

Romans 7:7-25 – “The Law and Sin”

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Intro: The most natural assumption a new believer makes after coming to Christ is that he or she should live a godly life, and that the way that is to be done is by making a serious effort to keep the Law. It's a logical deduction, since everyone knows that God has defined morality in His Law and that the Law speaks to us of His character. It follows that the way to please the one who has saved us is to play by His rules. But then we read Romans 6 which tells us that Sin no longer has dominion over us and we go on to read Romans 7 and learn that we have been released from the power of the Law to condemn us. Not long after reading those chapters, we probably notice that our effort to keep the Law and suppress the old Sin nature doesn't seem to be going well. We try to beat Sin by keeping the Law, but Sin always seems to find a way to defeat even our most serious efforts. “Whatever is wrong now?,” we think. And before long we may begin to entertain a frightening suspicion: perhaps we're not as secure in our faith as we were told. Maybe it didn't “take” in our case. Perhaps we have done something sinful and aren't even aware of it. Why is living a holy life so difficult, if we are really saved? Tonight, we'll read Paul's words to Roman believers explaining what's going on and why they can rest assured that their struggle with Sin is not an indication their relationship to the Lord is in jeopardy. He will explain to them, and us, that our problem isn't that we aren't “in Christ.” It's that we are “in Christ” but are trying to deal with Sin as if we were still “in Adam.” In Christ we have a whole new relation to the Law and a whole new way of dealing with Sin. Tonight, we'll learn that...

Proposition: Trying to live a godly life by keeping the Law only leads to uncertainty and an accusing conscience. Our victory over Sin will come from a higher source than keeping the Law.

Billboard: (vv.7-12) The Law is Good
 (vv.13-20) The Law is Good, But I Can't Keep It
 (vv.21-25) The Law is Good, But I Can't Keep It, So, Help Lord!!

(vv.7-12) The Law is Good – Paul has spent chapters 6 and 7 telling us that we have been released from Sin (chapter 6) and the Law (7:1-6). But what does that mean for a believer daily? We want to live godly lives. Shouldn't we do that by attempting to keep the Law? In these verses Paul explains to us the true use of the Law. **Romans 7:7–12 - 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.* Because the argument has been made that believers have been released from Sin and the Law, some might conclude that both Sin and Law are evil. To make clear that Sin and the Law are not to be equated, a statement that the Law is not Sin opens the discussion. Paul then brings into focus the true purpose of the Law: The Law was given to make Sin known; the Law brings Sin to our awareness. He then used an illustration from his own life to explain how the Law brings Sin to light. The law he points to is the tenth commandment, “*Thou shalt not covet*” – *covetousness* is illicit desire. This commandment reveals a sin hidden from observation. No one can see this inward sin, but the Law brings its presence to light. That is the commandment that found Paul out and convinced him that he was a sinner – not just someone who committed sins from time to time, but one in whom Sin dwelt. *For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”* Paul tells us that when the meaning of this commandment was brought home to him, he suddenly was confronted by a terrible truth: Sin was living in him to a disturbing extent. The coming of that

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commandment produced in Paul all kinds of sinful covetousness. Sin lies “dead” he tells us – hidden and undetected – until the Law come to shine its light on our hearts. Paul testifies that he was in blissful ignorance of his sinful condition until the Law revealed sin’s hidden presence in his heart. He felt he was fine – “alive” – until the Law brought sin to light and he saw that he was really “dead” – in dwelt by sin; guilty. It seems ironic – he thought keeping the Law would bring him life; that he would experience inner freedom of conscience in this case, but that was a deception. All trying to keep the Law did was to uncover his weakness. “It killed me,” he said. The Law is good. It fulfills the purpose for which it was made - it shows us that Sin still lives in our flesh. We learn that by making a serious effort to keep the Law.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The Law is good, and it reveals Sin’s presence in our flesh.

[ILLUSTRATION] We live in the age of miracles when it comes to modern medicine, do we not? God has led men and woman of science to find wonderful ways to use the things He has created for truly good purposes. Every day people in our community undergo tests designed to diagnose and treat diseases that could shorten their lives if left undetected. Sometimes the tests are unpleasant. It’s not always fun to undergo some of the procedures that might well save a life. We might despise them. But, if we are wise, we’ll be grateful for them at the same time.

[APPLICATION] Don’t despise God’s Law. God’s Law is good and serves a good purpose. When we learn that we are released from the Law’s power to bring condemnation, we ought to rejoice. Likewise, when we experience the Law’s power to reveal our Sin, we should bow in humble gratitude. The Law is good, even when it brings us up short concerning our condition.

(vv.13-20) The Law is Good, But I Can’t Keep It – Is this good thing, God’s Law, a killer? Not at all! Sin is the killer. **Romans 7:13–20 - 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.* The Law simply reveals to us the sinfulness of Sin, showing how utterly sinful Sin is. What is revealed is the presence of indwelling Sin even in we who are spiritual and our inability to overcome Sin by our own efforts. This comes as a shock to many new believers! We are in a dogfight with Sin. We hate Sin, but we find ourselves still falling into its trap over and over. We know and truly believe in God and His good Law. We ARE God’s people. It is no longer ME, but SIN IN ME that causes me to fail in my efforts to keep God’s Law. The Law shows me what is good, but it gives me no power to do what is good (v.18). So, when I try to keep the Law, I constantly fail with the result that I constantly feel accused, condemned, and harassed. BUT I AM NOT. It is Sin’s presence in my flesh that causes me to fall into the trap that makes me feel this way when I try to suppress Sin by keeping the Law.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The Law is good. It shows me my sin but cannot help me overcome Sin. All it can do is keep on proving to me that I am a sinner.

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[ILLUSTRATION] A drivers’ manual is good. It shows me how to drive safely. It instructs me in the rules for using turn signals. It reveals to me that which I should do when I’m being overtaken by an emergency vehicle. It tells me who has the right of way at intersections. It even warns me of the consequences if I break the law. A drivers’ manual is good, but it cannot drive my car. It just lays there on the seat beside me when I run that stoplight. I can be instructed by a drivers’ manual, but it can’t drive my car.

[APPLICATION] In that same way, God’s Law is good, because it makes me aware of my Sin nature. But I can’t ask it to do too much. It brings Sin to light, but it doesn’t provide any power to overcome the Sin it has revealed. When you try to use the Law to make you godly, all you get is further condemnation. That is the Law doing exactly what it is designed to do. You’ll have to get help from another, more powerful source if you want to live godly in Christ Jesus. And that’s what our next paragraph shows us.

(vv.21-25) The Law is Good, But I Can’t Keep It, So, Help Lord!!– Our sorry condition leads to a conclusion: Sin is going to be a problem that we can’t overcome on our own. That is what is revealed more and more clearly, the more we try to suppress Sin by keeping the Law. **Romans 7:21–25 - 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.* Paul noted that he found it to be a law (in the sense of “natural law” – something that happens every time – a condition of life, in other words) that though he was saved, the presence of Sin had not been taken away from him. As believers we are released from Sin’s authority – but we are not relieved of Sin’s presence. There is a struggle with Sin going on in the life of every believer which is revealed vividly when we try to suppress Sin by keeping the Law. This miserable condition leads us to cry out to God in desperation – HELP LORD!! The help that we need we find through Jesus Christ our Lord, as we are told in verse 25: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* This power to overcome indwelling Sin will be explained in detail in chapter 8, but that’s for next week. For tonight we’ll simply say that...

[DOCTRINAL POINT] A serious attempt to keep the Law leads us to cry out to God for His gracious help.

[ILLUSTRATION] Here are two bits of human wisdom that might be instructive to us in the light of what we’ve learned tonight: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” And “Your system is perfectly designed for the results you are getting.” What’s the point? If you are trying to live a godly life by keeping the Law, you are shooting yourself in the foot, metaphorically speaking. You are getting exactly the result you should be getting: the Law is revealing to you that you are still living with a Sin nature.

[APPLICATION] The only way out of our dilemma is to find our righteousness “in Christ” rather than in fruitlessly trying to keep the Law. So long as we keep trying to suppress sin using the only method those in Adam have, we will, like them, feel no certainty at all about our eternal destiny. Our assurance comes from seeing who we are “in Christ,” and living according to the new way of the Spirit, rather than the old way of the letter of the Law.

Conclusion: Next week, we’ll begin to focus on this new way to live life, the Law of the Spirit of Life, as it is called. What we need to focus on tonight is this: The natural assumption a believer makes after

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coming to Christ is that he or she should live a godly life by making a serious effort to keep the Law. Odd as it sounds, that's probably where one is supposed to start the Christian life, but woe to the one who finishes their Christian life there! After trying this and meeting only increasing condemnation, we need to go on to cry out for life in the Spirit, for that is where true assurance of our condition awaits us.