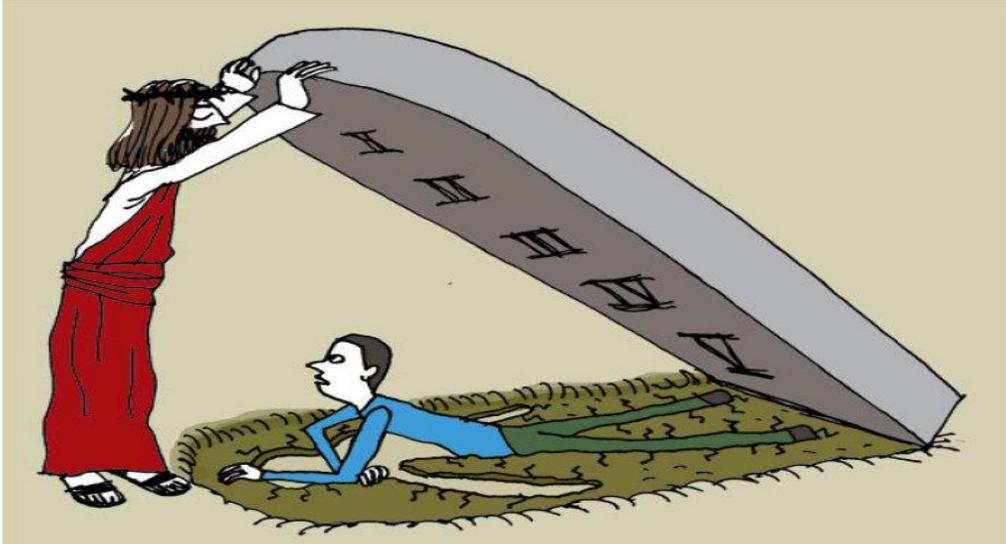


Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 7:7-12 - Sermon Notes



Background

Last time we learned that Paul said that the Law arouses our sinful passions, causing us to sin, which then produces death (separation from God.) Now, in today's section, he will point out that the Law does not prevent sin or even suppress sin. In fact, the very presence of the Law causes sin to increase.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "But, if the Law can not save us and, in fact, causes us to be more sinful, then why did God give the Law to Moses in the first place?" That's an excellent question! I'm glad you asked it. There are a number of reasons why God gave the Law.

The Law reveals the holy character of God. That is, it focuses on the holiness of God. And, it challenges man to be holy as well.

Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)

Therefore, you shall set yourselves apart as holy and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God. 'And you shall keep My statutes and do them; I am Yahweh who makes you holy. (Leviticus 20:7-8)

But, even though the Law was good and holy, it didn't provide salvation for the nation of Israel, and it can not provide salvation for us today.

because by the works of the Law No flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

However, specifically, for the nation of Israel, the Law did provided forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial offerings, it also provided a pattern of worship, and it demonstrated God's instructions for the physical and spiritual health of the nation.

In the Law, God tells us what His expectation is for every human being. He wants us to be holy. That is, God wants us to separate ourselves **from** sin and separate ourselves **to** Him. But it also reveals to all of us that no one can keep the Law - everyone falls short of God's standard of holiness. In other words, the Law does not prevent sin, it produces sin and the Law reveals our own sinfulness to us. And, because of that, it produces in us the realization that we must rely on God's mercy and grace to make atonement for our sin.

Here's another way of describing our situation: without an understanding of what sin is, we feel innocent. However, through the Law we understand what sin is, and we realize our guilt. The Jewish people believed that keeping the entire Law would make a person sinless and acceptable in God's sight. What they failed to see, however, was that no one can keep the entire law, except for God, Himself.

Any good Jewish Christian having read or heard what Paul has just said about the Law might be inclined to say, "Are you saying that the holy Law of God is not only insufficient to sanctify us, but that it causes sin to increase? Surely you don't mean that the Law increases sinful passions, and actually makes people worse than they were before?" This is the theoretical objection that Paul is responding to here.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! Rather, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law. For I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "you shall not covet."

So, Paul asks another of his rhetorical questions: "Is the law sin?" And he responds in typical Pauline style with the two Greek words, "*me genoito*" meaning, "May it not be!" or "No way!" As he will go on to say later in verse twelve, the law is holy and just and good! The evil is not in the law, but the law brings out evil in us because of our sin nature.

Look very carefully at what Paul says here about the Law. He says, "I did not know sin except through the law." You will notice that he did not say that he was not a sinner without the law, just that he did not know about his sin without the law. He then goes on to give an example from the Tenth Commandment, "For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." The law informs us about sin, and because of that, we become more aware of our own sinfulness. And, because of our sin nature, the knowledge of the sin makes us desire it, even though we know it is sin. This frustrates all of us at one time or another. Even the Apostle Paul was frustrated by this, which he will express later in this chapter.

In his letter to the Galatian Christians he explained the function of the Law this way,

**Therefore the Law has become our tutor unto Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.
(Galations 3:24, 25)**

What does he mean that the Law has become our tutor. Exactly what does the Law teach us? It reveals to us our utter sinfulness and amplifies it so that we are unable to deny our need for a Savior. Fortunately, God's plan includes our Savior and salvation through faith in His sacrificial death. So you see, although it produces death, the Law leads us to Christ and to God's gift of grace which produces life. That's why Paul will say in verse twelve:

So, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Romans 7:8-10

But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, worked out in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the Law sin is dead. Now I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; and this commandment, which was to lead to life, was found to lead to death for me.

In other words, what Paul is telling us is that before the Law was declared, there was no sinful lust. Then the Tenth Commandment was declared:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's

As soon as the Tenth Commandment took effect, sin took this commandment and accomplished sinful lust in man's heart, and he suddenly lusted after the very things that the law said we should not lust after.

Paul says that “**apart from the law**,” that is, when the law and our sin nature were separated from each other, “**sin was dead**.” It's very much like two siblings who are constantly fighting but as soon as you separate them from each other the fighting stops, it dies. Thus, Paul says that before the law was declared, it and sin were separated, and sin was dead. But as soon as the law was declared, sin took the occasion of the presence of the law to completely work out sinful desires within man.

Adam and Eve are good examples of this. When they were first put in the garden, it was not wrong for them to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and they apparently had no particular desire for the fruit of that tree. But, when God told Adam that they were not to eat of that tree, that's when they both desired to eat of it, and the satisfying of that desire produced sin.

I can still remember as a child, when my mother baked cookies and put them in the cookie jar saying not to touch them until after dinner, all I could think about was sneaking into the kitchen to steal a cookie from the cookie jar? That's precisely the process that Paul has been talking about!

Now we get to a very difficult verse. In fact, it is perhaps the most difficult so far because it is not clear what Paul means by the two expressions, “I was alive” and “I died.”

Now I was once alive apart from the Law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died (Romans 7:9)

There has been a lot of discussion among Biblical scholars as to what Paul means by these expressions, but there is little consensus other than this: When Paul claims to have been alive, he must mean that he had a certain kind of peace, he felt innocent and secure, and he was free from the convictions of his conscience. That is, he believed himself to be righteous. So, when he says that he died, it must mean just the opposite. In other words, sin reigned, producing its condemning effects, leading to guilt and misery.

What Paul is telling us in this verse comes from his own personal experience. There was a time when he felt confident in his own righteousness. But as he learned more about the Law, he discovered how much of a sinner he really was, and the effect was that he no longer believed himself to be righteous. In other words, he realized that he was a sinner under God's condemnation, just like we are.

But, this is critically important for us because this is the first step towards salvation and a victorious Christian life for all of us. Unless and until we realize that we are not righteous, that we are sinful

and lost, we cannot be saved. Once we realize our own depravity, however, we need to discover what it is that will take away that depravity along with its guilt, and only faith in the blood of Jesus Christ can accomplish this. Therefore, realizing that each of us is a sinner and in need of salvation, we find that the only way to receive forgiveness is to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God and seek His forgiveness. Then, we learn that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, and in order to be saved, all we have to do is to believe in and accept his payment for our sin.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, He was buried as proof of His death, and He rose again as proof of His righteousness.

Paul believed himself to be righteous until the Law stirred up in him all manner of sinfulness, showing him how unrighteous he really was. He now claims that the original purpose of the Law was to bring life, but instead it brought death. The reason he claims that the original purpose of the Law was to bring life can be seen in several Old Testament passages:

Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘I am Yahweh your God. ‘You shall not do according to what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do according to what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes. ‘You are to do My judgments and keep My statutes, to walk in them; I am Yahweh your God. ‘So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does them, he shall live by them; I am Yahweh. (Leviticus 18:1-5)

And

“I gave them My statutes and made them know My judgments, which, if a man does them, he will live by them. (Ezekiel 20:11)

And

“The soul who sins will die. The son will not bear the iniquity of the father, nor will the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. “But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has done and keeps all My statutes and does justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. (Ezekiel 18:20-21)

But, instead of obtaining life from the Law, Paul discovered that it caused him to have all sorts of sinful impulses that he couldn't resist, thus causing sin, resulting in death for him. His conclusion is that the Law, which is supposed to bring life, only brings death. That's why he says --

Romans 7:11-12

For sin, taking 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.

This is almost a repeat of verse eight but with a slight variation. Whereas in verse eight Paul said that sin completely produced in him all kinds of lust, in this verse he says that it deceived him.

What Paul is saying is that his corrupt and rebellious tendencies being excited by the Law, led him astray, causing him to sin in spite of himself. As a result of his sin, as he said before, he was killed spiritually; that is, he became spiritually separated from God.

Do you find that you sometimes feel deceived by your own inner tendencies? Do you find that you do things that you know are wrong, but you do them anyway? In just a few verses we will see that

Paul faced this same struggle and the resulting frustration at his inability to control his sinfulness. Here's how he put it:

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. (Romans 7:19)

The bottom line is that we all sin in this way. But the Apostle John has told us what to do about it:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

“Faithful” means that God will always do it (forgive us). And “righteous” means that His own righteousness **requires** Him to do it. When we sin, we turn away from God and walk another direction. When we confess our sins and repent, we turn around and begin walking with Him again.

Before we go on, let me speak for a moment about the word “confess.” It is translated from the Greek word *homologeō*. This is made up of *homo*, meaning “all the same,” as in homogenized, and a form of *logos*, which means “a word.” However, it is not so much the written word, or even the spoken word, but the thought or thoughts behind the word. So – *homologeō* means “to have the same thoughts.” In other words, it means to agree with God regarding the sinfulness of our action. So – John tells us that if we agree with God regarding the sinfulness of our action, He will forgive us!

Back in verse seven Paul asked the rhetorical question, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin?” Since that verse he has been showing us why the law is not the culprit; rather it is our own sin nature that is the cause of our sinfulness. The law simply causes our sin nature to be empowered. He now tells us very clearly that the Law is good, but it was not provided to purify the heart of fallen man. The tendency of the Law is to increase guilt, shame, and despair. In other words, man cannot obtain righteousness by obeying the law because the law, by exciting our fallen nature, actually increases our sinfulness.

Paul says here that the Law is holy. It is pure and it is spotless. He also says that the commandment is holy. So, what's the difference between the law and the commandment? The easiest way to distinguish them is to recognize that the law is made up of many commandments. Paul's point is that not only is the law, as a whole, holy and just and good, but even down to the individual commandments it is holy and just and good.

We can't blame the law or any one of the commandments for our sins, but the very presence of the law causes our sinfulness to be exceedingly sinful. In fact, we cannot blame anyone else for our sinfulness. We are guilty of our own sins, and the Law does not remove that guilt. In fact, it increases it.

So What?

For thousands of years, Jews have been trying to obey the Law to establish their own righteousness, and yet ... According to the Psalms in talking about mankind,

They have all turned aside, altogether they have become worthless; There is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalms 14:3)

And when Paul quotes this in Romans, he gives it a slightly different spin. He says as it is written, There is none righteous, not even one. (Romans 3:10)

In other words, in spite of their millenia of effort, not a single Jew has been able to establish his or her own righteousness by obeying the Law.

Yet, there are still churches, even today, that teach the necessity of obeying the Law. There are even denominations today that have a plethora of rules and ordinances that must be obeyed. They believe that you are not a Christian if you don't live up to their standards. Apparently, these people have never read this seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

They fail to see why obedience to the Law, or regulations of the church, does not produce righteousness. Paul has taught us here that the very declaration of the Law produces in us the desire to break it. As a result, because of our sin nature, that's exactly what we do!

Now, so that you don't think that you and Paul are the only two people on earth who have ever had the frustrating experience of trying to be perfect for God and then having to live with the guilt that comes from being a sinner, let me assure you that all Christians have this constant battle with sin. The ungodly and the unsaved don't have this battle because they don't know the Law, that is they don't know God's expectation. But what makes it even worse is that they don't really care. However, you and I do know what God expects from us, and we know just as well that we can't possibly live up to His expectations.

That's where grace comes in! That's why God sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross, that whoever believes on Him should have all of his or her sins (past, present, and future) completely forgiven and receive everlasting life. And -- God gladly does this because He loves you!

Are you struggling right now with, as the writer of Hebrews put it in [Hebrews 12:1](#), “[the sin that so easily entangles you?](#)” And do you, like Paul, find that “[the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.](#)” Well, you are not alone, my friend. When your sin nature leads you into sin, simply confess it and get back in the race. Remember, when we confess our sins, God casts them away from us as far as the east is from the west, so each time we sin it is as if it is the first time to God. The only one who knows your sin history is you.

Do you feel weighed down by guilt over the sins that you have committed? Do you feel guilty because you don't keep the Law or obey God all the time? Do you frequently find yourself acting out of selfish motives? Remember, only the grace of God, through the blood of Jesus Christ, can take away the guilt! Confess your sins and lay them at the foot of the cross.

Listen, if our sin nature, spurred on by the Law, is what causes us to sin, then it's really not our fault, is it? We can blame the Law and our sin nature, right? – Wrong! Our sin nature is part of who we are. If we try to blame our sin nature for our sins, we are really blaming ourselves for our sins.

When we finally admit that we are totally responsible for the depth of our own sinfulness and recognize the undeserved, free gift of God's grace that declares us to be sinless, then and only then are we able to recognize - and receive - His perfect love.

Let's pray.