**Romans**

**Lesson 12: A Walking Civil War Romans 7:1-25**

How would you like to know that your sins will never be counted against you? How would you like to know that the law, the Ten Commandments, will never be used to condemn you? Haven’t you broken many of these commandments? If so, how is it possible to get off scot-free?

In chapter 7, Paul uses marriage to illustrate that the law's righteous requirements no longer bind the believer. How is this so? It is because he has been set free through death. Marriage is a binding relationship, as long as both the husband and wife live, but death changes everything. The Bible clearly states that a husband and wife are bound to one another “so long as they both shall live.” But if one dies, the other is free to marry someone else. Paul writes in verse 1, “Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?” Just as a married woman is no longer bound to her husband if he dies, so a man is no longer bound by the law if he dies. Death is the act that frees both. This is what Paul is trying to explain in the beginning of chapter 7, and it corresponds to what he stated in the previous chapter (6:2-7). Something supernatural has occurred—the believer’s death—and it all happened due to his union with Christ. Believers are united with Christ through faith in both his death and resurrection. All believers died with him when Jesus died to pay the price for our sins. Thus, the old man is dead. Therefore, the believer is no longer under the law, meaning the law no longer has any hold on him, and he is free from any condemnation (Romans 8:1)! By faith, the believer is now married to Christ (rather than the law) and lives his new life in the power of Christ. For this reason, Paul wrote the church at Colossae: “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

Paul continues, “So, my brothers, 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, so that we might bear fruit to God”(Romans 7:4).As believers, we are united with Christ. We belong to him just as husbands and wives belong to each other. In this new relationship, we begin to bear fruit for God—the fruit of a holy life, though far from perfect. As believers, we actually begin to live up to the righteous standards of the law, not out of duty, but out of love for our marriage partner, Jesus. As such, Paul wrote the church in Galatia,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25).

Before we placed our trust in Jesus Christ and were born again (John 3), we were controlled by our sinful nature. Continuing in chapter 7, we read,

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, 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 (vv. 5-6).

If we are honest, we must admit we were born with sinful desires that derive from a sin nature that loves to do what it is told not to do. You may have noticed you don’t have to entice a two-year-old to disobey—it just comes naturally! Moreover, when you tell him not to do something, he just wants to do it more! This is the nature of sin. The law works to arouse our desires to do what we are told not to do, but as we live out our sinful desires, we die physically and spiritually. *The wages of sin is death*! But now, through Christ, we have been released from the law so that we may serve Christ in a whole new way—not out of duty but in the power of the Spirit (Romans 8).

Thus far, in Romans, Paul has explained that the law defines sin for us. We would not have known what sin is except for the law. Furthermore, the law not only reveals sin in us, but it stimulates sin. Thankfully, through Christ, believers have been set free from the law. Now, given all that Paul said about the law, some in Paul’s audience may have begun to wonder if the law was bad, which is why Paul writes, “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’” (verse 7). Remember, Paul had been a Pharisee, and Pharisees meticulously kept the law outwardly. He probably considered himself innocent regarding trespassing the first nine of the Ten Commandments. But, when he began to think about covetousness, the Tenth Commandment, he realized he had broken the law, internally, in his heart. Paul confessed,

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from 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 (vv. 8-11).

Now Paul, being in Christ and indwelt by the Spirit, was convicted of breaking all the Commandments. Thus, he realized that the law condemned him to death because the wages of sin is death (6:23). Paul concludes, “So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good”(v. 12). Keller expounds, “The flaw was not in the law—quite the reverse (v 12): the flaw was in Paul, the sinner. Externally, he may be very good; internally, he could not be anything other than a sinner.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

This thorough examination of the law leads Paul to ask, “Is the law a killer?” He writes, “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But so that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (v. 13). Sin is the killer rather than the law. God uses the law to reveal sin in us so we might see our need for Him. That is the real purpose of the law. The Holy Spirit uses the law to convict us of sin so we can see how utterly sinful we are. And, with that insight, the Spirit draws us to Christ. Thus, the law is good. It is wonderful because it is the tool the Spirit uses to drive us to Jesus. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul contends,

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (3:23-25).

**The Great Internal Civil War!**

In the last half of chapter 7, Paul begins to share his personal experience as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ. Theologians have debated for centuries, wondering: Is Paul writing about his life before or after his conversion? I believe that Paul is describing the ongoing civil war that takes place in the heart of every believer from the moment of conversion. This has certainly been my experience. Before a man trusts in Jesus Christ, he belongs to Satan, and is under Satan’s control. The apostle John reminds us, “We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

On the other hand, the moment a man hears the gospel of Jesus Christ and believes, he is sealed (indwelt) by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). From this point on, there is a power within the believer working against the power of the evil one. These two powers are at war with one another. Hence, a battle rages within the hearts and minds of all believers.

Keller agrees and suggests four reasons why Paul is talking about his own experience—his Christian life. Keller writes,

1. *There is a change in verb tenses. The verbs of verses 7-13 are in the past tense, but from verse 14 on all the tenses are present. A natural reading would tell us that Paul is speaking of his own “now.”*
2. *There is a change in situation. Verses 7-13 talk about sin “killing” him. He’s dead. But from verse 14 on Paul describes an ongoing struggle with sin, in which he struggles but refuses to surrender.*
3. *Paul delights in God’s law: “In my inner being I delight in God’s law” (v 22), even though sin is nevertheless at work within him. Unbelievers cannot delight in God’s law in their heart of hearts: “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (8:7). This categorically denies that any unbeliever can delight in God’s law, so is a strong argument that 7:22 can’t be the words of an unbeliever.*
4. *Paul admits that he is a lost sinner: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (v 18). Unbelievers are unaware of being lost and so sinful that they can’t save themselves. In fact, even immature believers tend to be over-confident, unaware of the depths of the depravity of their own hearts.*
5. *So the evidence in the text points to the speaker being “present Paul”—a mature believer—though this is an issue on which wise, godly people have respectfully disagreed.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

The Christian life is not easy. We have an enemy who seeks to destroy us, and the moment we commit our lives to Jesus Christ, Satan comes after us. He already has unbelievers, so he doesn’t have to worry too much about them. However, believers are a threat to his kingdom. Thus, we are on his radar and need to be aware and prepared. For this reason, we are told, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Chapter 7 concludes with Paul’s description of the civil war within. He says,

So I find this law at work: When 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 the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind   
am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (vv. 21-25).

A Personal Word:

As a believer, I have experienced God’s grace and mercy. In addition, I know the Holy Spirit lives in me, and I have eternal life. I know Jesus personally as my Lord and Savior. He’s been my friend (John 15:14-15) since I invited him into my heart when I was about ten years old. However, from that moment, a battle has raged within me. I wish I could say it gets easier as   
I get older, but that has not been the case. My heart and spirit want so much to obey God, but Satan has proved to be a mighty warrior. As time goes on, I become more and more aware of the sin that still exists in my heart. I understand how Paul must have felt. What a wretched man I am at times. Like Paul, sometimes I cry out, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” I know the answer is Jesus Christ, my Lord! When all is said and done, I know this truth: In His sight,   
I am forgiven. He has cleansed me completely. When God sees me, he sees the righteousness of His Son in me and covering me. I am reminded of the words of Isaiah: “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness” (61:10).

One day, I will see Jesus. On that day, I will be like him (1 John 3:2). Oh, how I long for that day! In the meantime, I am trying to live more and more for Christ, and the only possible way is by living each day in the power that is available to me. That power is the same power that raised Jesus from the grave. It is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what Romans 8 is all about—life through the Spirit. Unbelievers have no choice. Their sinful minds control them. But, if you are in Christ, as I am, then you have a choice. Believers can submit to God’s law by the Spirit as they surrender to his control. Here’s the good news that leads us to the next chapter of Romans: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (8:1-2).   
I know the Lord has forgiven me, and though I stumble and sin, Jesus picks me up and sets   
me back on the right course. I love the grace of God, which I have experienced many times.   
I hope you have too! If you have not placed your trust in Jesus Christ and experienced his   
grace and mercy, why not do so now? All you have to do is receive him into your heart by   
faith (John 1:12-13). At that moment, he will seal you with his Holy Spirit, and you can begin   
to live this new life in the power of him who has saved you.

DAY 1 . Read Romans 7:1-6.

1. Paul uses marriage to illustrate how a believer is no longer bound to the law.
   1. Explain his illustration using verses 1-3.
   2. What releases a woman from her obligation to her husband, thus setting her   
      free to remarry?
2. Read verse 4.
   1. What event prevents you from being accountable (bound) to the law as a believer?
   2. What does it mean to you that the law can no longer be used against you (legally) to bring condemnation (Romans 8:1)?
   3. To whom does a believer belong once freed from the law?
   4. A believer no longer lives under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). What does this mean to you?

DAY 2 . Read Romans 7:1-6 again.

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10.
   1. How does Paul describe the life of an unbeliever before his conversion (salvation)?
   2. What does it mean to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature and follow its desires   
      and thoughts?
   3. What does it mean to be “objects of wrath” (John 3:36; 1 Thess. 1:10)?
   4. What did God do for those who believe (Eph. 2:4-5)?
   5. What do you think God plans for those who believe in the coming ages (2:7)?
   6. How does God want to use those who believe in him (2:10)?
2. Romans 7:5-6 say,

For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, 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.

* 1. How does one serve in the “old way of the written code?”
  2. How does one serve in the “new way of the Spirit?”

DAY 3 . Read Romans 7:7-13.

1. After showing that the law arouses our sinful desires and how believers are freed from the law, Paul anticipates the response of some who may deduce that the law is bad (sinful). After all, Paul told them that rather than giving life, the law brings death and condemnation and, instead of producing holiness, it stimulates sin. Therefore, some may wonder, “Is there anything good about the law?” How does Paul answer in verses 7 and 12?
2. What three things does the law do?
   1. Verse 7
   2. Verse 8
   3. Verses 9-11
3. How does the law lead one to Christ?
4. Paul writes, “I found that the very commandment that was intended for life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death” (verses 10-11).
   1. Explain.
   2. Have you experienced this in your own life? If so, how?
5. How does the Holy Spirit use the law to show us how utterly sinful sin is (verse 13)?

DAY 4 . Read Romans 7:14-25.

1. Verses 14-20 deal with the struggle in Paul’s life. Do you think Paul describes his life   
   before or after his Damascus road conversion (Acts 9; before Christ or after Christ)?   
   Explain your answer.
2. A non-believer has only one nature, a sinful nature. A Christian (believer) has two   
   natures. What are they (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 14:16-17; Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 1:13;   
   2 Peter 1:4)?
3. Fritz Ridenour writes,

So, we may as well be honest. This “new life in Christ” is not a snap. We come to Christ as sinners. We are saved by God’s amazing grace, and we are forgiven and justified before God. But we are still sinners after we believe. Paul found this out. He admitted that he was “rotten through and through” (v. 18).

The inescapable fact is that we can’t do the right thing by ourselves. Knowing the rules, golden or otherwise, doesn’t make us able to obey. We keep falling into the trap called sin because we choose to. The old nature is still in every Christian, trying to keep the new nature from taking over. And there is no “peaceful coexistence.” Truly, the Christian is a “walking civil war.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

* 1. What does Paul recognize taking place within him according to verses 21-23?
  2. Have you experienced this? Explain your answer.

1. Read Galatians 5:16-26.
   1. Explain how the sinful nature and the Spirit are in conflict with one another.
   2. Have you experienced this internal battle? What are you doing to win the battle?
2. To whom did Paul look to rescue him from this “body of death?” How does Jesus give us victory over sin? Have you experienced this?

**Conclusion**

In Romans 8, we will study the key to victory over sin. Warren Wiersbe says, “The old (sinful) nature knows no law and the new nature needs no law.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The best is yet to come! Chapter 8 explains the work of the Holy Spirit to overcome the bad and produce good. Have you been rescued from this battle that is being waged between the old, sinful nature and the new, spiritual nature? Can you say, along with Paul, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ (my) Lord?”

1. Ibid., 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 167-168. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ridenour, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary Volume,* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor

   Publishing, 1989), 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)