

Romans
Faith, Family, and Fullness
Part 6
Romans 7

Sanctification

- Set apart wholly for God and His purposes.
- Filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The conflict in our part of sanctification.

1. The Christian and the Law.
 - *Romans 7:1-6*

2. The Law and sin.
 - *Romans 7:7-13*

3. The Christian and sin.
 - *Romans 7:14-25*



Romans: Faith, Family, Fullness Part Six: Romans 7¹

Today we're in chapter seven of one of the most theologically comprehensive letters in the Bible – Romans. We're taking these summer Sundays to unpack it.

If you have missed any of the previous Sundays, I'd encourage you to go to our website on the sermons page and watch those, or download the manuscripts.

First, let me give us a very quick review of what we've covered so far.

Paul starts out his letter by establishing that the Gospel – the Good News of God's love through Jesus Christ, his Son, reveals God's righteousness. What does that mean? God's righteousness is his own holiness, as well as his righteous or best plan for humanity, including you – a plan that is entirely about love, from start to finish. Love in its purist form is holiness.

The problem is, though, that all nations are trapped in sin; every single person is enslaved to sin. Sin separates us from the love of God. Now, since the Jews were God's chosen people, they thought the problem of sin didn't really apply to them; they assumed because they were descendants of Abraham, that they were already right with God. But Paul pointed out that the Jews were actually even *more* guilty, because they knew the Law (everyone else did not), but they *still* disobeyed it. Being in Abraham's bloodline didn't keep them from sinning. Knowing and memorizing the law and having all the religious rituals didn't help them. So *everyone*, whether Jew or not, no matter who they are, is guilty of sin, and therefore will face God's judgement, wrath, and Hell.

But the Good news is that Jesus Christ – God's Son himself – died in our place for our sin, and then rose from the dead. When we accept, in faith, his death in our place, God says we are justified by faith and that we have a new status with him – we are part of a new multi-ethnic family of God made up of everyone who believes (not just Jews) and we have a new future – an abundant life of love here on earth, and life that goes on forever in heaven.

Then Paul described how, because of Christ, God has created a new humanity; no longer a part of the old Adam's lineage, which is enslaved to sin, but a part of a new lineage – through the *new* Adam, who is Jesus. Through Jesus, humanity gets a reset – our sins can be

¹ Resources:

NT Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1: Chapters 1-8* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004)

William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, *Romans 1-8: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008)

John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Fourth American Edition. (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818)

Clarence L. Bence, *Romans: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1996)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)

forgiven, and we get a new start in a new family. It's literally as if we have died to sin, and have been reborn into a life without sin. That's why every Christian is commanded to be baptized once in their life, because it shows that they have died to sin and been buried – thanks to Jesus' death and burial, and have risen from the dead through Jesus, so they are dead to sin and alive to Jesus. Baptism tells the world that this is true for you. By the way, we are planning for baptism later this summer, so please watch for that if you have not been baptized.

That gets us to last Sunday; remember we said last week that “dead people do not sin” – that our old life of being a slave to sin is dead, and we can now live a life that the Bible calls...

Sanctification.

We talked about this last week. That's a ten-dollar word in the Bible that you will want to become familiar with because it's what Paul is getting at all throughout the letter to the Romans, so we are going to spend a lot of time this summer learning to understand it and experience it. In order to help us learn, I want to give you a definition of sanctification. When it comes to our Christian lives, there's really two parts to it. The first is this – sanctification means to be:

- Set apart wholly for God and His purposes.

Can you say that with me? Let's say it again...That is *your* part in sanctification, or being holy, or becoming like Jesus; to set yourself apart for God and His purposes. But to truly be holy – to truly think and act in this life like Jesus, you need help. That's where God comes in; the second part of sanctification is to be:

- Filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Would you repeat that second part with me? Let's say that again... Those are the two parts of our sanctification – how we become like Jesus in the things we think, say, and do. Just to help us, would you repeat all of that with me? Sanctification is to be “set apart wholly for God and His purposes,” and to be “filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.”

We're going to repeat that on these Sundays throughout the summer in order to make sure we understand what sanctification is. But our sanctification – our holiness or Christlikeness – is more than just mental understanding; it is an actual, real experience that we can have in our lives. Actually, it has been part of God's plan for us since he created the first humans. When God first created humans, the Bible tells us that God made us in his image – to be holy like him. So, like God, we are to be driven and motivated by love – love for God and love for each other (and by the way, that means that we love ourselves, too). That's what God-likeness or holiness really is – love – and it's called sanctification. But the first Adam and his partner Eve chose sin, and as a result sin entered the world. Because of sin, we could no longer live sanctified lives. Thankfully, God had a plan – and that plan was

the Gospel – the Good News – of Jesus. Now, because of Jesus, we can be dead to sin and are now free NOT to sin.

One more time let's say what sanctification is: it is to be "set apart wholly for God and His purposes," and to be "filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit."

Chapter six talked about our part in sanctification – setting ourselves apart wholly for God and his purposes. At the end of the service last week, many of you determined you wanted to be serious about sanctification and you came to this altar to pray and submit yourself to Jesus – to be "free slaves," or slaves to God by choice.

Now in Romans seven, Paul goes on to point out that there is a problem when it comes to our part in sanctification, and that's what we're going to see today. Next week we'll start to see in chapter eight what God's part in sanctification is. But we have a problem – there's...

The conflict in our part of sanctification.

That's what we're going to see today, and I think by the time we're done, if you are a Christian, you'll say, "Yep, that describes me, too." What we're going to see today is important because, even though *we* have a part to play in our sanctification, chapter seven is going to show us it's still impossible for us to be sanctified *without* God doing his part through the Holy Spirit.

So let's see what chapter seven says. It's become a practice in this series to read the entire passage that we are looking at, in order to be sure we've got the whole picture. Standing helps us focus our attention, so I'm going to ask you to stand while I read, and you can follow along on the screen, but please listen with the ears of faith.

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died. I found that the

very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:1-25, niv)

Thanks – you can sit down. Now I know, I know – Paul's chapters get very long and confusing, and this one ranks up there with the most confusing. But that's okay; that just means it will take a little effort to understand it. Trust me – it'll be worth it!

There are basically three sections to this chapter, covering three thoughts that build on each other.

Paul's writing style is like in previous chapters – Paul is carrying on an imaginary conversation; he is anticipating what the reader might be thinking, and answering that question. This was a method of linguistics that's been used since ancient times, called using an interlocutor. An interlocutor is a person that you are having a conversation with.

The beginning of this chapter – verses 1-6 – carry on what Paul was saying in chapter six. Paul is talking about...

1. The Christian and the Law. (vs. 1-6)

I'll explain that in a minute, but first it might help you to understand what Paul means when he's talking about the Law. When Paul uses this word, "Law," he sometimes means the storyline of the Old Testament – about God's creation and his people and their triumphs and faith and victories and their failures and sin and dysfunction and brokenness – all that's found in the first five books and the historical books. But other times he's more specifically talking about the hundreds of commands given through Moses that are found in

the Old Testament. It's the second meaning that Paul is talking about here – all the rules and regulations that have to be kept in order to be holy. Last chapter we saw that the Law didn't seem to help us at all; instead, it just showed us how high the bar for us is – too high for us to ever reach. So Paul is answering the question, "What was the purpose of the Law anyway? What good does it do?"

So, like I said, Paul is continuing what he talked about in chapter six, about how the Law works. Remember last week we talked about how a dead person can't sin, and if we are dead to sin, we can be alive to Christ? Then do you remember when I told you about how Shelly and I keep our wedding vows? Paul uses both of those ideas again, pointing out that, in the Old Testament Law, a person is obligated to keep their wedding vows as long as their spouse is alive. But when their spouse dies, they are freed from those obligations and can pursue love with another person. So, when we've died to our sinful selves, the law doesn't hold anything more over us, because we are now free to be united to Christ.

I read a recent news article that helps make the point. There's a guy named Benjamin Schreiber, and he is very much alive. But that hasn't stopped him from arguing that he died four years ago. He is a convicted murderer serving his time in prison. But after the convicted murderer collapsed in his prison cell, doctors restarted his heart five times. While he was recovering back at the Iowa State Penitentiary, Schreiber filed an interesting legal appeal. He claimed that because he died before he was resuscitated, he had technically fulfilled his life sentence when his heart stopped. Schreiber filed for post-conviction relief, claiming that he was being held in prison illegally.

Judges, however, aren't buying it. The article said, "A district court judge wasn't convinced by his creative attempt to find a loophole in the law, saying that Schreiber's argument was "unpersuasive and without merit."" The fact that Schreiber was able to file a legal motion petitioning for his release, the judge added, "in itself confirms the petitioner's current status as living."

Dying for a brief amount of time doesn't amount to a get-out-of-jail-free card. The Iowa Court of Appeals said that the 66-year-old will remain in prison until a medical examiner determines that he is dead for good. Judge Amanda Potterfield wrote, "Schreiber is either alive, in which case he must remain in prison, or he is dead, in which case this appeal is moot."

The appeals court judges also ruled that he couldn't have it both ways—claiming to be dead as far as the criminal justice system was concerned while simultaneously going on with his life.

That was a pretty creative attempt to get out of prison, but it didn't help him because he is bound by the law as long as he lives. In contrast though, this is the certain hope of every believer in Jesus. Because we are connected in a living way with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we are dead and forever free from the demands of the law. Paul said:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"
(Galatians 2:20)

and...

"You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3)

And here in chapter seven verse four:

“Therefore, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ”
(Romans 7:4).²

And verse six says that...

“Now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”
(Romans 7:6, niv)

That brings us to the second thought in this chapter, which is the comparison of...

2. The Law and sin. (vs. 7-13)

In Paul’s interlocutor style, he’s anticipating that someone might conclude then that the law is actually sinful, because the law only seemed to allow sin to flourish. This section is a bit confusing, so I’ll try to simplify it.

Paul’s dealing with the paradox of the law and sin. In itself, the law is beautiful; it describes how God’s love works in daily lives – it gives in detail what it’s like to live in the image-of-God way of life. It gives us a picture of how Love behaves in all our relationships – to God, to people, to creation, and even to material things. That’s a wonderful and beautiful picture!

But if you read the storyline of Israel, you’ll see that they broke every one of those laws; the more laws they received, the more they broke. The more they were aware of the Law, the more they acted in the sin of Adam, and they rebelled. So even when God gave specific rules to obey, that did not fix the problem of the sinful, human heart. So, the paradox is that these rules made Israel even *more* guilty, because they were not only violating the image of God within them, thanks to the Law they actually now *knew* they were violating it.

Let me give you an illustration. When I was little, my mom would make Toll House chocolate chip cookies. They were so good, and they were a special treat because we didn’t have a lot of money. We didn’t have a cookie jar, so mom would keep the cookies in a Folger’s coffee can.

I couldn’t resist those cookies, so I can remember being very little and sneaking into the cupboard and taking cookies. The interesting thing was, I hadn’t been told not to steal cookies, but I still knew I was doing something I probably shouldn’t. So I didn’t ask my mom if I could, and I waited until she was out of the kitchen to make my move. I wasn’t a very smart thief, though, because I left the jar on the counter and worse yet, I left the lid off of it – so I got caught.

Even though I knew I was doing something I shouldn’t have, I didn’t expect my mother to be so upset with me when she discovered what I’d done. That’s because my mother had

² Antonia Noori Farzan, “An inmate claimed his life sentence ended when he died and was revived. Nice try, court rules,” The Washington Post (11-8-19)

never actually told me not to take cookies without her permission. Here's my point: technically, I wasn't guilty for stealing cookies, because I hadn't actually been told not to. But once I knew (along with a spanking to prove it), I had no more excuse. When my mom told me "the law," it only made things all the more clear for me: I was going to have to be more sneaky when I broke the rules! It's like, once I knew it was wrong, I wanted those cookies even more! That's the point Paul is making in this section. Even though the Old Testament Law describes a wonderful thing, it only made things worse because now we were tempted even more, but now we were left without an excuse. The Law has made it crystal clear that it's the evil in our own hearts that's the problem, and so as good as the Law is, it can't do a thing to change our hearts. That is clear even for us as Christians, as Paul makes his third point about...

3. The Christian and sin. (vs. 14-25)

In this section Paul gets personal and uses his own life as an example of this struggle with the sin that is in our hearts, even after we've become Christians. Paul knew what was right and wanted to do it, but he still couldn't. Paul knew what was wrong and didn't want to do that, but yet he still did it anyway.

Let me ask you – how many of you can relate to that? Even though you are a Christian, you find that you still sin sometimes; you know something is wrong, but you do it anyway, or you know something is right, but you don't do it. Can you relate? Some of you came to this altar last week to put to death your old sinful self, and you committed yourself to Jesus, and just in the last week you've already sinned – maybe even before you got home. Paul would say, "That was me, too!" In fact, he writes how frustrated he was, that he threw his hands in the air and said:

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24)

One Bible translation says it this way:

"I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?" (Romans 7:24, tmt)

The Living Bible paraphrase says it this way:

"Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?" (Romans 7:24, tlb)

You can hear the hopelessness in his voice, describing what every honest Christian can relate to. If there's a Christian who tells you that they haven't had this problem, then they are adding to their lists the sins of pride and lying. We can all relate to this. Even secular psychiatrists see this problem of the human heart.

Dr. Robert Coles is a renowned child psychiatrist, and he told this story in a graduate class at Harvard University many years ago: "A highly regarded psychiatrist recently told me in despair: 'I have been doing therapy with a man for 15 years. He is as angry, as self-centered, and as mean as he was the first day he walked into my office. The only difference is that now he knows why he is so angry and mean.'"

Dr. Coles pointed out that although the psychiatrist provided his client with insight as to how his childhood emotional wounding had affected his adult dysfunction, the man still hadn't changed. Coles asked, "Could we conclude that what this man needed wasn't just information but transformation?" Then Cole asked, "But is transformation even possible for human beings?"³

Knowing something is sin isn't enough to keep us from sinning. Even when we commit ourselves to Jesus, we find that we mess up again, so we commit ourselves to him again, only to mess up again. Is this the best that Christianity can do for us – even though we are saved, we sin, so we confess, are forgiven, we commit to God, and then repeat the process over and over and over for the rest of our lives? That question is left hanging in the air like the proverbial elephant in the room: "Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?"

Pause

Immediately Paul returns to our hope for the answer:

"Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" The answer is still Jesus! Jesus didn't die on the cross and put to death the law of sin just so you and I would have to keep struggling with sin! There is an answer! And that answer – the ultimate answer for our freedom from sin, the ultimate way that we can return to being in the image of God and live a life of love – the answer is...in chapter eight, which we'll look at next week!

The ultimate cliff-hanger! Here's the deal: everything in Romans 1-7 have been leading up to what's next. It's like Romans is a door, and the hinge is right here between chapter seven and eight. So please, join us next week! But in the meantime, I'll give you a hint: the answer lies in God's part in our sanctification: to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Benediction:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of
our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.
(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, niv)

³ Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt*, (Good Book Company, 2020) pp. 137-138