of Christ? But you have to first learn this lesson; the triumph of Christ is not found in your flesh. It's in the Spirit and it's in the Gospel use of God's law. That's how you get there. Brokenness is a blessing from God to bring us to an end of ourself and send us to Him so that we can know deliverance – wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death, thanks be to God, through Christ Jesus, our Lord (Romans 7:24).

The second takeaway is the Gospel use of the law, which is holy and spiritual in sanctification, is the same as in justification. How do you use the law in sanctification? The same way it was used to evangelize you. It's used in your discipleship. It defined sin for you. You may say 'I know the Ten Commandments.' I would so 'Oh no you don't.' I know Cindy. I love Cindy. I remember stepping out to marry Cindy. The Cindy I married is not the Cindy I know. I got a better deal than I ever thought I was getting. When you get married to Jesus, you're going to see things about Him you never knew before. You're going to look back, say, 'Yeah, that was sin.' But that's a pretty superficial look. I can now see a lot more of the sinfulness of sin and that's what's going to happen the rest of your life.

So the law in your sanctification defines the remaining sin in your life. The law in justification showed you your sin and reigning sin in your life. The law in sanctification shows you sin and the remaining sin in your life. The Gospel use of the law reveals sin, defines sin and reveals the sinfulness and deceitfulness of your remaining sin. It reveals the origin of your remaining sin. In pre conversion it revealed the sinfulness of your sin and its origin from your sin nature. Now in sanctification, the law reveals the origin of your sin in the old man that's left.

I will leave you with something that is controversial. I don't believe you have two natures. You might be thinking 'Harry, that's what you've been teaching us.' No, I have not. I believe when you come to Jesus, you don't have two hearts, you have one and the old one has been cut out. I don't believe you have two records. I think you have one – a new record. You have a new heart. The old record has been erased. The old heart has been nailed to the cross. You are now a new creation in Christ Jesus. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come.

So what do we have? We have two residents. You have two living realities in you. The Holy Spirit resides in you – you're a saint. And you still have remaining sin residing in you until we get to glorification and its presence is removed. So you're at war until you get home – to heaven. The Holy Spirit is greater than the remaining sin, because the Holy Spirit doesn't send you to do better, the Holy Spirit sends you to Jesus every single day – know, be, do.

Know that you have a new record and a new heart. Know that you have a new life in Christ, but in that new life in Christ you have two residents until you get to glory and when you get to glory, then the other resident will be eradicated because you'll get a new body. This old man resides in my old way of thinking, my old habits of sin – it's there, entrenched and embedded. I need the Holy Spirit with the Law of God bringing me to the Gospel of Grace, to dislodge that embedded sin, that entrenched sin and that entangling sin. I can't do it myself and the law can't do it for me. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ for He will deliver us from this body of death day by day in sanctification and gloriously triumphant at glorification. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Receive our thanks for meeting with us, Father. I ask You to help Your people dig deep into Your Word even now. God, these are big deals, big issues. Please let us have done with lesser things. Please let us get liberated from our pettiness, from our defeatism. Help us to see reality not only that remaining sin is greater than me, but that grace is greater than that sin from Jesus. And the law is spiritual, not only to bring me to Jesus, but to show me how to follow Jesus. But only Jesus by His Spirit can enable me to kill that old man and put on the new one. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.