When in Rome: Two Predicaments

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Welcome here for the Sunday, June 14th, 2026. My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the pastor here and to be with you here this morning. So we're jumping ahead again a wee bit this morning.

We're going to be passing over Romans 7, 1 to 13, and you can note that. And as always, I encourage you to read passages for yourselves when we skip over.
But as I've done before, here we go again. Here's a brief summary of Romans 7, 1 to 13. So in that section, Paul addresses the idea that even once we have chosen to accept and follow Jesus, we're still bound by the law.
Maybe this goes without saying, but I think it's helpful for us to clarify what Paul means there when he speaks about the law. And maybe you've thought about it. Maybe you know exactly.
He's not talking about law and order. He's not talking about Roman law or even necessarily the acceptable cultural norms that govern society at his time.
[1:23] When the apostle Paul writes about the law in the New Testament, he's usually referring to Mosaic law or Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament.

So that's the foundational collection of moral, civil, and ritual commandments that God gave to the ancient Israelites in the first five books of the Old Testament.
But as we can likely recognize, God's law is often very clearly also reflected in human laws and moral guidelines. As you know, I'm doing an, it turns out to be more massive than even I thought, online apologetics course right now.
And so it's opening my eyes, my heart to so many different things. And one of them is that people who don't recognize God, don't follow the teaching of Christ or anything like that, they still seem to have a basic morality.
So where does that come from? Well, we know where it comes from. So that's a fingerprint of God in people's lives that don't even necessarily recognize or follow him.
[2:34] We are not moral just because we're good people. We have an innate sense in us of morality and ethics that come from God, come from our creator.

So in Romans 7, 1 to 13, Paul suggests that the law of Moses, the law of the Israelites, applies to the living but not the dead. That's kind of interesting.
Maybe that's obvious, right? Once you're dead, what laws apply to you? But Paul's point in all of this is that through Christ, when we're dead to sin in baptism in Christ, we also become dead to the law.
Why is that? Well, we're no longer subject to the law. We are followers and subjects and servants of Christ. So we're no longer justified or sanctified in any way simply through obedience to the law.
But through obedience to Christ. Is that clear? I don't always notice nodding because it's silent, you know. Our passage for this morning is Romans 7, 14 to 25.
[3:45] So we're picking up after the summary I just gave you. So if you want to turn in your Bibles, Romans 7, 14 to 25. They're in the pew in front of you. You probably have your own with you.

And I'll read it for us. Romans 7, 14 to 25 says, We know that the law is spiritual. And this is Paul speaking.
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.

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[4:48] 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's 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, Paul says. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Don't change. 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.
[6:00] As you get bogged down in all the I do, do not, do, or do not, there is no try. Yada, yada, yada. Do I diddy, diddy, dum, diddy, do. There's a lot of do's and do nots.

So we'll get there. So our sermon this morning is titled, Two Predicaments. And we're going to take a close look at a very real struggle. Michelle said to me this week, two predicaments.
Predicaments, that's kind of a big word, isn't it? And I said, I'll explain it. So we're going to take a close look at a very real struggle. One that Paul describes in Romans 7, 14 to 25.
It's ironic because we come to this passage, and I've had some very recent conversations with people about, man, I don't want to sin, but why do I sin? I really don't want to do it.
Why am I a bad person? Why am I such a sinner? Ah, welcome to the club. So Paul shares this struggle. It's something that he faces himself.
[6:58] It's very clear. But it's likely one that many contemporary Christians, I've talked to people about it, contemporary Christians face this struggle as well. So as we'll see in our text for this morning, it's a struggle for someone who knows to do good, but can't seem to do it.

It's a struggle between the desire to keep God's law and a war with the law of sin, the temptation of sin, the way it seeks to control us.
So this is a challenging passage, and as our sermon title suggests, there are two predicaments, two challenges at play here. There's a textual predicament that we're going to look at, and there's also a human predicament that we'll look at as well.
So a predicament, for the sake of those who need a definition or love definitions, it's defined as any difficult and perplexing situation. Maybe you're perplexed by the definition.
It's a dilemma, in other words. It's also a word that people go, what does dilemma mean? Well, hopefully you get it in there. So we're going to start by looking at the textual predicament first.
[8:14] We've already noticed that this seems to be a predicament that Paul himself is wrestling with, not just one that he's sharing with his readers and listeners as some kind of example and illustration, right?

He's not saying, oh, here's a really bad example that Bob told me the other day, and here's what Bob is struggling with. He's personally wrestling with something here.
And so is it, first of all, his struggle to be a Christian? Well, when we look at that text at the beginning, he uses first-person pronouns. He says, I, and me, and my, and myself.
So all of those seem to suggest to us that this is a personal issue for him. But then we also see in other places in Scripture that this seems to be a potential struggle for all Christians.
Let's hear Galatians 5, 16, and 17. Paul says there, That's contrary to what the message of the world has been for decades.
[9:39] Some might say centuries. Do whatever you feel like, because nothing lasts forever. Better to burn out than fade away. All these kind of concepts, right?

Live free, die hard, all those things. James 4, verse 1 says, What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?
1 Peter 2, 11 says, Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.
No laughing matter. So this struggle against sin and making selfish choices, it seems to be one that, unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you view it, seems to be one that we should expect when we give our lives to Christ.
Christian life, I could get a show of hands. Christian life is not easy always, right? I saw a finger go up. It is not easy.

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[10:50] I've said to people, and I've heard many times, it in fact puts a target on your back for the greatest enemy we could ever have. So I could ask for a show of hands, like I said, who is facing this kind of struggle?

Keep your hands down. But it's safe to say that I already know what that would look like. Another possibility here, though, is that Paul's struggle may come from the fact that he is a Jew.
So not his Christian change of identity, but he was a Jew, as we know, who was trained and extremely knowledgeable in the law, right? Paul was knowledgeable, debated it, taught it, so many different things.
He was well-trained in the law. So some commentators suggest that may, in fact, have been the root of Paul's personal struggles over this issue, right?
When your character, who you are, your identity, I should say, rather than character, your identity is deeply rooted in something. It's hard to make a change. So it's almost as though his past understanding is struggling with his new understanding once he has fallen under the lordship of Christ.
[12:01] Does that make sense? His past identity, I think we can all probably relate to this. Our past identity, PC, pre-Christ, versus our new identity, struggle.

And that's where sin comes in, in a lot of ways. So there's two things. Here we get deeply theological. So bear with me. Buckle in.
Have a short nap. Not too long. So there's two things we need to consider when we're truly understanding Scripture, when we're seeking to do that. And they're terms from biblical study. Many of you will know them. Hermeneutics and exegesis. Hermeneutics. So hermeneutics means the science and art of interpreting Scripture.
It considers things like historical context, the genre of the writing that we're considering, many genres in the Bible, the language that's used in the writing and its specific meaning, and then considering the context of the passage that we're looking at within the context of the entire book from which it comes.
[13:07] So hermeneutics is essentially a set of guiding principles that we bring to interpreting Scripture. So what's exegesis? Well, exegesis is the practical application of the guidelines of hermeneutics to dig into the text itself.

So I think this is helpful. I found this. It may be helpful to think of hermeneutics as the rules of the road, the map, the vehicle, driving laws, etc.
And exegesis is then the actual journey. So driving the car to a specific destination. Is that helpful? We need to have that kind of understanding in a basic way when we study Scripture, at least basic. So first, there's a predicament of how to understand the text, right? We've just recognized that. So let's consider the overall context of the book of Romans for a minute.
So Romans speaks of justification by faith in Christ, not keeping the law of Moses. That's something that's a continuous theme throughout the book.
[14:16] The promise to Abraham comes through faith, not the law. So what about the immediate context then of chapters 7 and 8, Romans 7 and 8?

Well, Paul's comments there are directed especially to those who know the law, right? That's the audience he's speaking to in many ways. Now, he is also speaking to a Gentile audience as well, but it's targeted a little bit towards people who know the law well.
So for anyone who was once married to the law, right, really fiercely committed to it, then dies to the law, dies to that fierce connection through Christ.
Those once held by the law have been delivered from it. The law references clearly the Ten Commandments, which again, where does our moral code in society come from?
Well, there's ten examples there. So the law, though good, brought death to people and not deliverance. So the specific kind of deliverance that Paul appeals to, that he alludes to in the book of Romans, then he explains with specifics and clarity.
[15:33] So when we take a moment to consider all these context clues, I believe that begins to resolve that textual predicament for us. So while this may be a personal struggle for Paul, as we talked about, many suggest that it was, Paul still presents it as something that really does apply to all Christians.

It still applies to you and to me. So we're freed from the law by our death to sin in Christ. It was the only way that was possible. And then we're called to live the kind of life that Jesus taught and

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modeled for us.
And why do we live that life? Not out of guilt or obligation, but because we love him, because we want to serve him with our lives, because we recognize that his way for us is the best way, without question.
But then what about the human predicament? Remember, we talked about two predicaments in this, textual and now human. So speaking with personal language, as we've talked about, and from personal experience, Paul bears his heart to us in this passage.
But then as we also considered, the human predicament that Paul outlines likely applies to all of us as well. And as you read through it on your own, you'll maybe go, oh yeah, me, me.
[16:54] That's me. Also me. So Paul describes this predicament with eloquence and clarity. He describes himself as being sold as a slave to sin.

So again, although he sincerely wants to do good, he finds himself unable. He wants to abstain from evil, but finds himself unable.
He agrees the desires to do good and to abstain from evil are positive. But he finds that sin dwells in him. In his flesh, Paul says, nothing good dwells.
So while the desire to do good is definitely there, the ability to perform is not. The good that he wants to do, he doesn't do, and the evil that he doesn't want to do, he does.
Show of hands. No, no show of hands. Can you relate? I'll put my hand up. There's such powerful language here. Paul describes this struggle as, here's a quote, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.
[18:13] So never let it be said that Paul takes anything or speaks about anything he's passionate about lightly. That is not what Paul does. So Paul takes one last opportunity here to reflect on himself and the despair of his predicament.

And you remember I said tonal change as I was reading the passage because the switch flips in the text. So after he mournfully and desperately says, what a wretched man am I?
Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? And then in the same phrase, while this really does seem like a wretched situation, he describes himself as sold under sin, sin battling within him, being enslaved to the law of sin.
Paul then interrupts himself. Did you catch that? He bursts out with this glorious and hopeful declaration. He praises God. He recognizes Jesus as the one who will deliver him from these seemingly hopeless circumstances.
But it seems like the predicament would still persist. He, and maybe we, are willing to serve the law of God with our minds, but with our bodies, we're still potentially subject to sin.
[19:34] Show of hands. Just kidding. So this is all explained in Romans 8. I was reading through Romans 8 again this morning as I was thinking about the next two weeks.

And I don't want to jump ahead too much. Romans 8 is described as one of, if not the most powerful chapter in all of Scripture. Better show up, because it might be really exciting.
But I don't want to jump ahead too much, and you're already seeing it on the slide, but just some teasers. There's no condemnation for those in Christ. Sounds like an antidote.
The law of new life in Christ frees us. Christ's death fulfills God's righteousness requirement. We're no longer slaves to our flesh, no longer living solely according to our own desires.
By the Spirit, we can put to death deeds of the flesh and live fully as children of God. So in Romans 7, Paul vividly illustrates the weakness of the law of Moses.
[20:47] My Jewish friends, if they were here, would gasp. So the law was holy and just and good, but it was deficient in offering true deliverance.

It ultimately didn't offer any deliverance from guilt, from the power of sin. In fact, when you look at the law of the Old Testament, you think, ooh, I do that.
Oh, I do that. I also do that. And there's no, however, there's hope for you, right? There's no sense of deliverance. We want to do good, but the ability to truly act as we should isn't available under our own strength or willpower.
for anyone who has struggled with, and I would say 100% of us do, struggled with any kind of addiction, whether substance abuse, or anger issues, or desires to control our circumstances, any of those things, under our own strength or willpower, trying to solve, how successful has that been for you?

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As we're going to begin to see next week, as we move into Romans 8, I'm really excited, Paul proves deliverance from this predicament that we've explored together this morning.
[22:10] He provides the answers to this deliverance. Because first, there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Second, you've got to do it all on your own.

No, you don't. The Holy Spirit is our aid and our strength in resisting sin. And this struggle, as I've mentioned a few times now, is still present for us.
I think we could all agree. But we know that we have help and support as we strive to live the life that God wants for us. Have you personally experienced freedom from the guilt of sin through Christ?
I want that for you. Are you experiencing freedom from sin's power through the Holy Spirit at work within you? When you struggle, when you find yourself in a moment of darkness and depression and guilt, pause and remember that you are loved so deeply and you are forgiven in Christ.
Friends, may we all be reminded, I hope we have this morning and that will stick with you, of the blessings that we have already received. If you want to know more about this, about being free from the guilt of sin, how to understand it, how to receive it more, how to be able to let go, please talk to me because I want to give you hope.
[23:49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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