

The Struggle Within
Romans Series
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Our Scripture reading today is from the book of Romans and chapter seven. We are finally getting back to our study in the book of Romans. Romans chapter seven.

Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only 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 lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that 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 fruit for God. 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.¹

The seventh chapter of the book of Romans is one that is extremely difficult to understand and there have been many, many who have written about it and there are those who have been very confused as to even the kind of person who is being referred to here in this passage. You will see later on it talks about a struggle that takes place in a person's heart, a struggle that takes place in the life of individuals.

There has been a lot of confusion. Who is he talking about? Is this discussion about believers in Jesus Christ, the struggle they have? Or possibly it is not that at all. It is the struggle in the life of an unbeliever as he works towards coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, we are going to today just take a very quick survey of this chapter, get an idea of the principles that God is teaching to us and how we can use them to glorify him in our lives.

¹ Romans 7:1-6.

First of all, when we read this the first thing we read was—I mean, it is pretty obvious. I mean think about that for a moment. If a woman is married to a man, if she goes and finds another man, has a relationship with him, she is an adulteress. However, there is absolutely nothing wrong when her husband dies for her to go out and to be married to another person. That is what it says.

And you read that and your first thought is, yeah, that's true. It is not complicated at all, why even mention it?

Well, the reason for mentioning it is that it gives us a picture of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And the unfortunate relationship that we had with the bondage to sin before we came to know Jesus Christ.

You see faith in Christ brings death to the law and therefore freedom from the law's penalty. Just as that woman is married to the man, the man dies and she can go and marry another, the picture that we have here is that we have had an intimate relationship with the law and we had an intimate relationship with sin that came from our inability to keep the law. And so what happened was when we came to know Christ as far as we are concerned the law died. We are no longer under its bondage. We no longer have to work the way so many did in Old Testament times, thinking that they would try to be obedience to the law.

And what happened? Every one of them failed. Nobody is able to keep God's law. And so here they were heading towards death not knowing that there is a Savior who was coming.

Now what has happened to us? We know the Savior. We have come to love him and that relationship to the law and sin has been broken.

It is interesting when we read in verse four of this chapter. It says, "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ."² The word "died" that is used here is in the aorist passive tense in the Greek. Let me explain that. There are many Greek tenses and they are very specific and they help us to understand exactly what God is saying. The aorist tense is a past tense that talks about something that has happened, it is finished, it is over, it will never happen again. And so what it is saying is, "We have in our relationship to Jesus Christ, died to the law." It is over. There is no way that we can be held in bondage and be responsible for obeying the dictates of the law.

You see, that was the big problem that people had in that day and some even today. They think that they must be obedient to a law in order to have a good and positive relationship with God. They have to obey it. Well, it was impossible.

And so we have died, once for all, to the law of God. And we, instead, have been united with the Lord Jesus Christ.

² Romans 7:4.

Well, I said it is an aorist passive and that is interesting. It could probably be better translated, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have been made to die to the law.”³ In other words, it wasn’t the person who did it. I didn’t make myself die to the law. I had no power to do that, but the Lord Jesus Christ taking me and making me his child and given me his salvation, made it so that I am no longer under the law, under bondage. I no longer look forward to a time when I would have to stand before the God of eternity and be judged on the basis of my obedience to God’s law. We have been set free.

I don’t know whether that excites you. It excites me. For I know him and because I know him I am safe for all eternity. There is nothing that can separate me from the love of God. There is nothing that can pluck me out of his hand. I am there with the security of the Lord’s Word itself. I am saved and that means I am his forever and ever and ever.

Isn’t that wonderful? Isn’t that marvellous?

Well, we may, then, want to ask the question: What in the world is the law for? Why do we have it? And in what way does the law do something for us?

Well, you know, in this passage that we read, if we went on a little bit further we would read, “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.’”⁴

What is he saying here? He is saying that the law was that which taught me about my sinfulness. That is what the law is there for. It is not there to save. It can’t save. It has no power to save. But it has the power to lead us. It has the power to demonstrate to us that we, in fact, need the salvation of God for we break that law consistently and constantly.

Charles Hodge, a very great commentator in God’s Word and one of my favorites, put it this way, “The law, although it cannot secure either the justification or sanctification of man, performs an essential part in the economy of salvation. It enlightens conscience and secures its verdict against a multitude of evils which we should not otherwise have recognized as sins. It arouses sin, increases its power and making it both in itself and in our consciousness, exceedingly sinful. It therefore produces that state of mind which is a necessary preparation for the reception of the gospel. Conviction of sin, that is an adequate knowledge of its nature, and a sense of its power over us is an indispensable part of evangelical religion. Before the gospel can be embraced, a means of deliverance from sin, we must feel we are involved in corruption and misery.”

That is logical, isn’t it? I mean think of this for a moment. How can you be saved if you don’t know you need salvation? Something has to teach you that you need to be saved. It is like sitting in an auditorium and someone yells, “Fire.”

³ See Romans 7:4.

⁴ Romans 7:7.

Now you look around and you see, yes, there is a fire. I am getting out of here. You have to be saved. But first of all you have to know there is a fire.

Unfortunately there have been many who have been in buildings, a fire starts, they don't know it is a fire and therefore they wind up dying in that fire because of that lack of knowledge. They don't know they are in danger.

In the book Galatians Paul explains this and tells us what the law is all about. Galatians chapter three we read:

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.⁵

So I want to ask you a question and this is a very important one before we go on. Have you become conscious of the sin that exists in your own life? Have you become aware that you consistently have broken God's law? I am not pointing at you. I am pointing at myself also. We need to understand that for if we don't understand our sinfulness we will never understand our need of salvation.

If you have grabbed a whole and have understood that you are a sinner before God, then you, my friend, will be able to understand that you need a Savior and that he has come and has given to all who will trust in him everlasting life. What a wonderful blessing.

That is why when we preach the gospel we can't always be positive. It would be nice to always say something nice. But we need to preach the sinfulness of sin so that people can understand that they need a Savior. And when they recognize their need of a Savior, Jesus Christ will be there to rescue them and to give them life.

Well, there is one other important topic in this chapter and that is the struggle that takes place in the life of a believer.

And we may ask the question: Why is there an internal struggle?

Now, I am sure that you are aware of this, that there is a struggle within us. Well, let me explain.

The Word of God tell us that when we come to know Christ the Spirit of God comes to dwell in us. We have a new nature. It is wonderful. We have the nature that God has given to us, but lurking inside us is still the remnant of the old nature and there is a battle,

⁵ Galatians 3:19-22.

there is a struggle. The old nature wants to pull us into sinful behavior. At the same time the new nature wants to pull us away from sinful behavior. And so there is this eternal struggle that exists within the life of every single believer.

In our chapter starting with verse 13 the Lord goes into this and explains it to us in some detail.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through 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.⁶

Now, how can a believer say that, “I am of the flesh, sold under sin?”⁷ He is talking about the old nature that exists within him.

See what he says. “[For] I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”⁸

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt, you know, I really want to serve the Lord, but somehow I seem to be slipping in to behaviors that don’t honor him and somehow I seem to be turning the wrong way. Oh, yes, I turn back to the Lord, but why do I turn the wrong way at all? Because of the old nature that exists within us.

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.⁹

Do you see the picture there? The eye is the new nature. That is who I am. That is what I want to be. I want to serve the Lord. I want to honor him. But sin dwells in me and since sin is in me there is a battle.

You can imagine the Spirit of God fighting within a person with the spirit of the old nature, the spirit of sin.

Now what do we do about it? Well, first of all we have to be aware that this is going to occur in our lives. There will be times that we as believers, though we want to serve the Lord, seem to be dragged the wrong way, pulled into behaviors that do not in any way honor him. How do we get the victory?

Well, first of all we trust in the Lord. Secondly, we be aware that there is a new nature within us and we ask God to help us to accentuate that new nature that we might live to glorify God. Each time we seem to be pulled into sinful behavior by the old nature. We

⁶ Romans 7:13-14.

⁷ Romans 7:14.

⁸ Romans 7:15.

⁹ Romans 7:16-17.

turn to God in prayer and he in his matchless and wonderful love pulls us out of that behavior and gives us the ability to live in a way that glorifies and honors the Savior.

It says, beginning with verse 18, “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.”¹⁰ Do you see what he is saying? I want to do the right thing, but something is taking me away. I don’t have the ability.

Ok. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”¹¹

Do you ever feel that way? Do you see what he is saying here?

“Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”¹² Do you see the picture of the two natures? The I and the sin, the sin and the I, fighting with each other, struggling to bring us into sin or to take us away from sinful behavior.

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 making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.¹³

The word “law” here is used to talk about the principle, the principle of sin and so on and so forth.

“Wretched man that I am...”¹⁴ We have all felt that way sometimes. I can’t make it. I can’t do it. But Paul, lifting up his eyes to God says these words. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?”¹⁵ I want to serve the Lord. I don’t want to serve sin. Who is going to do deliver me and that possible?

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!¹⁶

Jesus will deliver us.

“So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”¹⁷

¹⁰ Romans 7:18.

¹¹ Romans 7:19.

¹² Romans 7:20.

¹³ Romans 7:21-23.

¹⁴ Romans 7:24.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Romans 7:24-25.

¹⁷ Romans 7:25.

Friend, we want to be a testimony for Jesus Christ. We want people to look at us and see not us, but the Savior. We want people to be drawn to the Savior by what we do and how we live our lives.

You know, I have had occasions where I have gone to churches and have met people that I have seen in other contexts either business or whatever and seen what I considered to be a very sad reality. There on Sunday they are able to go to church and they smile and everything seems to be right. You know, it is pretty easy to put on a false face for one hour, isn't it? But the next day on Monday they are living like the devil.

Well, these people, I believe, do not know the Savior. But for us who know him, that struggle is still going to exist in our lives and we need to constantly be turning to the Savior so that we can have the wonderful blessing of his pulling us to safety that we might not live in sin.

Well, today we have seen, as I have said, an overview of Romans chapter seven. We are going to go into Romans chapter eight the next time we gather together and there you will find that it begins, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."¹⁸ You are going to find as we take a lot of time in the eighth chapter that there are wonderful principles there that will help us to understand the grace and the salvation of God.

We have died to sin, but sin still lives within us. Confusing? Yes, it is. But what that means is that the bondage that we had before we came to know the Savior that bound us to sinful behavior has been broken by Jesus Christ. Each and every one of us can live for him. Each and every one of us can have lives that glorify the Savior. Be aware of the struggle within you. I am aware of mine. And each time something pulls you towards evil, turn the opposite direction and ask God for his blessing and his ability to turn away from the evil and turn to that which is good. And God will bless us in a marvelous way and make us to be great testimonies for Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for your Word that teaches us all things that we need to know in order to honor you and to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you, our Father, that in your grace you have broken that tie that we had to sin. We know that back then sin was just a part of our lives. We had to sin. But now, praise God, by your grace you have made it so sin is not a necessary part of our lives, that we can live for you.

So I ask, Father, that for each one of us you might intervene constantly in our lives and help us to live for you and to be testimonies to those around us that all who know us might see in us the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to serve well we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

¹⁸ Romans 8:1.