

The Law After Conversion

Studies in Romans

By Richard Warmack

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Bible Text: Romans 7:14-16

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Grace Baptist Church

c/o Richard Warmack

900 Wedgewood Dr.

Ruston, LA 71270

Website: www.gracebaptistofruston.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/graceofruston

Ok. I would like for you to take your Bibles with me this morning and turn back to Romans chapter seven. I have always enjoyed, as you well know, teaching through the book of Romans. I have done it enough times in the years that we have been together. But it seems like every time that I go back through and I study it again in preparation to preach the gospel to you, different things come to light.

You know, this is a book that is alive and these Scriptures are alive and we are able to gather and glean more truth from it so that we gain confidence and assurance. And last week, especially when we talk about this chapter, Romans seven, last week we talked about the law before conversion.

Now there are two ways that we look at this thing, the way the law viewed us before Christ was revealed in us and the way that the law views us after Christ accomplished his obedience unto death at Calvary. And, listen. They are two different distinct studies. We were by nature children of wrath even as others. We were in Adam, born, lost, condemned, under the guilt, penalty and condemnation of God's law and justice. Christ came. Christ lived. Christ obeyed. Christ died and Christ cried, "It is finished," and we were once and for all, all of the elect of all of the ages from Adam all the way to whoever the last person is that will walk not his planet, were set free from the law of sin and death.

So there are two distinct positions, one before the law, that is to say before Christ came and satisfied God's law and justice and after the law. But now we are looking in this thing in relationship to the way our minds view these things. You and I, we were born after the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and we are born dead in trespasses and sins, no ifs, ands or buts about it. We were born into this world. We were born with an Adamic nature and we were born with this sinful principle that Paul is so clearly revealing to us that still has such a terrible draw on our heart, mind and will and understanding, so much so that Paul says at the end of this seventh chapter, "The good I want to do I don't do and the evil I don't want to do, that is exactly what I find myself doing."

Now we are in a warfare. We are in a battle and this battle that you and I are called into as God reveals his Son in us is the hope and cause and ground of our salvation, brings this battle to the forefront.

And beginning here where we want to start at this morning in verse 14 on down to the end of this chapter verse 25, the apostle Paul deals with the power of sin. And that is so important that we understand it.

Now get this in your mind this morning. Justified sinners we are dead. We have already talked about it in Romans chapter six. We are dead to the guilt of sin, totally and completely. We cannot be charged with any sin.

And I know that sounds to the world, they say, "You say that, you make that kind of a statement. People are going to do what they want to do."

And as I have told you for years, you do what you want to do anyhow, do we not?

They raise those stupid straw men up that are just their vain imagination and understanding.

Listen. When they bring that kind of a thing up it just shows the natural darkness and depravity of their own hearts and mind. They don't understand the true nature of sin. Most people don't. I dare say most of the people I know friend, family and foe don't have a clue what sin is. They think sin is something that you do. We know based on God's Scripture sin is something that we are. You take us out of this world, John, there is no sin. Do you realize that? Apart from man in this world there is no sin. So sin is not what we do. Sin is what we are.

Now the evidences of our sinfulness do reflect themselves in what we do. But we are dead totally and completely and entirely and eternally to the guilt of sin. Paul states it very clearly when he comes out of chapter seven into chapter eight.

He says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

And if that is not clear enough at the end of chapter eight he said, "For I am persuaded, I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

As we talked about this morning in the Sunday Bible hour, Paul said to those Hebrew believers, "Where remission of these are," he said the verse before that, "Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more."

And immediately on the heel of that kind of a great statement he says, "Where remission of these are, what? Our iniquities and our sins being remembered no more, there is no more offering for sin."

We can't do anything to correct today what we didn't do yesterday. Now you just can't do it.

Now I know the religious world things it is kind of like a scale and balance thing and if you mess up yesterday, what do you do today? We pile more good stuff on this side and the scale comes with... We are trying to get the scale back to, you know, where the little center mark is right where it is supposed to be. And we can't do that. No, we can't, because here is the problem. We are not dead. Though we are dead to the guilt of sin, we are not dead to the power of sin. And you won't be in this life.

Because notice how Paul starts off verse 14.

“For we know...”

And do you see that? He says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal.”

Do you see that? It is Paul. It is the apostle Paul. He says, “I am carnal, sold under sin.”

In other words, when he uses this statement, “For we know...” in other words he is saying this. “We are convinced. We are convinced.”

And only a believer knows from personal experience that God's law is spiritual. Now that is... the world doesn't. They think the law is dealt with outward facts and figures, that it deals with what we do or do not do. But you as a justified saint this morning, as a child of God, you know that the law not only forbids murder and theft and lying and stealing, what else does it forbid? It forbids unlawful thoughts. Now the world doesn't think about it like that. It forbids unlawful motives.

Why are you here this morning? Why do you come to church? The law actually deals with unlawful desires, covetousness. Paul said in this chapter, “I had not known covetousness except the law said what? Thou shalt not covet.”

Now what did Paul covet? What was his covetousness? What was he doing? He was desiring to work out a righteousness on his own. He was seeking to reconcile himself to God based on his obedience to the law. Coveting is desiring something that you don't have by nature, that is not yours.

If you coveted a man's wife or you coveted his wealth, you want what he has got. And Paul coveted to be like Saul of Tarsus, not Paul. Saul of Tarsus coveted to be like God. You know, we know that we are carnal when we compare our character and our conduct to the Lord Jesus Christ. We know we are carnal in our character and conduct to the... when we think about it we compare ourselves to the strict spirituality of God's law which is the perfect exhibited, perfectly exhibited in the character and conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ during his earthly walk.

See, you want to compare yourself to somebody? Don't compare yourself to me. Don't compare yourself to your mom or your daddy. Who do we compare ourselves to? You want the example of what we need to be to go to heaven? Christ. That is the example.

And, see, it is only when we compare ourselves to Christ that we can truly see the remaining power. See, I can feel pretty good about myself as long as I don't compare myself to Christ. Because, you know, you always hear people make statements like this.

I don't know why I am stuttering. Maybe I overdid it yesterday.

They make statements like this. "Well, I might be a sinner, but I am not as bad as he or she is."

That is the wrong comparison. You see, the problem is they are in the same boat you are in.

That is like the pot calling the kettle black, there. What is the ultimate destiny of that one you are comparing yourself to? Are they going to get to heaven? Are they going to hell because they are worse than you, just a little worse?

It always comes back to this thing of ideas and notions. How much less do you have to do to be imperfect? He said, "Be ye therefore perfect," what makes you imperfect? At what point do you draw the line and say, "Well, I slipped off of perfection"? Because that is the command. That is the demand. That is the requirement. Be perfect.

Well, I am going to tell you what. I might be a country boy with country ways and not real educated, but I know this much. Anything, one shred less than perfect, one shred is imperfect. No degrees. And what is sin? Sin is missing the mark. What is the mark? Perfection. You miss it one iota...

You can shoot an arrow. That is what it comes from. It comes from that idea of shooting an arrow at a target. And you shoot the arrow and you have got to compensate because the arrow because of gravity what is going to happen? It is going to fall when you shoot it. The mark is in the center. The bull's eye is what everybody shoots. I never heard of anybody playing darts or anybody else say, "Well, I am shooting for..."

And that is embarrassing when you play darts or something if you pick up the darts, you know, you think you are pretty skilled and you throw it and you think it is going and it hits, you know, down at the ground.

Well, I know your target and my target and to take that dart, look like a fool as I throw it at the ground. We are shooting for the mark. And so you shoot the arrow and you let it go and it goes down and it falls in the area below the target, the bull's eye. Now would you tell everybody, "Well, I hit a bull's eye or I almost hit it."

Almost hit the bull's eye is to miss, is it not? And I think that thing of almost only counts in hand grenades and horseshoes. You know? It is not that you tried. You got to hit the mark. And he that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, it is sin.

And so when we compare ourselves to Christ, when we put ourselves not alongside some other sinner, but we compare ourselves to him who is holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, then we see for the first time just how sinful we are.

Do you want to see how much your love is? Compare it to Christ. That is the problem.

Now notice what he says here.

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

What a statement for the apostle Paul to make. He says, “I am carnal.”

You get some of these guys in these ivory pulpits to make that kind of a statement, huh? I want to tell you what. You know, I am grateful that you understand and you recognize and you realize that your pastor is a sinner saved by grace. And I don't think you think, well, I wish he wouldn't say he is a sinner. But I tell you what? There is a lot of people in a lot of churches, they wouldn't tolerate their preacher talking about being a sinner. So do you know what they think? Most people? They think their preacher is somebody.

Now I tell you. I hope you don't think I am somebody, but I hope you think who we both serve and love is everybody, Christ. He is everything. See, that is the thing, because we get caught up with men. Don't get caught up with me. You hear me? I am a man. I am subject to fall just like any other person. You get caught up with him and you are saved and I am saved and we are. But yet here the apostle Paul says, “I am carnal, sold under sin.”

Now what does he mean here? That is scary when you think about it. This man who writes this.

Listen, to understand it, this phrase that he uses refers exclusively to his personal character and conduct and it reveals to you and to me the power of sin that binds us down and keeps us from loving God supremely and loving his neighbor as himself.

Paul's comparison here is this. I do not love God like I should. That is what he is saying. I am carnal, sold under sin. What? I know that God requires I love him perfectly and love my neighbor which includes my enemy as myself. And he says what? I missed it. So I am carnal before God. Now I might impress you, but as far as God's impression with me, I am not getting there based on what I have done.

Now remember these phrases back over in chapter six. He said, “You are dead to sin, right? He said that we are free from sin.” Good truth. He said, “We are...”

Listen. He said, "We are dead to the law," in chapter seven verse one through three. He says we are delivered from the law.

Now those are important phrases and all of these exclude our personal character and conduct. You are dead to the law. You are dead to sin. You are delivered from the law and you are free from sin. That is not talking about your character and your conduct, but it refers exclusively to your state or your stand or your position based solely on one great grand truth. What? The imputed righteousness of Christ. That is the only way I can be free from the law, oh happy condition. Jesus hath bled and there is remission. How? In him.

That is the only way that I can be dead to sin and it have no claim on me. So here we see the vital difference between the guilt of sin which was totally removed from every elect sinner when Christ cried on the cross, "It is finished," when he justified all the elect. And that sense of sin that even you and I as justified sinners still has in our lives as we see how far we continually fall short of the standard of God's law and God's justice.

Now before we continue here, we need to discuss some of the particulars concerning what the apostle Paul is going to use. He is uses some phrases here in chapter seven starting where we are at today and he goes on over into chapter eight and it causes a lot of confusion to a lot of simple minded people. It is two words that he is going to use over and over and over again through these chapters that we are about to go through. He talks about the flesh and the spirit.

Now we have got to understand what he means by flesh and what he understands by the spirit, what it means by the spirit.

Now most commentators when they get here in Romans chapter seven they say Paul is talking about two distinct natures of believers. And that is wrong language. If we think that we have got two distinct natures, you know, it comes from this idea that we see in the modern world that we live in. You see them movies all the time. Somebody is presented with a chance to do good or do evil. And what do they always have sitting on their shoulders? They have got a little angel over on this side and they have got a little devil with a pitchfork over on this side. And one is whispering in this ear and the other one is whispering in this ear. And it is kind of like if we go that way that we have got distinct natures, two distinct... it is almost like we are psychotic. It is where we can get away and say, "Well, it is not me that did it. It is that bad part of me that did it." It is a way to avoid responsibility.

We have one nature, Bart, just one. And do you know what nature it is? It is human nature. That is all we have got.

Now, we know that true humanity consists of what? It consists of my body and my soul. And we know that physical death, what is physical? When you die one day, what is that? Physical death is the temporary separation of what? Your soul from your body. That is

what death is. The body in this thing we call death, the body ceases and becomes lifeless and has no feeling of whatsoever of any kind whatsoever.

So the soul then, what is the soul? The soul is that faculty of humanity that includes our mind and our affection and our will and it gives us our personality. You see, I live in a body. If you are older now and you can relate to this and I know I can relate to this. Do you feel any different in your spirit and soul than you did when you were 20? Huh? You talk with people who are old, really old, in their 90s. And they in their mind what can they still do? They still think that they can still remember and think and they want to do things that, well, what is the hold back? That old body, see?

So that... the soul... what I am is not just body. You know me because, I mean, if I came in and had a face change, you wouldn't know me, but the soul would still be the same. It would be me. If I had some kind of horrible accident where it disfigured me to where you couldn't even recognize me anymore, where... who is Richard? Richard is not this body. Richard is what? It is in here. It is my mind, my understanding, my will. We don't have two souls. We don't have two natures operating in one person. A believing sinner doesn't have a... he doesn't have two natures. He has got two opposing principles and both those principles, what are they doing? They seek to influence our nature or our soul. And these principles are what most commentators talk about and refer to as natures.

Now we are born into this world by natural generation and our nature that we get from Adam, it is totally dominated by an evil principle that we got from our father Adam. And that evil principle it was infused or imparted to us and listen. It totally controls our nature and our soul. That is why you didn't have to teach me to steal or lie or do those things that children do by nature. It is just in us. And this evil principle, it promotes and exalts itself above all and it has no fear of God before its eyes, that old evil principle. And that evil principle or corrupt principle, it controls my mind and my will and my soul so much so that by nature we love darkness and hate the light. If you don't believe me, go read John chapter three. It causes us to call evil good and good evil, because you know where it gets its energy from? It gets its energy from Satan.

And if you want scriptural evidence of that, go back over and read Romans chapter three verses 11 through 18. There is none good, no not one by nature.

Well, Christ Jesus our substitute representative, his human nature, where was it formed? It was formed in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit of God in order that you know what he didn't partake of? He didn't get an Adamic nature. Now he was made like us in all ways without sin. And his nature, that nature that he got that was created in his womb, that holy thing that God created in Mary's womb, it dominated him, that holy principle which always had regard. Who did Christ always think of? The Father.

He said, "I do the Father's will."

Now we don't do that. You understand that? Now that is the difference between us and Christ. Christ always did the will of the Father. Now we don't. We don't even do it

now. Do we? I mean, let's just be honest. Christ loved light and he hated darkness. We are just the opposite by nature. The principle that he had was energized by the Holy Spirit.

Now listen to me. In regeneration and conversion that same holy principle that Christ had by nature it is imparted into us in regeneration and conversion and immediately what happens? It dominates our heart and our mind and our understanding so for the first time what becomes essential and important to us? The doctrine of Christ.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter four, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost in whom the God of this world hath blinded their minds lest they see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

And so that holy principle that is imparted to us, it immediately dominates us and we receive the truth of the gospel which glorifies God and exalts Christ and excludes all boasting. And by this holy principle reigning in our hearts we are brought to true faith, we are brought to true repentance and we are brought to where we turn our backs on former idolatry when we love the preaching of the gospel.'

This new principle of holiness, it reigns. Do you hear me? He said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." For what are you under? You are not under law. You are under grace.

And he told us, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies."

Now that old principle's reign is over. He has told us we are not under the law. We are under grace. He tells us, "Don't let it reign." Its reign is over, but listen. It is still a powerful principle that exerts its influence on our hearts so that like Paul says here we cannot do what we want to do.

What do you want to do this morning? What do you want to do every morning when you get up as a child of God? Don't you want to love God? Don't you want to spend today and every day that you live loving God with all your heart, mind and soul? Don't you want to love your neighbor as yourself? Don't you want to be able to be a person that is not filled with prejudice and pride and envy and strife and resentment toward people? Don't you want that? I do. I truly can say I want to love God. I do. And I truly can say, just like you as a child of God, I want to love my neighbor.

But Paul says what? I cannot do it. It is not an excuse. That old evil principle is the constant source of our sin and we will not be sinless until that evil principle is removed.

Now notice what he says verse 15 of our text.

"For that which I do I allow not. For what I would, that do I not. But what I hate that do I. If then I do that which I would not I consent unto the law that it is good."

That is the hardest two verses in the book of Romans to read. It is.

Paul uses a personal pronoun here. He says what? He is not talking about you. He wants you to understand who is he dealing with? He is dealing with his own personal experience. I says, "I." Right?

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I..."

He includes himself with us. He says, "I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not. But what I..."

Do you see that? Over and over and over again he uses a personal pronoun, I, not we. He is describing his own personal daily walk to show the power of sin that even remains in the greatest of God's saints. And if he had that problem, what about us? Huh? He was there. I have never been caught up to the third heaven. Have you? He was. He got his gospel straight from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have heard, right? I have heard his voice in it. But he actually heard our Lord.

And, see, that is what he is showing us here is that he reveals it. Even a mature apostle like the apostle Paul indwelt by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit now could never be judged righteous and could never be judged holy based on his personal character and conduct.

He says, "For what I would," in other words, "What I desire to do," have his personal character and conduct perfectly subjected to God's law in heart, word and deed, but then what did he say? I come up short.

What is coming up short? What is it? Well, I just missed a little bit.

No. To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, coming up short is just call it what it is. It is sin. Right?

But I tell a lot of religionists, they who would deny that God justified all of his elect based solely on the imputed righteousness of Christ at Calvary with no consideration of their character and conduct in any way to any degree, they say, "Well, really what Paul was talking about here, he is writing about his experience before conversion."

They claim that Christians... they like to make this kind of statement. Christians aren't under the power of sin in any way.

What does the Scripture say? I don't care what they say. What does Scripture say?

Paul says, "The good I want to do I don't do and the evil I don't want to do, what? That is exactly what I find myself doing."

They like to make statements like this. They say... it comes from this idea of false view of sanctification. They claim that Christians rise above all this to a higher life.

If we just... now that... and they will usually use these catch phrases like you are not growing in grace, you don't know grace. I ain't never had anybody explain that to me, can you? I mean really explain it to me. What do they mean by that? Some even say... I have met people like this. They go so far in this heresy that they say Christians can reach perfection in their character and conduct in this life. That is a total denial of what Paul wrote here in Romans seven. You cannot do it.

I tell you, that kind of thinking arises. Do you know what it comes from? A self righteous religionist who is either ignorant of or not submitted to the imputed righteousness of Christ as their only cause of salvation because if they knew Christ was the only way, they would quit talking about themselves and they would start talking about him and what he did.

They refuse to see and to admit that all their deeds—and this is where everybody runs aground in religion—they will not admit that all their deeds, all their efforts before true God given faith are fruit unto death and dead works of idolatry.

Paul didn't have any trouble with it. None of the servants of God had trouble with it. They refused to admit that, here it is. All our righteousnesses, what are they? Filthy rags today if they are aiming at the ground of justification.

Now we should bring forth good works. Again, Paul is writing of his present experiences. In chapter seven, verses seven through 13 Paul wrote how as a son of God dead in trespasses and sin, an enemy in his mind by wicked work, he was unable to keep God's law and only able to bring forth fruit unto death.

There he wrote in the past tense. Here in verses 14 through verse 25 do you know what he turns to? He quits writing in the past tense. He starts writing in the present tense. Everything that he talks about in this section it is a present tense application. After Paul was converted he delighted in the law of God in his inmost self knowing that he possessed the righteousness of God which answered to man of God's law and justice.

But he discovered the remaining influence and power of indwelling sin kept him from being perfectly conformed to Christ in his character and conduct, still marred every... sin marred everything he did.

And that is hard to deal with.

Verse 16.

“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.”

Even though God's law proved that Paul felt short, you know what? The law is still good. It is still holy. It is still just and still perfect. The law only forbids that which is evil, right? And it only commands that which is good and right.

So what is Paul doing? He is agreeing with the law. He is agreeing with God's judgment. He is agreeing with what King David said.

“Lord, if thou shouldest mark my iniquity, you charge me with my sin, who can stand?”

Now notice our sorrow in verse 17 through verse 19.

“Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

Paul is not excusing nor denying his personal character and conduct. And he is not denying his personal sinnerhood or responsibility. He is not saying here that... he is not blaming it on something else. He is not saying that he didn't commit sin. He is attributing sin and tracing sin to its source. Where did it come from? That old evil principle that is in him. It is the same thing he said over in Galatians chapter two verse 20. He begins to explain what he means in this next verse, in verse 18 where he says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.”

Now the apostle wasn't in the flesh, right? But the flesh was still very much in him. But then chapter eight he says, “You are not in the flesh if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

You can't be in two places. Do you understand that? You can't be in the flesh that we are not as children of God were not in the flesh one minute and in the spirit the next. We are always in the spirit. Now the flesh still dwells in us, that old principle still works in our hearts and our mind. The flesh here is that old corrupt principle communicated to us from Adam in our natural birth that those ideas of self righteousness and self love and religious pride, principles that keep us from loving God and keeping his commandment perfectly.

And Paul isn't referring to his person when he says, “I know that in me dwelleth no good thing,” because what dwelt in him? Huh?

If any many hath not the Spirit of God what? He is none of his.

And if you have got the Spirit of God in you, you have got Christ in you the hope of glory and I would say something good is in you. So he is not talking about his person. He is referring here to the fact that he has one mind. He has one will. He has one heart. But these faculties that are in him are influenced by these two opposing principles, a new principle that is holy, just, perfect and good. The old principle what? Nothing but sin.

Paul could still will and he could still desire to do good and to love God and to love his neighbor, but what? He couldn't perform it.

And then in verse 19, "For the good that I would I do not."

You know, that is an amazing admission from such a great man of God. Paul always came short of the perfection he desired. If you ever get to a point to where you think you have arrived. You have missed out. If you ever get to feeling good about yourself, keep this one verse in mind. When we have done all we could possibly do, what are we to say? We are unprofitable servants. We have only done that which was required.

Keep that in mind. If you ever get feeling too good about yourself and you get to thinking you are too holy, I am going to tell you, that stuff leads to this thing of looking down on other folks. That is where hypocrisy begins. See, hypocrisy is not preaching to a standard that is higher than you have achieved. That is not hypocrisy. If it was hypocrisy I couldn't stand up here and preach to you. I couldn't tell you God demands holiness and perfection if I hadn't achieved it. Hypocrisy is claiming to have achieved a higher standard than you have actually acquired.

Now I am not standing up here telling you that I am holy in my character and my conduct. But I can still tell you about the requirement for you and for me, the requirement of perfection. Right? That is our experience every day that we live. We have come so far. We desire... I desire so much to love God with all my heart, mind and soul, love my neighbor as myself.

But it is my sorrow that I can't do it. I want to. The want to is there. I get up every day. I am going to do better, right? And before too long something comes my way and things don't they I want and what happens? I go the opposite. The same is I don't sorrow enough over it.

But I will tell you in closing, let us be very clear on this. A clear understanding of these truths of our sinfulness and our failure to love God like we should and keep his commandment it causes us to more deeply appreciate and love him who loved us and gave himself for us.

I always think about one verse.

"To you who believe he is precious. He is precious."

I hope Christ is precious to you. I tell you. I am not saying go do... I am not saying don't...you say, "Well, brother Richard says we need to fail more where we can appreciate him more."

That ain't what I said. I am just saying, when your failures come where do you find relief? Where does it drive you to? Does it drive you to improve to get relief? Or does it drive you to him who is relief? A big deal of difference.

Because, I tell you, if you are trying to improve to get relief, you are not going to find it. You are not.

Let's stand together and we dismiss. I appreciate your presence. The Lord bless you and keep you until we see you Wednesday night.

Bart, would you dismiss us please?