

The success of the gospel compared with the law

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at Romans 7 from verse 25 through to chapter 8 verse 4. It's just a few verses and I don't think these verses say anything particularly new.

! I think it's one of the places where Paul has been taking us on a journey up a steep mountainside and we've been huffing and puffing as we worked our way through the various things that he's been saying and here is a little flat bit on the mountain where we can sit down, have a cup of tea and a rest and look at the view and see where we've got to and I think that's what he's doing in chapter 7 verse 25 to chapter 8 verse 4. He's summarizing the position of the Christian believer.

And I don't know what you are thinking and how you are feeling this morning. You might be feeling a little bit ill. You might be rather stressed. You might have been very busy.

You might be rather distracted. You might be disappointed with this present world or you might be so excited by its prospects. All sorts of different conditions.

And I have to say that these particular verses don't address any of those things as such. But what the verses do do is write something more important over the top of them.

[1 : 39] So whatever of those you are, these verses say something more important than any of that. And that's, I think that is the way to take what we're looking at this morning.

Just as a reminder for where we've been, where we've climbed up, in Romans chapters 1 and 2 were to do with sin and the wrath of God. Around chapter 3 was to do with how God would count us in the group of people not guilty rather than guilty.

How can we be counted righteous? How can we be justified? And he included in that belonging to Jesus Christ, which he took into chapter 4, 5 and 6, where he's talking not about justification but about transformation.

And all the way through he's been centering on Jesus Christ and all the way through he's been keeping an eye on the Old Testament of the Bible.

There were Jewish people who were listening to him and saying, well, hold on a minute, we've already got what God says. We already have the law. Where does that fit in? And he's been referring to that all the way through.

[3 : 02] Well, that's where we've climbed up. And here we arrive in verse 25 with a therefore. Except the NIV translates it then.

So then. It's in verse 25. 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.

And then the next verse says, therefore. Looks as though he's saying two different things. So then and therefore. In the original Greek it's the same word. It's not a necessarily strong word.

It's just saying this being the case. All words have a range of meanings. This word can simply mean this being the case.

This is where we got, this is the position we're in. And it's used in Mark 11 verse 13. Although having looked at the NIV this morning, it's not particularly clear where. But this is the bit where Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem.

[4 : 13] He's hungry. He sees a fig tree. And this being the case, he has a look for some fruit. Therefore, this being the case.

You could say we're on the beach. It's a sunny day. There's an ice cream shop. Got some money in my pocket. This being the case.

This is what the situation is. We'll go and buy an ice cream. I think Paul is saying what is the case. And he says it twice. And I'd like to go through in four points what he says is the case and where this leaves us.

So, very simple. These are summaries of things I think that he's mentioned before. So, summary number one. This being the case. So, this is the case then.

I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law. But in the flesh or in the sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin. So, I think he's saying this is the case.

[5 : 22] This then is the case. I'm in conflict. As a believer, I experience within myself conflicting things going on.

Conflicting powers. Conflicting pulls. Conflicting forces within me. I'm in conflict.

But Paul is going to say there's nothing wrong with being in that conflict. If you want to think of it as a fight, it's a good fight. It's the right fight to be in.

It's a good conflict. And he says it is a normal conflict. This is normal for the Christian life. So, what's the conflict? I don't know whether you remember.

The other week we looked at where he says it's I. Well, in a sense it's not I. The conflict, as it were, between what's going on.

[6 : 28] He says, in my mind. That's what he says. In my mind I am a slave to God's law. But in my sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin.

In my mind I serve God's law. In my flesh, in my sinful nature, I serve the law of sin. Two conflicting powers, principles at work within me.

So, just to enlarge on that. I serve within me. Somehow, it is true to say, as a believer, I am serving God's law. Not in the sense that I eat all the foods that the Jewish people were told to eat.

And don't eat the foods that they were forbidden to eat. But in the deepest sense of what the law is getting at. What the law is aiming for. In the deep meaning of it. I am serving God's law.

And this other law, which he says here, in the sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin. Well, when he uses the word law here, I don't think he's meaning the writings of the Old Testament.

[7 : 42] He means it's a principle. This is what I observe to be the case. There's a principle at work within me of temptation. Of wrong desire.

Of wrong reaction. Of selfishness, if you like. All sorts of things like this in terms of thoughts. And words. And deeds.

And desires. And these are all contrary to God's law. But I find in myself, I'm capable of both of those things. In a very strange sort of way. And you could say that it's the two-sidedness of, on the one side, I'm born again.

The believer is born again from the Spirit of God. The believer is raised to new life spiritually. On the other hand, we are still not raised to life physically.

The body that we have is just the same as the body that we had before we were Christians. And we are looking forward to the resurrection of the body.

[8 : 57] And in some rather mysterious way, that gives us a foot in two camps. We're, if you like, in the world of the Spirit in some way. But we're still in the world of Adam in another way.

And so, number one, we're in a conflict. And I draw the conclusion that this is a normal experience. Perhaps not always an intense experience.

Sometimes an intense experience. But definitely there. So I ask you to consider. Would you agree with this? So I ask you to consider.

Is there anything that's ever crossed my mind? Do you find that within you there is a longing for spiritual, holy things?

And yet, to your disgust and distaste, there is also within you the ability and the reality of doing things that are against God's law.

[10 : 00] Do you find that conflict within you? So, if you've thought to yourself. Do you know, that's never been an issue for me. Then what I would like you to think is.

Are you really a Christian? If sin has never been an issue. Or not a particularly important issue. I ask again. Are you really a Christian?

Because this conflict is a normal experience. Experience. Summary number one. Summary point number two.

Over and above the conflict. We're now into chapter eight. Verse one. Therefore, this being the case. Let me summarize this particular aspect of it.

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Point of summary number two. Over and above this conflict.

[11:06] The believer is in Christ. You notice those words. Is those who are in Christ Jesus. And that means there is no condemnation.

No condemnation for the sins of my flesh. There is no condemnation now.

Please notice that word now. Chapter eight. Verse one. There is now. No condemnation. I would like to give that word its full time reference.

I don't think he's saying now. Which doesn't mean anything. Now. What should we do today?

Oh. Now then. Or. Now children. But I think he's saying. Now. If you follow my drift.

[12:12] He's saying. Bear in mind. Christians experience conflict. That's a true statement of affairs. And here is another true statement of affairs. There is now.

No. Condemnation. For those who are in Christ Jesus. And he uses this link. Or he's used this link before.

And he used it in chapter five. Verse 18. Which I will refer back to. Because this I think is what his thinking is. In chapter five.

18. He said. Everybody is in one of two places. They are either in Adam. Chapter five. Verse 18. Just as the result of one man's trespass. Was condemnation for all. He says. Adam. There is this linkage. You remember God doesn't deal with humanity like bubble wrap.

[13:11] He deals with humanity like a tree. Like a tree. That's the way he does it. And right at the root of the tree. If something is done there. It affects the rest of the tree.

And here. For. One. Sin. By our forefather Adam. That brings. Condemnation. To all his children. It just does. And he says. So that's the condemnation position. If you are in Adam. However. If you are a Christian.

You are now attached to a different tree. And this is the tree. At whose root and stem. Adam. Is another person.

With another work. So chapter 5. Verse 18. Just as the result of one trespass. Was condemnation. For all men. So also the result.

[14:07] Of one act of righteousness. Was justification. That brings life. For all men. So in Adam. One sin led to condemnation.

In Christ. One righteous act. I think that's a shorthand way of saying. One complex. Of things that Jesus did. His death and resurrection. That mighty event.

When he did that. He changed everything. For all the people. In him. So here's summary point number two.

Which is a very powerful point. There is now. No condemnation. For those who are in Christ Jesus. Jesus. And summary point number two. Seems to me to be in the nature of a fact. Which is received by reasoning faith.

[15:08] So in my first point. I asked you to look within yourself. And to say is this my experience. But in this second summary point. I'm not going to ask you to look within yourself.

I'm going to ask you to look. To the cross of Jesus Christ. I'm going to ask you to look to what God has said. And I'm going to ask you. Not do you experience this.

But do you believe it. Because this is a fact. To be received. By faith. My favorite illustration.

Of something like that. Is of Mrs. Thatcher. The one time prime minister. Of the UK. Who. Whose.

I don't know whether it's her son or daughter. Produced an offspring. And so Mrs. Thatcher said.

Quite famously. In fact on television. We are a grandmother.

[16:07] I don't know whether there are any. That was the point at which I. When I saw that I thought. I'm not sure. Whether she's in touch with reality actually. But anyway. She said we. We. We are. We are a grandmother.

Now. If you think of that. She. Came to. She was. Brought into this. Status of being a grandmother. Not by anything. That was within her experience.

She couldn't look within herself. And say. Oh yes. I'm a grandmother now. I can tell by looking inside my own heart. She knew she was a grandmother. By receiving. A fact.

About something. That somebody else had done. Outside of her. Which affected her. And I'm saying. That this. Of no condemnation. Is more like that.

Christ. Died on the cross. He did it. He achieved it. It changes things for us. We have to receive that fact. By faith. Summary point number two.

[17:06] There is now. No condemnation. I just emphasize the now. Because it is at the same period. As the conflict. So if you're in the conflict. You think. Oh. How can I be in.

You know. I'm conscious of my sin. And I'm struggling away. I feel so guilty about this. But Paul says. You don't have to wait a second. To enter the position.

Of saying. No condemnation. Because of what Christ did. All those years ago. There is. Now. This moment. For you as a Christian.

No condemnation. For those who are in Christ Jesus. That's my second point. Number three. The conflict. Takes place.

Within. A condition. Of freedom. Or victory. If you want to put it that way. So I've now moved on into. Verse. Two.

[18:02] Where it says. For. Or because. Through. Christ Jesus. The law. Of the spirit of life. Set me free. From the law.

Of sin. And death. Repeating. Through. Christ Jesus. The law. Of the spirit. Of life. Set me free. From the law. Of sin. And death. So he. The translation uses. Law. Twice. In that sentence. And I. Think. Again.

He. Has the idea. Of a principle. A dynamic. Of operation. Let me first. Give you. An example. Think of the.

Terrorists. Who. Terribly. And. Heartlessly. Planted. Bonds. On the London. Underground. Or on. The. Buses.

[18:59] There was a. Bomb went off on a bus. Wasn't there. Do you. Think. That those. Terrorist. Acts. In fact. Stood a single.

Chance. Of overthrowing. The UK government. No. They didn't. Did they. They. They could. Create. A lot of. Publicity. They could. Make people. Very. Very frightened. But. Looking at it. In its most. Gross. And crude. Way. They could. Kill.

Actually. Very few. People. And certainly. Not enough. To topple. A government. It was. In that sense. A hopeless act. And yet it happened.

Yet it was a terrorist attack. And you could imagine. Terrorists. Operating. Against. A strong. State. They might. Do. Vicious acts.

[19:52] And persistent. Acts. They might be. Always present. But. Never. Standing. A chance. Of victory. And I'd like you.

To have that. Idea. I'd like us to have that. An idea. In our minds. And just think about. This sentence here. It said. That there was. A law. Of sin. And death.

Death. So. A law. Or a principle. Of sin. And death. And this is. The. The law.

The principle. Of sin. The rules. Of the law. Don't. Remedy.

That. If anything. They make it worse. And we have. Just a. Complicated. Mess. Of being told. What to do. But not being able. To do it. Of sin.

[20:48] Ruling. And death. Ruling. So. That's the regime. And. We're told. That that. Regime. Has been.

Finished. We have been. Liberated. The law. Of the spirit. Of life. Set me. Free. From the law. Of sin.

And death. So we had that law. But we've been. Liberated. From it. So. Bear in mind. That word. Set free. And we've been.

Set free. By. The law. Of the spirit. Of life. In Christ. In Christ. Jesus. Through Christ. Jesus. The law. Of the spirit. Of life.

Set me free. From the law. Of sin. And death. So. We are operating. In a position. Of having. Been set free.

[21:43] We're operating. In a position. That the former. Power. That held us. No longer. Holds us. And if you like.

Sin. Is no longer. The governing power. But sin. Is the terrorist. Within. Who keeps on. Attacking. Who keeps on. Doing terrible things.

But. Sin. Cannot. Overthrow. Or cannot. Take back. Its rule. There is a new. Government. In place. And. That's the government.

That's in charge. So. Do you see. This. Principle. There is a conflict. But it's like. Terrorists. That do their.

Terrible things. But they can't. Overthrow. The real government. Now. The real government. Is the law. Of the spirit. Of life. We've set. Been set free. From the. If you like.

[22 : 39] The Taliban. Of the old. Government. But we've still. Got the terrorist. Attacks. Going on. And what this. Says to us. Is. When the terrorists. Attack. When.

Sin. And death. Rears. Its ugly. Head. Please. Don't. Think. That. That. Stands. An earthly. Chance. Of. Overthrowing. The rule. Of Jesus. Christ.

In our. Hearts. And lives. It. Can. Be. Very. Intimidating. Perhaps. Overwhelming. Perhaps. Shocking. But.

The terrorists. Don't. Stand. An earthly. Chance. Of. Overthrowing. The king. And the king. Has set us. Free. From the rule. Of sin. And death. So my.

Third principle. Is. That whatever. Conflict. There is. It takes place. Underneath. The fact. That we've been. Set free. And the victory. Is already. Assured.

[23 : 34] So keep on. Don't be. Intimidated. Keep on. Keep on. By faith. Now the fourth point. Is rather longer. And I want in this fourth point.

This fourth. Or summary point. To take verses three and four together. And my. Summary is. The achievement of this success. Is through the work of God.

Is the work of God. Through Jesus Christ. And I'd like to spell it out. In a few stages. Which I hope will be helpful. So the verses say.

For what the law. I think this time. Really meaning. The. Old Testament. And it's. Written commands. What the law. Was powerless. To do.

In that it was weakened. By the sinful nature. God. Did. By sending. His own son. In the likeness. Of sinful man. To be. A sin offering.

[24 : 30] And so. He condemned. Sin. In sinful man. In order that. The righteous requirement. Singular. Of the law. Might be.

Fulfilled. Or fully met. In us. Who do not live. Or walk. According. To the sinful nature. But according. To the spirit. Let me just say.

That in that. Those couple of sentences. He's actually. Starting. Really. A new theme. He's saying. And I need to tell you. About this in a minute. So he doesn't.

I'm not going to. Try and explain everything. Because Paul doesn't. Explain everything there. But let's take through. What we can do. What we can say. Number one. The law of God.

Even. The law of God. Even law. Written by God's own hand. Cannot. Produce. Obedience. To hits. To its requirements. And the law.

[25 : 24] Cannot. Make people. Truly. Good. First. Stage. Of this. Important point.

Law. It can. Achieve. Some effects. It. Usually. Achieves. Its effects. By. Deterrence. If people. Know. They're going. To get. Caught. Because. It's against. Their self-interest. To get. Caught. But. That's. Different. From making. People. Truly. Good. Law.

Cannot. Produce. Obedience. To its. Requirements. And. Cannot. Make. People. Truly. Good. And. This. Is. What. Paul. Says. It. Talks. About. What. The. Law. Couldn't. Do. What.

The. Law. Was. Powerless. To. Do. In. That. It. Was. Weakened. By. The. Sinful. Nature. He's. Talking. About. The. Inability. Of. The.

[26 : 18] Law. Of. God. It. Was. Power. It's a sort of word which means without without health were weak invalid and he says that in this sense although the law says thou shalt do this thou shalt not do that yet it it doesn't have the power to produce the effects that it's looking for it cannot make people truly good fundamental point goes against human intuition because human intuition thinks, oh, I can do, you know, I can be good.

And this is not the problem with the law, it's the problem with human nature. The law is quite right to command what it commands, but it's just that people don't have the capacity to do it.

So in that sense, the law is powerless. So number one, there is an inability to truly please God. So let me just spell that out to you.

If you're sitting here this morning, you think, well, I'm quite a good person. I've been coming to church, read my Bible, I'm good. I want to say you have not understood.

You have not understood what God is looking for. You have not understood yourself. You have not understood what spiritual and moral rightness really are.

[27 : 56] The law, morality cannot produce that. You are unable to truly please God. Number two, there is that inability, but God has ability.

God can do this. So the sentence says, what the law was powerless to do, God did. And how did he do it? He did it in these ways.

He sent his own son. He did it by sending his own son. So he didn't send a prophet. He didn't send a prime minister.

He sent his own son. That only really makes sense if you think of the divinity of Jesus Christ, that he is not just a man, but he is the son of God.

He sent his own son. He sent his own son, it says, in the likeness of sinful flesh. NIV says in the likeness of sinful man.

[29 : 09] The likeness of sinful flesh would be a little bit closer. So what does this say? It says that Jesus Christ came in flesh. So if you had done a chemical analysis of Jesus' body, I suppose it would be pretty much the same as ours, isn't it?

It's flesh stuff. He didn't pretend to be in flesh. He did come in flesh. But was it sinful? Well, no. Our flesh is sinful, but his was like sinful flesh, but he had no indwelling sin.

So I think Paul is quite careful to say that Jesus was human, but he wasn't sinful. So he sent his own son in the likeness of sinful man.

Truly human, but without sin. And why did he send him? He sent him to be a sin offering. And he uses a standard piece of terminology that his Jewish readers would have understood as a sacrificial term.

God sent his own son in sinless humanity to be a sin offering. So a sacrifice.

[30 : 33] All the other sacrifices in the Old Testament were, some of them were vegetable, but many of them were animal. And they were animals who either died or were sent off into non-existence, as it were, in the desert.

And it says that God took that idea and applied it to his son. He was a wrath-bearing sacrifice. And it goes on to say that he condemned sin in the flesh. He does not condemn me for my sin in my flesh.

But he does condemn sin. He doesn't just let it off. He does condemn sin in the flesh of Jesus.

And in the case of Jesus, it was the likeness of sinful flesh. So what happened on the cross? God sent his own dear son, sinless but human, and put sin on him, made him to be sin who knew no sin, condemned sin, dealt with sin as condemned, poured out his wrath on Jesus Christ, and everything that sin deserved, everything that condemnation implied and included happened to Jesus.

[32 : 20] He bore the whole brunt of everything, 100%. So he bore the condemnation. God condemned sin in him there, so that for me, there is now no condemnation.

Summary point number four. God did this, and as he goes on to say, this amazing piece of lateral thinking produces the effect that the direct approach could not achieve.

It makes good people, in a sense which we need to be careful about, but it's true. In this, God, through Christ, produces people who do not walk according to the flesh.

So the verse says, in order that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

And it produces people who live according to this new principle, not the flesh, not living for self, not living for Satan, not living for this world as if this world were all there is.

[33 : 47] But, they take a radically alternative view, and they walk according to the spirit. It's a wonderful phrase.

They walk according to the spirit. not talking about people falling over backwards, not talking about people jumping around with their arms in the air, necessarily, but, the way they live.

They walk according to the spirit. It's a work of the spirit. They walk in a sense of the presence of God.

They walk with the power of God at work within them. They walk with a sense of the beauty of God and the beauty of his ways, the beauty of his grace, the beauty of his person.

They walk with that as the sky, as it were, over their heads. They walk with a sense of the goodness of God. They walk with a sense that the God before whom they walk is their father, who is a good father, and a loving father, and a dependable father, and a giving father, and all these things are in their minds as they mind the things of the spirit and therefore walk according to the spirit.

[35 : 12] And it's a wonderful thing, isn't it? It makes the monkey with the jar sort of pale into insignificance that God, through this sort of amazing lateral step, has produced this way of making sinners good people.

Not perfect people, but changed people. And thus, the true meaning of the law is fulfilled in us.

And I take it that that is what is meant in verse 4. Because of the cross of Christ, the righteousness of the law, the things the law was aiming for all the time, its deep meaning, for example, love for God and love for neighbour, this begins, not in a perfect sense, not in a complete sense, but in a genuine sense, to be fulfilled in us.

Summary point number 4. The achievement of this success is through the work of God, through Jesus Christ. Christ. And that concludes our little tea party on the flat bit of the mountain, where we've looked back at these points together.

We're in conflict, but it's a good conflict. The conflict, it takes place under the secure regime of the Spirit. And this is all done through the work of God in Jesus Christ, through whom there is now no condemnation.

[36 : 55] Let's close by singing together.