

**Good Law and Deadly Sin  
Romans 7:7-13**

**Intro**

Imagine with me for a moment this scenario

You are on the run, you are being pursued by law enforcement, you are desperate to escape and the cops finally catch up to and you hear a voice scream

“stop running, hands in the air, get down on your knees”

And out of fear of not wanting to be taken out you comply - get on your knees - hands in the air - don’t wanna get shot

You comply because you’re scared - because you want to live - not because you care much about that particular police office. You are engaged in a legal transaction. Nothing personal. You obey the Law to avoid the consequences of disobeying the law

Now consider this scenario

You are on the run, you’re being pursued, you are desperate to escape and the one who is pursuing you catches up to you and you see who it is. It’s your father. You hear his voice.

My child I have always loved you and my will is that you would know my love and follow my command

Stop running, humble yourself and listen and obey me my beloved child

And you obey, not out of fear but because you are loved and you desire to please your father. You are not engaged in a legal transaction. It’s a highly personal reality this obedience to your Father. Law-keeping that is energized by love for your father.

In Romans we have been learning - maybe for the first time - maybe more deeply how grace and obedience function together

Obey God NOT in order to be accepted but because he already accepts us. Our hearts desire is to please him and out of the security of his love we seek to do his will.

Questions related to last week’s sermon for the CG Leaders - Mark Dawe’s response

**As I have looked back over 25+ years of church involvement, I had a hard time seeing the benefits...the fruit. However, as I compare to the last 5-6 years where I’ve been able to see much fruit, I have to ask what is the difference? The difference is my own personal acknowledgment, and I believe Paul’s too, about how great, how deep, how complete Christ’s redemptive work truly was, and is. When we begin to come to grips with this, and set aside our “filthy rags,” our aim becomes Christ, with our eyes on him and not ourselves. Only then will we see “good fruit.”**

How great, how deep, how complete is Christ’s redemption for our souls - Through the first 7 chapters of Romans, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has been unfolding the riches of the gospel - a great and deep and abiding theology of the grace of God

When are you gonna get to what we gotta do? Do well to not Reason there are 11 chapters of theology of “know”, “believe,” “live out of” before specific “do” stuff begins in earnest in chapter 12

Gotta know, gotta grasp how great, how deep, how complete is Christ's grace that has come to us in the gospel. Life and death and fruitfulness and our eternal destiny hang in the balance!

Our text Paul continues to teach us how law and sin and grace function in our lives. So let us read our text. Prepare our hearts and minds to hear from God himself for this is the Word of God.

## READ TEXT

Paul is continuing to take us deeply into theological realities intended by God to inform us of the grace of Jesus Christ, our constant need for Christ, and the present work of Christ in us so that we will live fruitful lives before him.

The relationship between law and grace, how sin functions in the middle of all this.

1. How the law functions 2. Our sinful response 3. The purpose of all this

### I. How the Law Functions

- A. 7:1-6 we saw that the law of God is something we need to be freed from and that Christ liberates us from the law as we are united by faith - united to him in his death and resurrection...and now we serve in the new way of the Spirit with new hearts that desire to please God - not by way of the written code.
  - 1. We are not united to a to-do list - we are united to a living Savior
- B. Since the law is presented in this negative light - need to be liberated from - a natural questions arise - v. 7 "is the law sin?"

**The law is apparently characterized as barring marriage to Christ, arousing sin, causing death, and impeding life in the Spirit, so that the sooner we gain freedom from it, the better. (John Stott, *BST: Romans*, p. 198)**

- 1. So, it is a natural question that Paul must wisely respond to - is the law sin? By no means - may it never be so - reflecting the pattern we saw in 6:1 and 6:15 - sin so that grace abounds? sin because we are not under law but under grace
  - a) Sin reigns over our lives and we need to be liberated from its tyranny
  - b) Law reigns over us and we need to be liberated
- C. Paul unpacks "why not" - no the law is not sin - the law instead reveals the reality of sin in our souls.
- D. Note the change in address - he begins to talk in the first person "I." I would not have known - continues this personal address through the rest of chapter 7.
- E. Who is this "I" that he is referring too? Commentaries inform me that this is one of the most difficult and debated chapters in Romans. Weighing different options - "I" is Paul representing Israel or "I" is Paul representing Adam or "I" is simply Paul talking about his own experiences.
  - 1. Let me suggest that at the very least Paul is talking about himself personally and also providing a paradigm for all humans when it comes to how God's law and our sin function together - the experience of all people before conversion
- F. Back to v. 7 - without the law I would not have known sin - but then I heard God's commandment "you shall not covet" and I was made aware of the sin of covetousness residing within me.
- G. The law is not sin - it reveals what sin is to us
  - 1. Paul is quoting the last of the 10 commandments (the law) found in Exodus 20:

**You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. (Exodus 20:17)**

2. Jewish tradition teaches that this 10th commandment is actually the commandment underlying all the others because this commandment addresses the heart - our desires

**Those who lives are filled with coveting are guilty of the fundamental sin; by desiring what is forbidden, they thereby show that they treasure and delight in someone or something more than they delight in the one true God. God is not their greatest treasure of pleasure, and thus they can scarcely claim to be true worshippers of him. Those who covet have another god than the one true God who created the world. Thus coveting should be understood as the fundamental sin. (Thomas Schreiner, *BECNT: Romans*, p. 367)**

3. I'm not worshipping a metal idol - check, I'm not committing murder - check, I'm not stealing from people, check - discontent with what God has given You? Oh...
  - a) Certainly, there are echoes of Eden - desire to have that which God had forbidden - fundamental sin
  - b) Coveting can be understood as the fundamental sin and so Paul wisely directs our attention there.
  - c) Paul says - I didn't know it was sin until the commandment came to me - of course not - our world does not condemn coveting it encourages it and celebrates it!

**Illustration:** Our economy thrives on coveting - news presents us with the latest horror - commercials playing before our eyes, promising security and comfort - provoking desire for the finer things - you deserve it. Even the endless parade of home improvement shows can provoke coveting. No problem. Upward mobility. Do what you have to do to gain more status, popularity, security, notoriety. Even a perfume called "covet."

4. My confusion over "coveting" prayer - I'm personally reluctant to take the name for an actual sin and apply it positively to our Christian experience.
  - a) Hidden - not like adultery or murder - "respectable sins"

**"You shall not covet" has everything to do with inward attitude and heart issues. To covet is to be discontent with what God has given you. Covering includes envy, self-pity, grumbling, and murmuring. Coveting is not simply "wanting," it is an idolatrous longing for more beauty, wealthy, approval, and popularity than you have. It is not wrong to want such things, but if you are bitter and downcast when you don't achieve them, it is because your desire for them has become idolatrous coveting. (Tim Keller, *Romans for You*, p. 166)**

- b) Ever covet? Ever discontent with what God has given you? Every experience self-pit, grumbling, and murmuring - yeah
5. God speaks to us through his law and commandments and the sin that is present in our lives is revealed
  - a) The very Jewish Paul who was an expert in the law - had a moment when the commandment landed on him in such a way that the realities of his sin were revealed.

- H. The Law is not sin - it reveals sin - and our sin responds to this revelation - our sinful natures are provoked by law and springs to action

## II. Our Sinful Response

- A. Whereas before we are largely unaware of our sin - though still guilty and culpable for our sin - the commandment comes and reveals our sin and furthermore it wakes up the sin that resides within us - it stirs our sin up and rouses it to action.
- B. Sin is not just things we do - it is an internal reality is presented here as a living, moving, monstrous figure with energy, motivation, and destructive power.
- C. V. 8 apart from grace - when we hear the law of God, instead of saying "ok" I'll do that - sin sees an opportunity and seizes it
  1. We aren't blank slates - reason out the options - born in Adam chapter 5 - born in sin - there is a sinful response to the law of God

- a) Instead of saying “yes Lord” in our sin we hear God’s law and sin produces even more sin within us
  - (1) In effect that which lies dormant within me comes alive - my response to God’s commandments isn’t more obedience it’s more sin
- D. v. 9 I was once alive apart from the law - Paul seems to be saying that I thought I was fine before the law landed upon me - the commandment came and sin came alive and I died - experiential
  - 1. Life seemed to be peachy - sun is shining, the birds are chirping, swing in my step - a fatal cancer deep within the bones of my soul - Law reveals sin and in our sin our response is even more sin
  - 2. Death for me - spiritual death at work in me because of my sin - aware of sin and it is killing me
- E. v. 10 the commandment that promised life proved to be death to me - what’s he taking about - reference to Leviticus 18:5

**For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. (Romans 10:5)**

- 1. And if one would keep all of God’s commandments perfectly, we would have the life promised by God but no-one does because of our sin and so rather than life - death is our portion. The commandment proves to be death to us.
- F. v. 11 Here again as in verse 8 we find sin seizing an opportunity - it decided me - sin tricked me into thinking that disobedience to God is not a problem
  - 1. That deception killed me - spiritual goner - deceived - in sin - under judgment - Ezekiel 18:20 - the soul who sin shall die
- G. v. 12 - so is the law sin v. 7? No, the problem with the law is that we are sinful - not the law - no the law that proceeds from God is holy - the commandment holy and righteous and good
  - 1. Oh, his commandments are not sin - they are good, perfect, righteous
    - a) WE ARE NOT!
- H. Application
  - 1. The Law is good but it cannot impart spiritual life to those who are dead in sin - it cannot save us from God’s judgment for
    - a) The Law reveals sin - the sin within us seizes the opportunity to produce more sin, to deceive us and kill us.

**III. The Purpose of All of This**

- A. v. 13 the law is good, holy, righteous - not sin - did this good law bring death to me then? Law come and I die - Again “by no means” - the law does not bring death to us - our sin brings death to us - it weaponizes God’s good, holy, righteous law.
  - 1. Temptation says the opposite - herein is life - sleight of hand - deception - it is death - sin’s constant companion
- B. But in this universal horror for humanity there is a divine purpose - v. 13 “that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”
  - 1. There is a purpose for how God’s law functions - to reveal the exceeding sinfulness of sin
    - a) These realities are not the result of a sadistic God who like to see us wriggle in fear and depression about our sin - to see sin in its ugly monstrosity - intended to stir up desperation for God’s grace - panting - desperate for grace
      - (1) Look at what sin is at work in each of us - a monster
      - (2) Seizes opportunity to deceive us,
      - (3) producing more and more in
      - (4) In the end it kills us - it produces death

- b) Sin is monstrous - but God's law reveals that sin to us and shows us how poor and sinful we truly are and reveals that all our attempts at moral improvement and performance are futile to save us.

**It is apparent that the law has no power to stem the force of sin. The law, therefore, can't be the solution to the depth of human evil. (Thomas Schreiner, *BECNT: Romans*, p. 370)**

**Illustration:** Sin - A precious treasure held close to the chest in the dark - the law comes to us - the light comes on and we look to our hands and find we are coddling a massive cockroach with poison dripping from its pincers as it snaps at your neck and face. THE LAW CAN'T FIX THAT!

- 2. The law's commands cannot save us - it was never intended to do so

**For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)**

- 3. The atrocity of our sin reveals our desperate need for a rescuer to cover and forgive sin - to the power of sin that holds sway over us.
- 4. We aren't just a little broken and need someone to fix us a little WE NEED A SAVIOR! AND IN CHRIST YOU HAVE YOUR SAVIOR!
  - a) Born of a woman - fully God and truly man - when he heard God's commands his answer from the depths of his heart was always and ever "yes Lord!" - MADE TO BE WITH US IN EVERY WAY YET WITHOUT SIN!
    - (1) Died as our substitute - bearing the judgment for the monstrosity of our sin - risen from the dead - coming to us in the Gospel declaring to sinners - I WILL ACCOUNT MY RIGHTEOUSNESS AS YOUR YOURS IF YOU WILL TRUST ME FOR MY GRACE. THIS IS WHY WE NEED AN ALIEN RIGHTEOUSNESS.
    - (a) Sin shown to be exceedingly sinful but 5:20 - WHERE SIN INCREASED GRACE ABOUNDED ALL THE MORE
    - (b) Crushes the head of that deadly cockroach - while it still wriggles in its death throes - presence of sin remains - power broken, sin, covered, righteousness imputed, eternal life secured

**In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners. (John Calvin)**

#### C. Application

- 1. CALL TO UNBELIEVERS
- 2. Beloved Don't play with sin - its end is death
  - a) It's out to kill you - calls for nothing less than all-out war!
    - (1) We belong to Christ
    - (2) Power and penalty of sin broken
    - (3) Holy Spirit within
      - (a) KILL SIN! STOP MAKING PEACE WITH IT!
    - (4) Employ the help of others - community is essential

**[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13)**

- (5) Be of good courage!

**Close**

The law is good, it has a purpose for us when it comes to our salvation - not as the Savior - but as what reveals our need for a Savior.

We are far more sinful than we could ever know but we are more loved and accepted by God than we could ever imagine.

The law-maker comes to us the law-breakers and in Christ, his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners.

When hear his words of command - it is not the impersonal transaction of law and obedience - it is the Word of the one who loves us and whom we love - we say "yes Lord!"

May it be so increasingly in our lives.

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