

Gods grace

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Date: 04 June 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] So, Romans chapter 7, now hear God's Word. Again, this is a continuation from Romans chapter 6, so he's speaking as though he's not stopped speaking. We stopped at chapter 6.

So, I'll read from chapter 6, verse 23, to the end of chapter 7. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 7, verse 1. Or do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person as long as he lives. Thus, a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives.

But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she leaves with another man while her husband is still alive.

But if her husband dies, she is free from the law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear the fruit for God.

[1 : 32] For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code, but in the new life of the Spirit.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin, by no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet, if the law had not said, you shall not covet.

But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetedness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me, for sin is seizing an opportunity. Through the commandment. Deceived me, and through it killed me.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means.

[2 : 52] It was sin producing death in me what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

[3 : 53] So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Turn again to Romans chapter 7. It's worth beginning by, beginning where I ended last week in Romans 6, that Paul is saying that a person is a slave to the one that he obeys.

very similar to a person, let's say, who's in a financial debt. And that is that the borrower is always in debt, a slave, a debt slavery, to the one who lent him the money.

And the only way that that person can be set free is, of course, if the debt is paid off. That type of relationship in the type of world that we live in now is quite a common one.

[5 : 39] That kind of financial slave debt that there is. Well, Paul is saying exactly the same kind of thing in many ways, that before we were saved, we were saved and locked into a slavery that we could not get out of.

But the moment we became saved by Jesus Christ, it meant that we could say no to sin. You know, we can say no to sin. And that's an encouragement.

But he makes the point very clear that we are always going to be slaves to the one that we obey. And so grace, which is what he's been speaking about, never motivates a person to sin more, or never motivates a person to sin even in the first place.

Grace doesn't do that. And I made the sort of illustration for want of a better word, that whenever you say something about someone else's sin, which is exactly what James encourages us to do, to pull our brother or sister back from their wandering ways into sin, then you can be faced with the accusation that you're not very graceful.

Or you're not taking any consideration of God's grace. And yet a careful understanding of God's grace will show us that grace never teaches a person to sin.

[7 : 09] It's the person who's sinning who is graceless, not the person who points out what the sin is. But that's the way the accusations often go.

What does that mean? Well, it means that believers now are free to obey Christ. That is, that when Jesus asks us to do what he calls us to do in the Gospels, if you're a true believer, you have both the opportunity, the desire, and the ability to do it.

You can never, no longer blame sin. I just can't do it. Sin just... So what's the issue?

The issue is, is that we show our obedience in accordance with the person that we belong to. If we obey Christ, then it demonstrates that we belong to Christ. But if we sin, and we keep sinning, and we make no effort to stop sinning, then we simply show by our obedience to sin that we belong to the old man, and we're not saved at all.

Now this raises a very serious question, and that is that since grace teaches me not to sin, grace teaches me to say no to ungodliness, and I'm now free to obey Jesus Christ, will I, as a Christian, stop sinning?

[8 : 30] Will you, as a Christian, stop sinning? And the answer that Romans 7 says is no. You won't stop sinning.

You won't sin as much, but you will never stop sinning. You know, we should never underestimate the power of sin. And that is that even in a believer's life, the believer will still sin.

Now God understands that you're not able to stop sinning, and that's why Romans 5 says that God's grace abounds all the more, that every time you sin, God's grace takes care of it.

Romans 6 says, however, you will, because of your freedom in Christ, sin less. As you get older, as you live this Christian life, you will not sin as much as you used to.

But then Romans 7 comes along and says, but you will never stop sinning altogether. You won't want to sin, Romans 7 says, but you will end up sinning, because that's what sin makes a person do.

[9 : 39] So Romans 5, God's grace covers all sin. Romans 6, you're free to say no to sin. Romans 7, the trouble is, because you are still sinful, you won't say no when you're meant to all the time.

That's a very complicated life that we live. It's a life full of tension, and the tension is between doing what Christ calls us to do as a believer and the sort of sinful desires that we have.

Now the other thing that this addresses here is that if the law of God arouses my sinful passions, then isn't the law of God bad?

You know, how many times have we sort of come into contact with people who says, well, if you didn't tell me not to do it, I wouldn't have done it. As though by the very fact of you telling me not to do it, I went ahead and did it.

Whereas if you didn't say anything in the first place, I wouldn't have done it. That's how the law of God works. But can you really blame the person who told you not to do it for you doing it?

[10 : 46] You can't. We do. But you can't do that. And the law of God works in exactly the same way. It tells you you shouldn't do something, and then all of a sudden, you want to do it.

Someone leaves something nice on the kitchen table, you know, perhaps a buffet ready for later, and you're told not to eat anything. And if you weren't told, you wouldn't have had anything. But the very fact that you are now told, you decide, well, one sausage roll won't matter, and maybe one more, and just one more, and I'll just move them around so it looks like none have been taken. We all do it. We all do it. We all do it, I think, because we think we can get away with it. So the very act of the law telling us don't do it, it actually encourages us to do it.

Very good reason, by the way, is parents, don't come up with rules for your children. Rules are never going to shape your children in a biblical way.

[11 : 49] Here's why. Because if you break God's laws, then do you really think that your children are going to have any attention for your rules? No. They're going to break God's and yours.

Rules don't shape anybody. Rules, in fact, cause us to do the very opposite of the rule.

Now, we can get into why the law is needed and why certain rules are required, but it should be kept to a very basic yes and no. We can get into that another time.

Perhaps I should do a thing on a Christian home. But here's the general principle. That the moment the law tells you not to do something, all of a sudden you want to do it.

So is the law bad? No, Paul says, the law's not bad. Now, I'm going to try and illustrate this because the law has already been brought to our attention back in chapter 2, and this is what it says.

[12 : 48] For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. So the law's really good. In fact, you can imagine the law of God like this as a ladder to God.

And if you keep the law, you will definitely get to God. If you keep the law, you are righteous, and if you're righteous, you will definitely get to God. You're with God.

Here's the problem, though. If the law is the ladder, we can't climb it. Not because the ladder is broken, but because you have broken legs. The problem is not with the ladder.

The problem's with us. Sin breaks our legs. So the ladder is perfect. The ladder is the law. It does take us to God.

The trouble is nobody can climb it because sin, being as destructive as it is, has already broken our legs. So nobody can keep the law of God.

[13 : 49] So we're in trouble because nobody can keep the law. But here's the other problem that sin causes. Sin also means that I can't get away from the law either.

Now why would a person want to get away from the law? Well, there's a number of reasons why you'd want to run from the law. But let's just say for God's law for a moment. The law holds me captive as long as I live.

That's what Paul says. What does that mean? Well, it means this. That if you have done something wrong and according to the law of the land, you must spend two years in prison or five years in prison or 50 years in prison, whichever it may be.

Most prison sentences are arbitrary anyway. They're made up on the spot. You know, I have a great problem with a number of them. You know, someone who commits rape, for instance, only get eight years.

They should get life and then possibly the death penalty. You know, we... Who makes up these sentences? You know, there are some crimes that are horrendous and yet an arbitrary judge makes up an arbitrary law saying eight years will take care of that.

[15 : 10] No, it's wrong. But here's the issue. I've just been sentenced to ten years and the law is going to hold me to that because I've broken the law.

But I've died. Can the law still put me in prison? No. I'm no longer held captive by the law.

I'm actually... I've been set free through death. In many ways, you could argue that I've gotten away with it. That is until I go to meet God. No one gets away with anything.

You know, you ought to have great encouragement in that and also a certain amount of fear. Encouragement because of the amount of people that have done horrible things and have died before ever being brought to justice.

They've not gotten away with it. In a world without God, they have to be taught that you'll get away with it. But in a world where there is a God and a future judgment, no one gets away with it even through death.

[16 : 17] And so what Paul is saying here is this. Very, very simple. That the law holds you captive for as long as you're alive. And so if you have broken God's law, then you are going to be judged

according to that law.

But remember Romans 6. You have died with Christ. There's Christ died so that we could die. Why is it so important that Christ died so that we could die? Well, so that we're no longer held captive to the law. So that we no longer have to face a judgment rather because Christ has faced it on our behalf.

So Christ's death and our death in Christ sets us free from the law. We can no longer be held accountable to the law or to its judgment.

The law cannot judge a dead person. And for all believers, in Christ, we're dead. We're alive, but we also died to the old man.

[17:20] So when we go to meet God, no judgment because it's already been judged in Christ. Now Paul uses an illustration to point out how this works.

And it's an illustration of a marriage. The woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? You know, marriage in the eyes of God is not done with a piece of paper or a ceremony in a registry office where you have your names down and they're joined by name only.

And then a divorce paper comes through and suddenly the marriage is over because you've got a bit of paper to say so. No, rather listen to how God puts it. The woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

If he dies, there's the death, then she's free to marry another man because he's no longer around. He's gone. You know, he's in the earth.

But if she goes off with another man while her husband is still alive, I know he's out there somewhere, she will be considered an adulteress, thus breaking the law of God.

[18:31] Very, very simple. But as long as you're still connected to someone else through life, then you're still connected to that person. So how does God get us to leave our union with Adam?

Remember, we all come from one person, Adam, the first man that we belong to. How do we leave that union? If we are legally bound to him, which we are legally bound to him, how do we get to leave Adam and marry Christ, for want of a better word, to come into union with Jesus Christ, for want of a better word, without breaking the law of God?

How can we go from one person to another person without breaking the law of God? Well, very simple, Paul says.

Someone has to die. And the illustration that he gives here is this, that you have died. You have died in Christ. You have died with him.

And the new life you now live means that you are separated from your old man and joined to a new man. This is legal work here.

[19:46] We don't tend to think of our life being bound up in legalities. That's the very thing that Paul is saying here, that there has to be a legal exchange because you're under law.

But now, since Christ has died, you have also died. You have died to the old man. You're now free to leave him. And now, in your resurrection with Jesus Christ, you are now in union with him without ever breaking the law of God.

So God keeps his own law by causing you to die in Christ and rise with Christ so that you can be in union with him forevermore. Deep stuff, this may sound to many of you.

This is really important because it's the very heart of why you have a relationship, eternal relationship, with Christ. So what's the point that Paul is making?

Well, verse 6, if you look closely. But now we are released from the law, having died to which held us captive. Having died to that which held us captive, so that we may serve in a new way of the Spirit, not in the old way of the written code.

[21:02] So here's what Christianity means. It doesn't mean that you have just chosen Christ or that you have just come to Christ. It means that you've left somebody else and that you have left somebody else through death.

And now because of Christ's resurrection, you can have your very own resurrection and new life with him. And what that means is, is you can never be judged for the old life because the old life has died.

The old life is gone. God can never hold you accountable to that ever again. The only thing he will hold you to is your new life in Christ as a believer. So it brings us back to the question.

Will I now, with my new life in Christ, be able to stop sinning? And Paul says, no. But, you won't be judged for it.

I'm going to say that again. Will I now, in my new life in Christ, be able to stop sinning? No. But you won't be judged for it when you do sin.

[22 : 12] Now, that shouldn't give you a reason to sin more, just because you won't be judged for it, though it will for many. But that takes us back to Romans 6, that if we keep sinning and never make an effort not to sin, we are simply slaves to the old man, showing that we never really belong to Christ in the first place.

No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning. They will sin, unfortunately, but they won't keep doing it without repenting. So, what about the law?

Well, the law lets us know what sin is, but the law can't save us. The law can prosecute us, saying, you must be judged for this, but Christ's death is taking care of all of it.

But the law is still a bit of a problem. He says, verse 13, did the law bring death to me? No. The law didn't bring death to you, but it just lets you know that you're already dead, that sin is actually the real killer.

And what that means is, is that even when I know I want to do the right thing, and I know what the right thing is to do, I end up doing the very opposite. Why? Because of the remaining sin in my life.

[23 : 24] So, is it possible for me to stop sinning? No. Because even though I know what the right thing is to do, I'm still not going to do it at times. How many of us can put our hands up to that, I wonder?

This is what Paul says, verse 15, for I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.

Will a believer stop sinning? No. Will you want to stop sinning? Yes. Will you try and make every effort not to sin? Of course. But will you stop sinning?

No. But God's grace takes care of it. Let me ask you a few questions. How many of us here this morning wonder, or at least feel as though their Christian life is just simply a life that has gone around and around and around in circles, but never really progressed?

Or how many of us feel that they have covered a lot of distance in their Christian life, but never really moved forward with God?

[24 : 39] How many of us know that we have accumulated years and years and years of service in the church, but we haven't really grown? Do you know why that happens so much in churches?

It is because sin makes us go round and around and around in circles. Sin doesn't want us to move forward. It never wants us to move forward in the direction of godliness.

So it wants to keep us right where we are. Paul is basically saying, look, I feel the frustration. I know what it is to want to do what God wants and yet end up doing the very opposite.

I know what it is to think godly thoughts, and unfortunately I know what it is to think ungodly thoughts. I know what it is to speak in a godly way. Unfortunately, I know what it is to speak in an ungodly way.

I know what it is to do godly actions, and unfortunately I know what it is to do ungodly actions. Paul is just caught, as we are as Christians, in this tension between waking up in the morning and deciding whether or not we're going to be like Jesus.

[25 : 49] And sin says, not today you're not. He wants to ruin our day from the very beginning. So he says, verse 21, So I find it a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

Imagine the frustration. Last week I asked, who's the most godly person in this room? The answer was fairly simple.

The person who sins the less. Least. Who's the most ungodliest person in this room? Well, the answer again is fairly simple. The person who sins the most.

And Paul says, that even as a believer who doesn't want to sin, but keeps sinning, he's nothing better than a wretched man. And who will deliver me from this body of death?

In other words, as long as I have to live in this body, unfortunately I'm going to have to live with sin. That's not a very encouraging message, is it?

[27 : 05] But here's what it is. It is the truth of Christianity. Christians are sinners. We shouldn't make a practice of sinning.

We can say no to sin. God's given us his grace to say no to sin. But is it hard? Really hard. Here's the exhortation then.

God's law is good. God's law is not the problem. God's law is the perfect ladder. Rather, sin is the problem. Sin breaks our legs, meaning that we can never climb the ladder.

Sin deceives us. Sin even says, commit the sin because you know you can be forgiven. That's the deceptiveness of sin.

Sin will convince you that the sin is worth committing on the basis that you will be forgiven. That's how deceptive sin is.

[28 : 07] Now, given the fact it is the case that as long as I am alive, I'm not going to be able to stop sinning. And sin is a problem.

We need to be grown up about it. And by that I mean you can't afford to have a children's offbeat kind of logic. And a child's logic goes something like this.

That if I'm going to get told off anyway, why not just carry on the way that I am if I'm going to get told off anyway?

You heard any children say that? Quite a few. What does it look like in a grown up Christian then?

Well, it seems logical, but a grown up Christian will say something like this.

That if I can't stop sinning in this life, then why should I stop sinning? It's the same kind of logic.

That if I can't stop sinning, then why should I stop sinning?

[29 : 11] Logical makes sense. Not very biblical or not biblical at all. It's the offbeat logic of a child.

That if I'm going to get told off anyway, I might as well do it because I'm going to get told off anyway. In other words, there's no desire there not to change and not to do it. And so the Christian says, well, I'm going to sin anyway, so I might as well sin anyway.

Simply indicating that there is no desire to be different. And so the exhortation is fairly simple. Seek to obey Christ in all that you think, say, and do.

In other words, be like Paul who, when he does sin, he hates the fact that he has actually done it.

He doesn't like the fact that he's gone ahead and done it for a moment.

He wants to do the right thing and when he ends up doing the wrong thing, he hates it. Finds no enjoyment in the sin whatsoever. So, final thought.

[30 : 12] God's grace means that you can say no to sin but remaining sin means that you'll have to say no to sin every single day because it is a problem.

But remaining sin also means that every time you know what God has taught and you have read it and you have learnt it and you go out to do it, sin lies close at hand to make you do the very thing that you ought not to do.

And even though you know that you shouldn't do it, you go ahead and do it anyway. Maybe you go ahead and do it anyway on the understanding that you will be forgiven. In other words, that sin uses God's grace to make you sin more.

Deceptive. It will ruin your life. So Paul says, who's going to deliver me from this type of life? What a wretched life it is.

To be saved, to be a Christian, to be a believer who loves God but who can't stop sinning. Who's going to deliver me from this type of life? And the answer is very simple.

[31 : 21] The one who has already delivered you from the judgment to come. Jesus Christ. That's why he ends in chapter 7 verse 25. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Thank you.