

Romans 7:1-13

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 7. And I want to focus our thoughts around a phrase in verse 8.

! So at the end of the verse, it says this, Now, if you've not been here, it's a lovely day. Welcome visitors who are here for the first time today. We're really glad that you're here. You're coming in at Romans chapter 7, and you've missed 1 to 6. But what we've seen already in this book is that by keeping God's law, we can never make anyone right with God.

If you've come here this morning thinking the message of Christianity is do good, and somehow you'll make it into heaven, that is not the message of the Bible. It's not the message of Christianity. None of us, not one single person, by keeping God's law can make themselves right with God. We've already broken it. We cannot keep it perfectly.

[1 : 17] And therefore, no matter how hard you try, no matter how much you give yourself to obeying God's law, there's absolutely no possibility that you will get right with God through the law.

And that raises the natural question in our minds, what is the point of the law then? What is the purpose of the law in the whole scheme of God's salvation?

If we can't get right by keeping God's law, what's the point in it? What value is it? What value are God's commandments to a person who isn't a Christian, and yet needs to become a Christian? Paul is going to explain in chapter 7 really all about the law. As you read it, there's 25 verses in the chapter, and yet the word law is mentioned 29 times, so it's not very hard to work out what the subject is.

It's a really intense discussion of God's law. And so before we get into the argument, I just want to take a moment to kind of explain verses 1 to 6, to identify briefly the illustration there.

[2 : 27] We're not going to go into it in depth, but he's using the illustration of marriage. And what he said here is that death brings freedom from God's law, from the law.

Death brings freedom from the law. So you cannot prosecute, can you, somebody who's in a cemetery. You can't bring a dead person to court. You can't imprison a corpse. And the illustration he's using is a woman whose husband has died. Previously, she was not free to marry anybody else. But now that the husband has died, she is set free from the law of that relationship.

It's no longer got any hold on her. It's no longer got any relevance. And so she can now remarry, if she chooses, in a godly and an honorable way.

And that's the illustration he uses. And he says, in the same way we were once bound to the law. And we were once united to the law. But now, when he changes the illustration, it's not so much that the law has died to us, but we have died to the law.

[3 : 35] There's been a death. There's been a death. And that death means a separation. So remember Romans chapter 6, we died in Christ. And because we died united in Christ, we died to the law, and the law no longer has any claim over us.

It no longer condemns us. But then he comes back to the original point. What is the point of the law? What is the value of the law for somebody who is not in Christ? For somebody who is not a believer?

You've said, Paul, the apostle has said, twice, verse 14 of chapter 6, you are not under the law. And then the next verse, 17, we are not under the law. And so chapter 7, verse 7, he takes up this argument, and he says, is the law sin?

Is the law a bad thing? Is it a curse? We've died to it. We've been set free from it. Does that mean that the law in itself is evil?

No, he says, by no means. Never think about it. Never think that. As he puts it in verse 12, just look there with me in Romans 7, he says, the law is holy and righteous and good. It cannot be a bad

thing.

[4 : 47] The law is given to us by God. It is from God. It cannot be a bad thing. The law is a reflection of God's character.

So what is the relationship to sin for the non-Christian? What is the relationship to the law for somebody who is not a Christian?

We know the place of the law in a believer's life. We've been saved by grace, apart from the law, so that we may keep the law joyfully and freely. But what is the relationship of the law to the person who is not a Christian?

Paul is going to show us in these verses how the law affects somebody who is not a Christian. He does it in four ways. I think he's talking about himself. I think it's autobiographical that Paul is looking back to his own experience.

I wouldn't want to be utterly dogmatic on that, but I think that's what he's saying. The law affects the unbeliever in four ways. First of all, the law reveals sin. The law reveals sin.

[5 : 49] Look at verse 7, the second half. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet.

Earlier on in the verse. Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. Now, everyone in the world, everyone in this country, you have a sense of right and wrong.

Sometimes it's distorted. Sometimes it's weak, but it's there. People know, don't they, in every culture it's better not to steal than to steal. It's universal.

It's better to be kind than to be cruel. It's better not to kill. Everyone has got a sense of morality. But it's not until we take the Bible seriously that we begin to realize why wrong things are wrong.

Why are some things wrong? Why are they wrong? It's not just that it's condemned by society that everybody says it's wrong.

[6 : 55] That isn't what makes it wrong. It's not just that you might feel ashamed about it. We do feel ashamed. We should feel ashamed when we do wrong. But that's not why it's wrong.

It's not even because it hurts other people. It's wrong, isn't it, to hurt other people, of course. But that's not the essence of why it's wrong.

It is wrong, the Bible says, because it is disobedience to Almighty God. It's disobedience to Almighty God that makes it wrong. So the catechism, which we've been going through on Sunday mornings, says sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

It's not living up to God's standards, and it is deliberately breaking God's standards. The Apostle John puts it in 1 John 3, verse 4. He says sin is lawlessness. Or as David puts it in Psalm 51.

He's committed adultery, and he's murdered the husband of the woman he committed adultery. So he's sinned against Bathsheba, the woman. He's certainly sinned against Uriah. But when he comes to think about those sins, he says to God, it is against you, and only you, that I have sinned.

[8 : 15] And so the essence of my sin is that it's against God. So take, for example, the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment is, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

It would pass all of the three tests that I've just given you. If you don't keep the Sabbath day, the Lord's day, society is not going to condemn you.

If you got out this afternoon, got your books out, and started to work, and you went to the park, and you started to work in the park, and doing your kind of school work, or doing your daily work, and people in the park saw you, the people in their neighborhood wouldn't shake their heads, would they, and say, well, that is terrible, what you're doing.

Society does not condemn people for breaking the fourth commandment. Most people don't feel any guilt whatsoever for breaking the fourth commandment.

They don't feel ashamed about it. They're not embarrassed by it. They don't see anything wrong with it. They would say to you and I, I'm not hurting anyone else. I'm not doing anybody any harm. What's the harm?

[9 : 26] Society doesn't condemn it. It doesn't make me feel guilty. What's wrong with it? Well, the reason it's wrong is because it's a breaking of God's holy law, of God's commandment.

And the law of God reveals sin. And the law shows us what sin is. And the Bible's really helpful because it shows you and I that sin doesn't need to be an outward word or an action.

It can be a thought, can't it? And it can be a feeling. And it can be a motive. Look at verse 7 with me. Can you see that? I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said.

And so there's one commandment which deals specifically with the heart. The only one of the Ten Commandments which is entirely internal in yourself.

It's the Tenth Commandment, coveting. Your thoughts. And so what Paul is saying is the law is like the sun shining through the windows of a house and showing that the house is dirty.

[10 : 39] As soon as the sun comes out, you see the grime in the dirt, don't you? Window cleaners, isn't it? They love it when the sun comes out because it shows the dirt on all the windows.

And suddenly, you didn't realize the windows were dirty at all, but the bright sunshine comes and you see it really clearly that your windows are a lot dirtier than you thought they were. The sun, it doesn't create the dirt, does it?

No, the sun reveals it. And so the person who doesn't know the Bible, they don't know the state of their heart. They don't know what sin is. And so we see in our society, a society which has walked away from the Bible, it's got no real idea of its guilt.

And wrongdoing before God. That's one of the tragedies, isn't it, of our society. It's a huge obstacle for the good news of the Lord Jesus. People are so ignorant of the law of God, they simply don't know how much they're sinning.

And half the time when they're sinning, they don't even know it. And they don't feel like they're sinning, and they're shocked, and they're really irritated when a Christian or a preacher tells them that they're sinning.

[11 : 58] And so that's the importance, isn't it, of bringing the Word of God to bear on the human conscience. This is God's commandments.

And it may be as difficult as it is that one of the chief tasks of the church over the next generation is to keep repeating and repeating and repeating the commandments of God to people that don't want to hear them until people know that they are breaking them.

and until they know what God's law is, and at that point, they can repent. People say, well, that's just too negative, isn't it?

It'll put people off. And so what the church has done is it's played down the law of God. And what that has done is it's undercut evangelism.

So we're all concerned that so few people become Christians and the church doesn't grow. And one of the reasons is because we've ceased teaching the character of God and the law of God.

[13 : 03] The law reveals sin. Secondly, Paul says, the law stimulates and increases sin. That is an astonishing thing. The law stimulates sin and the law increases sin.

He says it three times. Look at verse 8. Can you see that? John 7 verse 8. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandments, produced in me all kinds of covenant, all kinds of covetousness.

And then in verse 9, he says this. When the commandment came, sin came alive. And in verse 11, sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived me.

That is mind-boggling. So we think, don't we, God's law, that must restrain sin. God's law would keep sin down. God's law would make it weaker.

But Paul says, no, God's law actually arouses sin. It aggravates sin. It stimulates it. It brings it to life. Now, in fact, that is a simple fact of human nature and you know it really well.

[14 : 11] We want to do what we're told not to do. So if I was to say to you boys and girls who are here today, as soon as the service is over and I've pronounced the benediction, Graham has pronounced the benediction, you must not look under your seat.

I don't want you to do that. I do not want you to look under your seat. Now, until I've just said that, you've never even thought about looking under your seat, have you? Why would you look under your seat?

But as soon as I say it, you start to think, well, what is it that's under the seat? What is it that's under the seat that you don't want me to look at?

Why is it that you said, do not look under your seat? I wonder, can I just have a little look when nobody's watching? The law aggravates sin. So the Lord said to Adam and Eve, do you remember in the Garden of Eden, you can eat any tree in the Garden of Eden.

There's millions of trees in the Garden of Eden and God says you can eat all of them except that one tree there. Don't eat from that one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What's the tree they go to?

[15 : 24] What's the tree they're standing by? You go to the supermarket and you say to your child, you can have any of the chocolate bars apart from that one.

What's the one that they want? It's a fact, isn't it? Forbidden fruit looks sweet. The knowledge that we shouldn't have something gives it added attraction.

That's why, isn't it, books and producers of films, when they go to promote a film, what is the best publicity?

The best publicity is to get someone to condemn it. To get somebody really angry about what's written in the film or the book. And that'll get the crowds either to go and see it or to read it.

Get someone well-known to condemn it. There's something perverse and something obstinate in us that reacts to being told what to do and what not to do. The great Christian thinker, Augustine, tells us in his confession that when he was a little boy, he and his friends stole some pears from a garden.

[16 : 35] They didn't even eat the pears. And they threw them away. They didn't even like the pears. But what was attractive to Augustine is that they were stolen. It wasn't the flavor.

It wasn't the taste. It was the fact that they were stolen. This isn't the purpose of God's law. It's not why he gave his law.

But it is the result of his law being brought to sinful hearts. When the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. We're like a man tied to a sleeping monster.

And the monster is sin. And you're sitting there and you're tied to this huge, vicious monster. And the commandment comes and says, you kill the monster. Kill the monster.

And you say, shh, shh, shh, shh, I can't kill the monster. And the call, kill the monster, wakes the monster. And the monster kills you.

[17 : 39] It's a lovely little story, isn't it? But when the commandment came, sin came to life and I died. The law stimulates and increases sin.

Thirdly, the law convicts of sin. Look at verses 9, 10, and 11. Look at verse 9. 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, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. One of the great positive functions of the law of God as we hear is that it convicts of sin.

There was a time when the apostle Paul who wrote Romans had a really high opinion of himself. He was a very, very religious man. He'd never miss a service. He was at everything. He was meticulous in how he wanted to keep God's law.

He could have stood up and prayed, Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other men. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. As for touching the law, I'm pretty blameless.

[18 : 44] I'm a Hebrew of the Hebrews. If anybody is right with God, it's got to be me. But there came a day when the law of God shone into Paul's life, into his dark heart.

And he saw a lot about himself which he'd never seen before. And he saw his sin and he saw his uncleanness and he saw his inability to keep the law and he saw that he had coveted.

He'd coveted people. He'd coveted things. He'd coveted honor. He'd coveted respect. He thought he was a law keeper. And yet, when the law shone in his heart, he found he was a lawbreaker.

And the law comes and you think, well, I've kept the law. And then you listen to Jesus explaining the Ten Commandments. And when Jesus says, you shall not commit adultery, and you think, well, I've kept that law, haven't I?

But then you understand that what Jesus is talking about is my mind and my desires and my lusts and I've not kept that law at all. I've broken it. And you think, well, I've kept the Sixth Commandment.

[19 : 55] Shall not murder. But then as Jesus explains it and he says, it means don't be angry and don't hate. And you recognize you've broken that commandment and you've told lies about people.

And so you've broken that commandment too. And the law of God comes and as we begin to understand it, we realize we've broken all the commandments. And actually, we've never kept any one of them.

And Paul, the apostle, says, when that happened, I died. I was overwhelmed with lostness. I suddenly realized that I was separated from God.

and I saw my helplessness. And the law of God came forcefully to bear on my conscience and I was overwhelmed with guilt and with fear and anger.

I'm lost, he says. I'm lost. And he cries out for mercy. And that's missing, isn't it?

[20 : 59] So much of the church's message in this country. That we urge people, come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Come. Come to Jesus.

Come to church. But we never tell them why. We never tell them why they need Jesus Christ. Why Jesus alone can save them.

And then, what happens is what the Lord Jesus said himself. He says, to whom little is given, the same loves little.

And so, if I think my sin is a really small thing, and Jesus has saved me from it, I'm going to have, aren't I, a small love for Jesus. But if I suddenly realize how great my sin is, and how desperate I am, and that Jesus has saved me, I will have a great love for Jesus.

So can you see it? The more that we understand our sin, the more we will love our Savior. The law convicts of sin. The fourth thing is, the law proves how sinful sin really is.

[22 : 14] I look at verse 13. The law proves how sinful sin really is. In verse 13. Did that which is good, the law, 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.

Did the law kill me? By no means. It was sin. It was sin producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might shown to be sin. And here's this magnificent statement.

That through the commandments, sin might become utterly sinful. There is nothing more wicked than the abuse of that which is good.

So we hate child abuse because it feeds, doesn't it, on innocence and it feeds on the trusting nature of little children. We hate it.

[23 : 22] They exploit it to their advantage. It takes something good and it twists it for evil. You know, the person who comes to the old lady's door and pretends to be a social worker, she's had social workers and they've been kind and great and they've looked after and they've helped her and then she lets this person in and they rob her and they beat her.

And we say, don't we rightly, that is a contemptible crime. It's the scum of the earth does that kind of thing. the person who's hiding under the credit of being a social worker.

Not content just to do wrong but using what is pure to do wrong. Using what is good to do wrong. And Paul says, this is what all sin is.

It's what all sin is. Through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure. And he puts it this way, he says, it was sin producing death in me through what is good. Through what is good.

The commandments which were good and told him to be good made him worse. Sin took the good commandments of God which told him to be good and he used those commandments to make him worse. It shows us what a terrible thing sin really is.

[24 : 48] It corrupts blessing. And so actually when we think about what sin is it does involve that, doesn't it? It involves taking what is good and misusing it.

It means taking something which is positive, taking something which is from God and misusing it. And so God has given you a body.

It's given you a wonderful body. Might be a few things wrong with it but it is a wonderful body. Your body is intricate and it's complex. It's beautiful. What a wonder.

Our bodies are God's creation and they've been created to give him glory. But what does sin lead us to do with that beautiful, wonderful, complex human body that is the creation of Almighty God?

We take that body, don't we, and we use it as an instrument for lust, for perversion, for evil. It's a horrid thing about sin.

[25 : 47] It's a parasite. It feeds on God's good gifts and God's work. So God gives you a mind. He gives the human mind. It's a marvel, isn't it, the human mind?

You think about what human beings have discovered and thought and known and how many people use that wonderful mind that God has given them to deny God, to criticize God, to blaspheme God and they argue against God and God has given us physical abilities and appetites. He's given us appetite for food, taste buds and yet we become gluttons. Our bodies need rest. Rest is a good gift from God but people become lazy and God has given us capacities of soul, if I can put it like that.

The capacity to worship, the capacity to bow down and worship God and instead of worshipping God, we worship man-made idols. We've got the ability to imagine, we can create things with our minds, things that never existed.

It's an amazing human power and instead of creating beautiful things in our art and in our music, we misuse that and so we end up creating ugly things, evil things.

[27 : 12] God gives us our homes, our work, all these good gifts and so instead of looking at them with great thankfulness, we become greedy and dissatisfied. we grasp and God gives us strength and dignity which are good things and sin twists them and distorts them and misuses them and God gives you a desire for fulfillment and that is a really good desire for fulfillment but people use it, misuse it and it destroys them or a longing for recognition.

That's a great thing, isn't it? Something in us wants to be known and wants to be loved and wants to be respected but it leads people, doesn't it, to do the most appalling things.

These things are good, they're capable of great good but sin comes and takes them and dirties them and pollutes them and turns them into what is foul and ugly and harmful and hateful.

Sin turns a beautiful world into a desolate hell. Sin turns glorious human beings into selfish, cruel, wretched creatures.

Evil is the distortion of good. The devil, the Bible tells us, was once a bright angel in heaven and the word of God shows us how he was corrupted, how he fell.

[28 : 42] The Bible teaches us that all things come from a good God and we should receive them with thanksgiving and obedience. So what have I done with all that God has given me? With all that God has made me?

What return have I made to him? And Paul says, doesn't he, it becomes sinful beyond measure or exceedingly sinful. That's what the law does. And that's what the Bible does for somebody who is going to become a Christian.

It's a really strange work, isn't it? The law shows us our sin, the law increases our sin, the law convicts us of our sin, the law makes plain how ugly my sin is.

But that is God's mercy. That is God's kindness. Because it is only then when I look in the mirror and I see myself as I really am that I'm ready to come to Jesus Christ.

And it's only when I'm in despair and when we are down and when we know we are lost and when we know we are helpless and when we know that we are dead in sin, it is only then that we'll look at ourselves with horror and what lies ahead of us and at that point we will be ready to call on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 01] and he will save us from ourselves. He will save us from our sin and he will save us from death and hell forever and he will save us from the consequences of our sin.

And wonderfully, he does save everyone who calls on him. And so let me finish with this. Have you called on Christ to save you from your sin?

You see, this table, this bread and this wine tells you that there is a way back to God. There is a way that you and I can be saved from our sin.

It is as we come to the Lord Jesus Christ in all our need, in all our desperation and cry, save me. And at that point, Jesus will save us.

And I pray that if you haven't done that today, you would do it. Let's pray.