

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: Our Ongoing Struggle with Sin

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:1-25

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Religion is our attempt to connect with God by doing good things and avoiding bad things. Generally, that involves obeying a bunch of rules. The problem with religion is that we're not very good rule-keepers. Many of religious people live with the uneasy feeling—"I don't know where I stand with God. I don't think God is very happy with me." We're caught in this struggle of wanting to do right, but never being able to consistently pull it off. As a result, we live more under the shadow of condemnation than in the light of God's love.

Romans 7 is about our ongoing struggle with sin. Put simply, it tells us that sin is the problem and Jesus is the answer. In this chapter, Paul is specifically addressing Jewish Christians who believe that all non-Jewish believers must obey God's rules set forth in the Law of Moses in order to keep themselves right with God. Paul says, "No!" That's religion. That's not Christianity. He says, "In Christ, we have died to sin and therefore, we have died to the Law." And that raises questions in the minds of those Jewish believers—something like —"Okay Paul if we're no longer under law but under grace, as you say, then does that mean the law is bad? Isn't obeying God's rules essential for us to become the people God wants us to be? Again, Paul says, "No." In verses 1-6 he uses the relationship between a wife and her husband to illustrate how a believer's relationship to the law has changed. In Romans 7:6 he explains, "By dying to what once bound us—the law—we have been released from the law so that we may serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." That is the Christian life—we are no longer under law as a way of keeping ourselves right with God. We are now defined by life in the Spirit. Religion is about trying hard to live by laws and lists of rules. Christianity is about living in a new kind of relationship with God by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he goes on to unpack verse 6 in the rest of Romans 7 and the first part of chapter 8. But Paul's main task in Romans 7 is to convince those Jewish believers that the law can in no way make us or keep us right with God. He begins by telling us why the law is "holy, righteous, and good (v12).

Three reasons why the law is good (7:7-13).

1. The law defines sin for us.
2. The law exposes sin in us.
3. The law stimulates sin in us.

In verses 14-25, Paul's going to unpack why people who have been made new in Christ still struggle with sin and why obeying more rules won't fix the problem. (cf Gal 5:17-18). First, he distinguishes between his "new, innermost self" and his mortal body. He sees himself as a 2-part person. He also talks about 2 "laws" at work in his life—"the law of sin and death"(7:21-23, 25) and "the law of the Spirit of life (8:2). This, he says, is the source of our ongoing struggle with sin.

Basically, he's saying this: If you try to deal with your struggle with sin by trying harder to obey more rules, you will not weaken the pull of sin in your flesh, you will only strengthen it, and you'll make yourself miserable in the process. He said, "Just as the law cannot save us from the penalty of our sins, neither can it save us from the power of sin. The same Gospel that saves us, changes us—not the law!"

Romans 7 is a common experience of all believers, but it is not a description of the "normal Christian life." It tells us how trying harder to obey more rules only makes our struggle worse.

The problem is sin in me and the answer is Jesus living in me. Thanks be to God, Jesus has set me from the power of sin. The starting point for living in "the new way of the Spirit" is understanding that Jesus lives in you so he can live his life through you. You live the Christian life the same way you entered the Christian life. (cf Gal 2:20)

When you wake up every morning, pray—Thanks be to God! Sin has no power over me. Jesus, you have set me free, today, live your life through me. When you drift into Romans 7, say— Thanks be to God! Sin has no power over me. Jesus you have set me free, today, live your life through me.

For Discussion —

When you listen to Bible teaching, you should be listening with an ear to learn, but also an ear to share with others what you are learning. Keep that in mind as you discuss today's message. How do you need to internalize this message so you could share this Good News with people who need to hear it?

Not everyone agrees with today's teaching on Romans 7. Some very sound, godly people believe that the language of Romans 7 cannot possibly describe a Christian whom God has made new. But there are others, like myself, who believe that Romans 7 describes our ongoing struggle with sin and how trying harder and obeying more rules doesn't fix the problem, but actually makes it worse.

1. Have someone READ Romans 7:1-6. Who is Paul addressing in chapter 7? Why is Romans 7 necessary? Why didn't Paul just go from Romans 6:23 to Romans 8:1.
2. What is Paul's main idea in using the relationship between a husband and wife as an illustration between a believer's new relationship with the law?
3. READ Romans 7:7-13—What words and phrases address the connection between law and sin? How is the law "holy, righteous, and good?" (v12) In light of this passage, why are rules powerless to help us in our struggle with sin?
4. READ Romans 7:14-25—How would you summarize how Paul describes his own ongoing struggle with sin? Does this resonate with you? Point out instances of how Paul talks about himself as a "two-part" person. Why is making this distinction so important?
5. In vv.14-25 and over in 8:2, Paul talks about "the law of God," but also about two other "laws" ("fixed realities") at work in his life (READ 7:21-23, 25 and the READ 8:2)—"The law of sin and death" in his mortal body and the "law of the Spirit and life" operating in his innermost, new self. How does understanding these two conflicting "laws" fit with his "two-part" person mentality?
6. What things in your life trigger a sinful response or pattern of behavior?
7. How does the truth in Romans 7, help you deal with the struggle of ongoing sin in your life? How is inviting Jesus to live his life through you different from praying to be more patient, less angry, more able to resist lustful temptations, etc.?