

Romans

Romans Chapter Seven

Romans 7: 7

July 4, 2010

This is lesson number 47 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

Title: “**What the Law can do.**”

We will be spending considerable time on the law. As we have seen before it is not always clear what law Paul is referring to; i.e. the Mosaic Law in the Ten Commandments, the natural law planted in the human heart, or any law system of rules.

In the case of this section I don’t believe there is any doubt that Paul means the Ten Commandments; he summarizes the TC in coveteousness.

There is a relatively recent [20 years in theology is recent] movement afoot called New Covenant Theology and some of its leading proponents teach that the Ten Commandments are abrogated, or done away with and have been replaced by a “higher” law of Christ. I strongly reject that teaching and may deal with it more fully in future lessons. The reason that I mention it now is to focus your thoughts on what Paul says about the TC and to ask if the TC are no longer at work what is Paul talking about in Romans 7?

Read Romans 7:7-12

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 coveteousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. 12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

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We will only deal with Romans 7, verse 7 in today's lesson.

Notice first how the Apostle introduces this section:

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not!

Paul's style is to present propositional statements which may cause some readers to ask certain questions. He anticipates exactly what someone will think when they read or hear what he has written. They may misunderstand exactly what he means, or they may even object to what he says.

He then proceeds to answer the question or objection.

Let's quickly review some of what we have already studied:

In Chapters 1 & 2, Paul charges the entire human race with holding down the truth that may be known about God from nature and natural law.

Then he says that both Gentiles and Jews are condemned by God.

But the Jew will object: **Romans 3:1-2**

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

2 Much in every way!

After answering how the Jew had great advantage:

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better than they?

Not at all.

For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.

Then after Paul makes what I believe is the greatest statement of the Gospel to be found anywhere in the Bible at 3:21-26; he asks:

Where is boasting then? 3:27

And notice especially 3:31: "Do we make void the law through faith?"

Certainly not! On the contrary we establish the law."

Or, does the gospel of Jesus Christ eliminate the law?

And as we study verses 7:7-12; we can see how Paul establishes the law.

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And then in 4:1-3 1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Abraham's faith preceded the law by 430 years.
We will say more about this later.

At the close of Chapter 5, as Paul is exulting in the victory of Christ in the reign of grace over the reign of sin, it was necessary for him to shut the mouths of the antinomians; those who would use grace as an excuse to continue in sin {6:1-2}.

Anyone who is born of the Spirit, and so baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ Jesus, cannot and will not habitually think and practice licentiousness!

The same idea is carried over in 6:15 ff, where the thought may occur that one might continue in sin because we are "not under law." Certainly not!

We were slaves to sin but now we are slaves of righteousness.
You will obey your master; and your master is either sin or God!

Then in our exposition of 7:1-6; we saw that Paul declares that the believer has died to law in order that he may be married to Christ and bear fruit to God.

That defines a Christian as well as anything you will find.

Now to take up at verse 7.

What the Apostle has written about the law, in 7:5, and in 5:20-21, may cause someone to conclude that the law itself was sin or somehow was not a good thing.

The question before us then is what is the nature of the law; is the law evil or is the law good?

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."

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In 7:1; “the law” is any law principle.

The law principle includes “The Law,” capital L, as in the Ten Commandments. It is not easy to always know for sure whether Paul means “The Law,” as in Moses, or a law principle. But the law principle always includes the moral code in “The Law.” Therefore you can’t be too far off if you think “Ten Commandments,” when you read “law.”

It is clear, however, in this section, from verse 7, Paul is referring to the The Law, capital L, because he is going to use a specific commandment, namely the 10th, to prove his point.

As we deal with this section about the Law, I will attempt to objectively and fairly discuss several views of the purpose of the law that range from the idea that for the believer, the Law has been completely abandoned, or set aside by God in the day of grace; to the proposition that God will save certain people because they have the Law, i.e., that God will save the Jews because they are Jews.

And while I disagree with both of those two views, which I consider to be error; we must understand what the Law does and does not do; both for those who have died to the law {Christians}, and for those who are still under law {unbelievers}.

There are more than two interpretations of the relationship of the Law to the Gospel. For example, there is a book, “Five Views of Law and Gospel.”

What makes this quest for understanding so difficult is that there is some truth in each view and it is often a matter of semantics and definitions of how a word is used.

The purpose of the Law, as regarding the Gospel, is one of the most debated issues among theologians. Men whom I greatly respect and receive as brothers in Christ take differing positions on what the Law has to do with the Christian.

Some things on which we can agree:

All those outside of Christ are under law and condemned in Adam.

The Law cannot justify anyone.

All those who are “in Christ,” are dead to the law.

Even the holy law of God, if obeyed in the “letter of the law,” cannot sanctify.

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I believe that Paul is concerned that someone may conclude that the Law has no purpose or utility after Jesus satisfied the Law in His atonement.

No one was saved by the Law before Jesus went to the cross any more than anyone can be saved by the Law after He died on the cross. The Gospel promise was given Genesis 3:15 and Abraham believed the Gospel long before the Law was given to Moses; Christ has fulfilled the Law; yet the Law is still with us.

Read Romans 1:1-9; 16-17

And so as we study what the Apostle says about the Law and how it worked in his heart and mind, my prayer is that each of us who professes to be a Christian can say that we know sin as Paul does.

If the Law, when applied by the Holy Spirit, does not convict you of your sin and guilt and condemnation and lead you to Christ, you will die in your sin as a self-righteous hypocrite!

Mark 1:14-15

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

In order for the Law to gain a purchase in your heart and mind, you must believe that God has spoken through His Holy Spirit and that He used men to write His Word. This is not "formula preaching." This is how God uses His Word to convict of sin.

I do not believe that the Gospel is, "Believe on Jesus" or "Allow Jesus to come into your heart."

A man must have a need to believe or trust Jesus. This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The well do not need a physician! Are you sick of sin? Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Where is conviction of sin and repentance in this age of easy believism?

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A few years ago I had a very frustrating conversation with a nice, moral, and religious woman. She told me that she trusted Jesus Christ and I can only accept what she said. However, she may well have been the kind of person who knows **about God and yet does not know God.**

What happened was that while I was working the polls at an election, and because the turnout was so pitifully low, I had a lot of time to read. I was reading, Lloyd-Jones, and this woman asked me what I was reading. When I told her, Lloyd-Jones, she commented that his name must be Welsh. It so happened that this lady was herself from England. I told her that he was indeed a Welshman and a great Bible teacher. Then she asked me what I thought of St. Paul. I told her that I thought Paul was a magnificent man used by God to write most of the New Testament. She said that she could not stand St. Paul; that he was arrogant and hateful to women.

When she said that I shifted the discussion to what she understood the Bible to be. I told her that it was my belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that the Holy Spirit used Paul and other men to write God's Word and that it has been preserved over the centuries. She said that she could not accept that but that she appreciated the words of Jesus.

She had already mentioned other religions, Buddhism and Islam, and so I asked her if she knew what Jesus said about how many ways there were to get to God? I quoted John 14:6. Then she asked me, "But who wrote that?" "The Apostle John," I said. Then, she said, that is simply what John thought, not necessarily what Jesus said. I told her that the only record we have of what Jesus said is in the Bible.

I asked her if she would read a small book on the inspiration of the Scripture if I gave it to her. She said, probably not. I thanked her for her honesty and told her that we had no basis for further discussion about what St. Paul wrote or any other part of the Bible.

I told her that if she did not accept the entire Bible as being authoritative, then all she had to go on was her own intellect, and she agreed that was true. It was an amiable discussion, neither of us were argumentative, but I realized that she was blind to the truth of God's Word. All I could do was pray that something I said would cause her to think about her disregard for the Bible.

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1 Corinthians 2:1-14

2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**

And the point of this is that if God does not use the Law to arrest your heart and mind as he did Paul, and every other soul who knows God, you will never really understand why you need the righteousness of Christ. You may profess to believe in Jesus, but if there is no conviction that His righteousness is essential and exclusive, you will be forever condemned.

That is what the Law can do; convince you of sin.

Conviction of sin came to Paul as the Holy Spirit took the Scripture, the Word of God that Paul had memorized, the Law that Paul imagined that he was keeping perfectly, and as an arrow, pierced his heart and killed his sinful pride, and he died to the Law.

Paul imagined that he was keeping the law and pleasing God by his external and outward obedience.

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Philippians 3:1-11

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. 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. NKJV

Now I want to go into more detail on Romans 7, verse 7. If I say something that you think is particularly relevant, then give Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones the credit because a lot of what now follows is from his commentary.

When we began in Chapter 6, I believe that I pointed out that Chapters 6 & 7 are a two-part parenthesis between Chapter 5 and Chapter 8.

After 5: 20-21, which summarizes the Doctrine of Representation in Adam and Christ; Chapter 6 then, explains the believer's relationship to sin.

Chapter 7 deals with the believer's relationship to the Law. Cf 6:14

Paul anticipates that he will be misunderstood and that some will think that the Law has been set aside and is meaningless and is of no use for the believer.

Here is an outline that may help you sort out what Paul gives us:

In 7:1-6, the believer is dead to the law and married to Christ, in order that he may bear fruit to God. Dead to the law in order that he may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

In 7:7-12, Paul vindicates the law.

The law is not sin and the law is not dead.

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Verse 7: 13 is a summary and an introduction to the next section.

In 7: 14-25, Paul is relating his personal experience as the Law works on him and he delights in its purpose. He despises his weakness and glories in God's goodness. He shows in detail how this works itself out and he makes a defense against being misunderstood.

We will explore later whether Paul was unconverted or converted in 7:14 ff.

Now this is an important thing to know. I need to remind you that I am not a Greek scholar and therefore must trust the works of those who are trained in the language of the Bible. But here is the thing:

The remainder of Chapter 7, from verse 7 on, is in the **first person singular**, in that Paul is relating his own experience.

Another important fact is that in verses 7-13, the Apostle speaks in the **past tense, what has happened**. Then from verse 14 to the end of the chapter he speaks in the **present tense, what continues to happen**.

By not understanding this change of tenses, many have drawn wrong conclusions about whether Paul is speaking of himself before or after he was saved. The Law is still working on Paul after he has been justified.

The reason that I have encouraged you to continue to read Romans as we make our way through it is because you need to keep in your thoughts what he has stated in previous verses. The only way to understand Romans is to grasp how Paul makes a statement and then later he will explain it in more detail. E.g., 5:10 is explained in Chapter 6.

How, then, do we as believers view the Law?

Sin was in the world before the law was given to Moses.

The Law comes in alongside of sin {5:20} and clearly identifies sin {3:20} and makes a record of sin {5:13}. The passions of sin are aroused by the Law {7:5}, and confirm a person's guilt and condemnation {7:7}. But the Law can never produce righteousness and life, only death.

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But when the Holy Spirit of God does a Law-work in the heart and mind, and conviction of sin occurs, the Law serves as a child-leader to lead a person to Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:15-29

15 Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. 16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. 17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. 18 For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. 19 **What purpose then does the law serve?** It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. 21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor {child-leader}. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The introduction of the law did not change the Gospel and the Gospel does not change the Law!

So Paul has clearly stated in Galatians and in Romans that Abraham and all the faithful have put their trust in Christ and not in their obedience to any system of law.

All of that in order to lay a foundation for this section on verses 7-12.

When the Law comes in its power, and convicts us of sin, and leads us to Christ, it is not then that the Law is of no utility to the Christian. To the contrary, now the Christian is enabled to serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter {7:6}.

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Read 7:5-6 Then in verse 7, he asks, Is the Law sin?

Paul gives his usual answer! “Certainly not!” “God forbid” KJV is the idea, but is correctly translated: “Don’t think that way!” or, “Certainly not!”

Not only is the Law not sin; but it is exactly the opposite {12}.

Then Paul gives us two personal examples of what the Law does:

The **first example** is “I would not have known sin except through the law.”

He cannot mean that he did not know what sin was or that he was a sinner.

Everyone knows at some level that they are wrong about certain things. Romans 2:14-15 make it clear that all people have a moral code to some degree. Our conscience may become hardened and we may excuse ourselves, but we all have a knowledge of sin in that sense.

What he is telling us is that he was not aware of the real nature of sin until the law made it clear to him. Cf 3:20

Only the Law of God gives us a right conception of the true character and nature of sin. Unbelievers know that they sin, but they hide their actions in darkness and secrecy. They determine for themselves what is right and wrong. And in our postmodern culture there is very little that is considered to be objectively wrong.

That is why it is necessary to preach the Law. A man cannot be justified through the Law, but neither can he be convicted of the sinfulness of sin apart from a law-work in his heart.

Paul’s **second personal example** is: “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘*You shall not covet.*’ ”

It is extremely interesting, at least it is to me, that Paul is the only New Testament writer who quotes the Tenth Commandment. **Exodus 20:17**

"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."

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The Tenth Commandment gets at the real nature of sin and the fallen nature of man. In a real sense it is a summary of all of the commandments.

'You shall not covet.'

Cf. verse 8, "lust," "concupiscence," or, "evil desire"

It is the same word as "*covet.*"

We tend to limit "lust" or, "evil desire" to sexual desire. But it is much broader than that. It means to "desire after anything forbidden."

While the word usually carries a sinful connotation, "evil desire," it can mean "strong desire." Cf. Luke 22:15 Our Lord "lusted."

Luke 22:15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

Sin is rooted in evil desire, and sinful acts flow from evil desire. We have sinned against God when we have evil desire even if we do not commit the act of sin.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus takes several points from the table of the Law and shows what the Law was always meant to do. "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin {3:20}."

Matthew 5:20 ff

20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

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.

Murder, adultery, lying, etc., come from evil desire.

Finally, I want to call your attention to the word "known" that occurs twice in verse 7. These are two different words in the Greek language and it should be translated to give their meaning more clearly.

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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."

The first "know" is a kind of apprehension. The second "know" is much stronger than the first and means "to know absolutely."

Lloyd-Jones translates the phrase: "I would never really have comprehended the meaning of sin but by the law"; but then he adds, "I would never have understood and come to feel in the depth of my being, and have a full understanding and experience of the meaning of lust, and the part that lust plays in a man's life, were it not that the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

Paul not only came to see that to lust was sin, but the law brought him to see the terrible power of lust in his life. So the law did this great service for him. If the law had left him alone, he would have died a self-righteous Pharisee.

So we must not think that the law is sin because it is the law that causes us to see the real nature of sin.

While the law cannot sanctify through law-keeping, do not think that the law is useless, or that it has been set aside.

The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.