

## Romans

Romans Chapter Seven

Romans 7:1

May 23, 2010

This is lesson number **42** in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

### The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

### Title: “The Dominion of the Law”

The context for this next section will be Chapter 7:1 thru Chapter 8:4.

We will be studying **The Law: It’s Function and It’s Limits**.

In addition to Haldane, Hendricksen, Moo and others, my main commentary resource on Romans is Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones from a series that he preached in the late 1950s.

But these are mere men and the only reliable commentary on any passage of Scripture is the Bible itself. The best theology is **biblical theology**. That simply means that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, and plenary: inspired word of God.

And so we compare Scripture with Scripture and do our best to not take an isolated passage out of context. In biblical theology, the entire Bible determines the interpretation of a text.

And we must, I repeat myself, interpret the Old Testament by the New Testament and not try to explain the New Testament by the Old Testament. That is especially true with eschatology: the doctrine of last things.

### Rom 7:1

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

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In Chapter Seven of Romans, the Apostle explains verse 6:14.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Chapter Seven of Romans has been tortured and twisted and is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. That said, I will give you my understanding of this amazing passage of Scripture.

We must all remain teachable. Especially preachers.

When a preacher stops learning you have a real mess on your hands.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones, in his Introduction to Chapter Seven says,  
"Prejudice is one of the greatest enemies of true exposition."

Charles D. Alexander says,  
"Never underestimate the power of a preconceived notion."

So don't bring your preconceived notions, your prejudices, to the Bible and then try to make the passage fit what you already believe. Let the text speak to you and say exactly what it means in the context of the entire Bible.

The main difficulty with understanding this chapter is knowing how to understand sin, our nature, and of course, the law.

To show you why you cannot understand Chapter 7 in isolation from Chapter 6 we will compare some verses in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7:

6:1	the reign of sin	7:1	the reign of law
6:2	died to sin	7:4	died to the law
6:4	walk in newness of life	7:6	serve in newness of the Spirit
6:7	freed from sin	7:6	delivered from the law
6:18	set free from sin	7:3	free from the law

Paul opens this section: "Or do you not know, brethren....?"

The law, as Paul uses the phrase here, is not only the law given by God through Moses to the children of Israel. It is the law principle, any system of law. It does, however, include the natural law {Romans 2:14-15} and the law given by Moses. **There is the law principle and its dominion over every man.**

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But what has law to do with the Christian?

And that is what we will see, if we get Paul's teaching correctly.

Do you not know that:

The believer is dead to sin, but there is still sin in his life.

The believer has a new nature, but he still has a sinful nature.

The believer is dead to the law, but he cannot be lawless.

There is in the believer, a spiritual war being fought.

The believer will have the victory, but he must fight the fight.

Over forty years ago David Estrada, who was then a missionary in Barcelona, Spain, was speaking to our church in Tenn and gave this illustration of sanctification.

God had given the land of Canaan to the Hebrews. It was theirs.

But God also told them that they must go in and possess the land. It was already theirs, but they had to go in and fight for it. That is the nature of sanctification. We have a perfect sanctification in Jesus Christ just as the Hebrews already owned the land, and just as the Hebrews had to possess the land, if we believe in Jesus Christ, we must be growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in personal sanctification.

A helpful outline from Arthur Pink:

7:1-12 and 6:1-14 gives us our standing or position as having been justified.

7:13-25 and 6:15-23 gives us our state or walk as being sanctified.

The second part of Chapter Six is what our state **ought to be**.

The second part of Chapter Seven is what our state **actually is**.

There is this conflict or spiritual war between the believer's two natures as he grows in grace and is gaining personal sanctification, or holiness.

Romans Chapter Seven is a commentary on sanctification from

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Galatians 5:17:

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Before you became a believer in Jesus Christ you were free with regard to righteousness {6:20}. You had **only** a sinful nature. Your nature was totally depraved and sinful and even if you were a moral person, you were still a slave to sin. And you were under the just condemnation of a holy God.

But if you were justified: God justifies the ungodly {4:5}; and baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ Jesus {6:3}, you were given a new nature. You did not lose your sinful nature, but now you are no longer a slave to sin and are able to resist sin in the mortal body because you now have a new master, even God.

As a believer, you will resist sin in the flesh and the body of sin will be rendered inoperative {6:6}. It will not be a legalistic duty, you love Jesus so much that you cannot do otherwise.

That, brothers and sisters, is what Romans Seven is about - True Holiness.

### **Romans Seven describes every Christian.**

Not that every Christian breaks the laws of men or falls into gross disobedience; but none of us have attained the standard of holiness set by our Lord Jesus Christ.

As I have already mentioned, there is a wide range of interpretations on what Paul is teaching here. I will do my best to be honest with the text.

Paul often makes a general statement and then makes a specific application of that truth. E.g., 6:7 is always true; 6:16 is always true. But how does being freed from slavery to sin apply to the believer?

Now in 7:1, Paul makes another general statement:

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

Obviously, this is another case where Paul thinks the readers of his letter will know this principle, that the believer is dead to the law.

Or, do you not know ....?

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An observation on the term “brethren.” Not just his Jewish brethren, Cf. 9:3.

Don’t worry ladies, Paul means you too. The brethren and the “sistren.”  
Brethren may be translated “brothers and sisters.”

When Paul uses this affectionate term, “brethren,” he is always deeply moved.  
Cf 1:13 & 10:1

Romans 7 is often discussed and often misunderstood. If you lift the last part of Chapter 7 from its context of Chapter 6, you probably will not get it right.

Paul is a most logical thinker and he will make a statement and if you are not careful, you will think, “Well, he is through with that thought.” But read on and he will come back to the thought and expand on it.

Romans 7, apart from 6:14, will not mean what you may think it does.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

For example, why do people even argue about whether Paul, in the last half of Chapter 7, refers to himself as a believer or, as he was before he became a believer? Was Paul saved or lost at the time he describes here? If you read the context, you cannot miss that Paul is dealing with how a **justified** person understands sin and the law.

A justified person is not condemned, they are safe in Jesus Christ.

According to Lloyd-Jones, Chapters 6 & 7 are a parenthesis.

Read 5:21 and then skip to 8:1. The one who is justified is no longer condemned.

**But how does the one who is justified understand sin in his life and what about the law?**

### **The Christian and the law?**

In 5:20-21, Paul makes an astounding statement. It is so radical to sinful human logic that it can be seriously misunderstood. Back in 3:8, Paul states that this

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teaching has led some to slander him and to say that he is teaching that believers have a license to sin.

When you preach grace: that you can do absolutely nothing to merit God's grace, and neither can you do anything to then cause God to condemn you. You will be misunderstood and perhaps slandered.

Once justified, you will be glorified, and in between you will be sanctified.

As I have said, if you preach grace, you will be misunderstood by some and they will accuse you of preaching antinomianism; that you can continue in sin because of grace. If we are not misunderstood by unbelievers, we are probably not preaching the Gospel.

The **antinomian** and the **legalist** will both misunderstand what we are preaching.

The **antinomian** will hear they have license to sin: sin without conscience.

The antinomian will think they can sin as much as they like and grace will cover their sin. But if we have died to sin, how can we live any longer in it? And besides that, you now have a new Master and are no longer a slave to sin.

The **legalist** will hear law: Rules to get saved and rules to keep yourself saved; touch not, taste not, handle not.

The legalist will live in fear of being yet condemned because of continued sin in their life. The legalist will try to redefine sin so that they can have assurance that they are living up to a standard that God will appreciate.

Saul, as a Pharisee and a legalist, thought he was keeping a standard until the law did its work {7:9}.

**The believer will hear: It's Christ, and Him alone!**

**The believer will be dead to sin and dead to the law!**

After 5:20-21, Chapter 6 deals with, the reign of sin and the reign of grace.

But 5:20 also brings in the **law**. What has the law to do with the Christian?

This too was being misunderstood. Was Paul teaching that the law is completely done away with for the Christian?

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And so, Chapter 7 deals with the Christian and the law.

When Paul in 6:14 states,

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Paul, are you not inviting lawlessness? not being “under law?”

How will anyone know how to progress in sanctification if they don't have law?  
Tell us what are the rules?

Now here is another startling revelation.

**Paul is going to prove that sanctification by the law is as impossible as being justified by the law. Not only that, law will hinder true sanctification.**

For the purpose of today's lesson I want to introduce the “big picture.”

We will spend whatever amount of time we need to explore the nuances of Chapter 7. It is important that we begin right or we will not grasp the depth of what the Holy Spirit has given to us through the great Apostle.

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Dr. Lloyd-Jones sees Chapter 7 as being divided into three parts.

**1. Verses 1-6** are a **general statement** of the relationship of the believer to the law.

Verse 4 is absolutely essential:

That we be dead to the law in order to grow in Christ.

That we should bear fruit unto God.

As long as you are married to the law you can never bring forth fruit unto God. You must be married to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**2. Verses 7-12** are a **vindication of the law**. Paul has declared that the law can never justify, that it can only stir up sin, then raises the question:

“Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!”

Paul is as passionate in his answer to this question as he was in 6:1 and 6:15; “Shall we sin because of grace?” “Certainly not!”

It is not the law that causes a lack of fruit to God, the problem is ourselves, Cf. 8:3.

**3. Verses 13-25** Paul works out in **experience** what he states in the first two sections.

Cf. 5:10 & 7:24-25

Rom 5:10

10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved by {in} His life.**

And then he proceeds in verses 12-19 to show how **we shall be saved by {in} His life.**

Rom 7:24-25

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank **God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!** So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

**Justification and sanctification: Only through the Lord Jesus Christ!**

Chapter 7 explains the grip of sin. Most Christians today have no idea of the power of sin in their life. And so there is little or no repentance.

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You can't draw a big crowd today by preaching about sin. That offends people. That is negative. Tell us how much God loves us while we wallow in sin and spit in God's face.

Tell us how to be saved without commitment; that's all we want to hear.

And that is why so much of what passes for Christianity in our age is so superficial. Sell me some little book that will solve all my personal and financial problems, but don't expect me to think and to know what the Bible teaches. Don't expect me to know doctrine, I don't have time for that, all I want to do is go to heaven when I die.

Some people talk about "getting out of Romans Chapter 7 and into Romans Chapter 8." What they mean is let's not talk about sin, let's just talk about assurance. But the people who talk like that have never been in Chapter 7.

They want the assurance of their salvation, but many have no repentance of sin.

Chapter 7 will free you from the law if you can receive what it is teaching.

**The believer is dead to the law - all law!**

**Be careful, it does not say that the law is dead to the believer.**

God willing, we will pick up on that thought in the next lesson and we will look at the analogy of marriage that Paul uses to prove that the believer is dead to the law so that he may be married to Christ.

I want to close on this thought. There is another way to be "under law."  
The Christian who lapses into sin and condemns himself is back under law.

They think that a Christian could not do what they have done.  
At that point they are not trusting Christ, they are looking to their obedience for their assurance of salvation and merit before God and are **under law**.

But this caution is always before us. The one who thinks that there are no moral limits and takes license to willfully sin has fallen into antinomianism and that is a fatal error. Antinomians are not saved people who lapse into sin, they are presuming on the grace of God. Jude 4 tells us who they are.

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Do you see why the doctrine of grace is so easily misunderstood?

There is always this tension between knowing that even when we sin that we are still in Christ - under grace; and the fatal, damning presumption that we can sin because of grace and, in fact, are still under sin.

We have seen in Chapter 6, just as the believer is dead to sin and serves a new Master, even so in Chapter 7 the Christian is dead to the law.

The law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.

Have you died to sin and to the law?

Only being dead to sin and the law will lead to true holiness.

Union with Christ is to be married to Christ.

Be faithful to your Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ.