

Romans

Romans Chapter Seven

Romans 7: 25

August 15, 2010

This is lesson number 53 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: **“I Thank God Through Jesus Christ Our Lord”**

Rom 7:12-25

12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

We have come to the end of Romans Chapter Seven, which is about the law, but this section will continue through verse 4 of Chapter 8. Romans 7:14-25 has been one of the most difficult passages of Scripture for me to understand and to try to explain to you.

That is not to say that it cannot be rightly understood because God does not give us His holy Word in order to leave us in confusion. What I am saying is

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that I have read it many times and meditated on its meaning. I have consulted many scholars in whom I have great respect, yet there are about as many interpretations as there are writers.

Although he is virtually alone in his interpretation I believe that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has the explanation that is most consistent with the entire letter to the Romans. And I believe that we have gotten to the heart of it.

It was Lloyd-Jones who said that any man who is dogmatic about his interpretation of this passage is not qualified to preach it.

In a nutshell, Lloyd-Jones' argument is that the point of Romans 7 is not whether this man is unregenerate or regenerate; unsaved or saved; but the relationship between law and sin.

Lloyd-Jones' interpretation of this passage is that we entirely miss the point of this section by wrestling with the question of unregenerate man or regenerate man: babe in Christ or mature believer. Paul, says Lloyd-Jones, is continuing to argue the purpose and application of the law.

As we illustrated last time it is as though there are two "me's"; the "me that is spiritual and the "me" that is carnal; both operating at the same time.

Let's continue now with Romans 7:25 ff.

If you will follow Paul's theme throughout this great letter you will see that Romans is clearest statement of the Gospel to be found anywhere in the entire Bible.

There is something that I can be dogmatic about and that is that if what you hear preached does not agree with what Paul has written in the Book of Romans it is not the Gospel! Every sermon that purports to be the Gospel must be tested by the theme of Romans, which is **the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ!**

What has Paul laid down for us so far? Here are some, but surely not all, of the main points that we have preached from Romans.
Most important of all:

- **The Gospel is the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.**

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If you miss that you do not know the Gospel. You will have been bewitched by 'another gospel', which is no gospel at all.

- Men have a clear revelation of God in creation and yet they hold down that knowledge of the divine nature to confirm their own condemnation.
- Everyone is condemned in Adam, both Jew and non-Jew; it is grace that reveals the Gospel to anyone and certainly not because of who their parents were.
- God deals with two men in history: Adam and Christ; and you are represented by one or the other.
- All men are condemned in Adam. The reason men are blinded to the truth of God is because they are lost. Not that they **will be** lost if they refuse to believe the Gospel: they are **already** lost! This is the great error of most modern-day evangelism that presents the idea that a person will be lost IF they reject the gospel: they are **already** lost!
- You must be made right in God's sight by an act of the sovereign God or you will go to hell.
- If you are represented in Christ it is because God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world. You do not have the **ability** in and of yourself to "decide" to allow God to save you.
- If you can, not if you will, but if you are given the grace to agree with your condemnation, only then can you claim the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.
- Ungodly sinners who are enemies of God may be brought to love God in Jesus Christ.
- But if you think you had anything to do with the first cause of that transaction; i.e., your coming to Christ, you will be found to be trusting in your works and not in Christ alone.
God justifies the ungodly!

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- The model of justification by faith is **ungodly** Abraham who is justified before he obeyed God and before the law was given in written form. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

If you have any other “plan of salvation” it is not according to Scripture and it is ‘another gospel.’”

Paul answers the criticism of grace. If grace abounds over sin why not continue in sin?

When grace is preached it will always sound like antinomianism to the unbeliever. Why is that true? If you preach that a man cannot do anything to cause God to save him and if he is saved he will not do anything to cause God to damn him; then is not that a license to continue in sin?

Certainly not!

Why is grace not a license to continue in sin? Because the believer is dead to sin. He is no longer a slave to sin. How then can he continue in sin?

But sin is not dead and the true believer really desires to obey righteousness. When he was a slave to sin he would make silly excuses and keep right on sinning. But as a slave to righteousness he will fight against indwelling sin.

Not only is the believer dead to sin he is dead to the law. He must be dead to the law in order that he may be married to Christ. He must be married to Christ so that he may bear fruit to God.

Just as sin is not dead, neither is the law made void.

That is what Chapter Seven is about: sin and the purpose of the law.

The Apostle has told us “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

The law cannot justify you, and neither can the law sanctify you?

What then is the purpose of the law?

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Sin uses the law to arouse the passions of sin. Does that make the law a bad thing? On the contrary “the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good.”

This background is necessary in order to make any sense at all out of Chapter Seven. It is my conclusion after this study of Romans Seven that most people have missed the teaching of Chapter Seven of Romans because they are trying to determine if Paul here is talking about himself when he was an unbeliever, or when he was a new believer, or as a mature believer.

Of course we all must be in one of those categories, lost or saved, but I believe this passage is about the power of sin and the relationship of the believer to the holy law.

The believer finds that two things are going on at the same time. What I will to do that I do not practice and what I hate that I do.

In previous lessons we saw that the reason I do what I will not to do is because sin dwells in me. We looked at the concept of the “two me’s.”

The reason that I do not do what I will to do is because there is “another law” in my members. Sin is so powerful that it operates as “another law.”

This struggle with sin brings Paul to exclaim:

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Then Paul interrupts his argument and erupts in praise to God before he can continue. I believe the first phrase of verse 25 is just that. He must give thanks that the situation is not hopeless:

25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The proof that this phrase is not part of his argument is fairly obvious. Would he thank God that he is still in the condition that he describes?

{Charles Hodge}

The second phrase of verse 25 is a summary of verses 14 – 24. “So then...”

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

He started this section in verse 14:

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

Paul frequently first states his conclusion and then makes his argument and closes by restating his conclusion.

Notice that he starts with his conclusion: **but I am carnal, sold under sin.**

Then he explains what he means by that in verses 15 – 24 and then in verse 25 he concludes his explanation of what the law can and cannot do and wraps around to where he started. Cf. verse 14 with verse 25.

Now I want to see if we can establish the teaching of Romans 7:14-25. As I have said, I dare not be dogmatic about this interpretation but when it is carefully analyzed and compared with other Scripture it makes more sense than anything else that I have studied on this difficult section.

Several times I have stated that Martin Luther said that Romans is a commentary on Galatians. That is a generally correct statement. But I also said that Romans 7:14-25 is an explanation of Galatians 5:17. I want to retract that thought.

In fact, Romans 7:14-25 is the exact opposite of Galatians 5:17.

Galatians 5:16-18

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. **17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.** 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

At first reading this passage in Galatians does seem to parallel the passage in Romans 7:14-25.

But notice that Paul brings in a factor in Galatians that is not found in Romans Seven. What is that factor? **The Holy Spirit!**

In Galatians Paul commands the believer to: **“Walk in the Spirit.”**

Galatians Five is how the believer lives his life in the Spirit. The Christian is not frustrated and defeated by sin; he overcomes sin by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Romans 7:14-25 is a man trying to be sanctified by the law and he is defeated.

Galatians 5:18 is the key to the whole of Romans Seven:

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

Romans 7:14-25 is a picture of a man trying to use the law for a purpose for which it was never intended. The Holy Spirit does not sanctify us by the law! The Holy Spirit uses the law to convict of sin but not to make us holy.

Romans 7:14-25 is an explanation of Romans 6:14:

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Victory not only is possible; victory is certain! Galatians 5:24-25

24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

And so Galatians Five is the exact opposite of Romans 7:14-25.

Romans 7:14-25 shows the folly of the man who tries to be sanctified through the law. Just as the law cannot justify us; neither can the law sanctify us. That is a wrong use of the law.

There is not a word about the Holy Spirit in Romans 7:14-25; Paul will bring in the Holy Spirit in Chapter Eight.

Now I want to say more about the Holy Spirit.

We Baptists, especially we Baptists who preach sovereign grace, are sometimes subdued in proclaiming the Holy Spirit and His work in the believer. I do not believe I have come up short in declaring the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit in the matter of regeneration. But after a man is a Christian the Holy Spirit dwells in him and guides him in the way of the life in Jesus Christ. We need to be encouraged that God will guide us into holy living.

The reason I believe that we do not say much about life in the Spirit is a reaction to the abuse of the Holy Spirit by the Charismatic folks. To hear them preach they seem to think that they control the Holy Spirit instead of Him guiding them.

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But just because religious hucksters and false prophets abuse the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that is no reason for us to not proclaim His power.

Here it is: If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you and you have all the power you need to resist the sin that dwells in you. 1 John 4:4

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

The key to understanding Romans 7:14-25 is to compare all the other Scriptures that seem to parallel what it is saying about struggling against sin.

Everywhere else in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is involved. In Romans 7:14-25 the Holy Spirit is not mentioned.

That tells us that Romans 7:14-25 is not about the life of the believer who has the Holy Spirit living in him. It must be about something else. It is not about the mature Christian at all. That's what Galatians Five and other Scriptures that bring in the Holy Spirit are about but not Romans 7:14-25.

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Just to keep this argument in the context of Romans, compare these verses:

- 5:1-2 peace with God; standing in this grace....
- 5:21 grace superabounds the reign of sin....
- 6:18 a new master....
- 7:4 dead to the law and married to Christ....
- 7:6 serving God in the newness of the Spirit....
- 8:1-2 walking according to the Spirit....

And so on through Romans.

All the other Scriptures that describe the regenerate man are the exact opposite of the man in Romans 7:14-25.

The key, I repeat, is to see that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Romans 7:14-25. The Holy Spirit gives us the victory over indwelling sin. Sin uses the law to arouse passions of the flesh.

The teaching of this great passage is about what the law can and cannot do.

In Romans Seven, Paul is proving that the law is neither void nor evil.

Then Paul shows us that if you try to use the law in your sanctification, in your growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you will be totally and completely frustrated! Your only conclusion will be:

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

But when you see that you are dead to the law, you can say with Paul:

25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

As we continue next time in Chapter Eight, we will see, God willing, that we do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. We will understand what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh.

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I hope this series on Romans Seven has been instructive for you. For my part, I have delighted in gaining a better understanding of the power of sin and the purpose of the law. If you are going to gain victory over an enemy you must first understand him. Knowing how sin works will give you an advantage to fight it and overcome it.

The more we understand the awful power of sin the more we can appreciate what Jesus Christ has done for His people.

There is a book by Lloyd-Jones; I can't recall its title; but the subject is Jesus Christ. He makes a point in this book written over sixty years ago that is so relevant in our pluralistic society today. He said that you could have Buddhism without Buddha and you could have Islam without Mohammed because these religions are based on the teachings of men. You could have the teaching without the person. But what is unique about Christianity is that there is no Christianity without the person of Jesus Christ!

As we conclude this lesson today I feel the need to urge some of you to consider where you stand before God. Are you at peace with God?

Not too long ago a local pastor told his congregation that Calvinists are not evangelical. If he means that we do not present Jesus Christ as a frustrated beggar and that we do not place the ultimate cause of salvation in a "decision," then by that definition we are not "evangelical."

My definition of evangelism is that we preach that men are justly condemned and that the righteousness of God is revealed in the propitious blood of Jesus Christ. We preach that while you do not have the ability in yourself to come to Christ, yet you must come to Christ!

You know that I do not preach that there is anything that you can do in your own power to cause God to save you. But I can say on the authority of the word of God: 2 Corinthians 5:11

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;

So I am not calling for a "decision" or for you to give God "permission" to save you. But I am urging you to consider your standing in the sight of God.

Repent and believe the Gospel!