

# Romans 7:14-25

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn, if you will, to Romans 7, and we're looking at verses 14 to 25. So, if you know this passage at all, the big debate is who is Paul talking about?

Is he talking about somebody who's a Christian? If he does, why does he say, wretched man that I am? How can he say that after Romans 6? Or is he talking about somebody who's not a Christian? Or is he talking about someone who's kind of in between, on their way, but not there yet? And so, what I want to look at in Romans 7 is to try and grasp who is Paul speaking about.

And what I've found about the Bible in kind of over 25 years of studying it is the Bible is wonderfully realistic. Lots of people think the Bible is a fairy tale.

What Romans 7 is, I think you will find enormously helpful as you seek to live as a Christian. And if you're not a Christian, at understanding what does the Christian life look like?

[ 1 : 07 ] So, I want to look at it from four different angles. First of all, I want us to try and see, what is the point that's being made? What's the point that Paul is making?

Well, let's look at the context. That's how we should study any passage, isn't it? To look at kind of where it comes in the flow of the argument. What has the apostle been talking about?

And he's been talking about the law of God in the first half of Romans. And particularly the law of God in the life of somebody who's not a Christian. And so, what is the relationship of God's law to becoming a Christian, to being saved?

What does the law of God do in the life of somebody who's not a Christian? And Paul is writing to people, many of whom believe that if you kept the rules of God, if you kept the law, then that would get you to heaven.

That was the great function and the purpose of the law, they thought. They held that God had given the law to Israel. And if Israel obeyed the commandments, or if you got 51% of the commandments, then in the end, you'd be saved.

[ 2 : 18 ] People think like that today, don't they? They think, well, as long as my good outweighs my bad in the scales, well, God will let me in. It was salvation by works, that's what they thought.

So, for them, the law was their saviour. They viewed the law like a ladder to climb up on. The law was the means of salvation. And Paul has shown us, all the way through Romans, that's utterly impossible.

That the law will never save anyone from sin. And you remember, in our last study, we saw how the law of God actually reveals sin. And it shows what sin is.

And the law of God actually stimulates sin. There's something in us that when we're commanded not to do something, we immediately have got an instinct to do it. So I said last week to the children, isn't it, whatever you do, don't look under your seat.

And immediately, when you hear that, we begin to think, well, what's under the seat? I want to see it. Surely, it would be a good thing to kind of have a peek what's under the seat. There's something in us, isn't there?

[ 3 : 25 ] God said to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, you can eat from any tree in the garden, except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge and good and evil. Billions of trees, but only one tree you're not allowed to eat from.

Where did they go to? That's the tree they chose. The law stimulates sin. And the law convicts of sin. And it shows us, we need a saviour.

I need a rescuer. But the law can never bring anyone into a right relationship with God. And that's the teaching of Romans 7, 1-13. The law, all by itself, cannot make a bad person into a good person.

Now, Paul moves on, I think, in the second half of the chapter, to look at the law and the Christian. What is the place of the law, God's law, in the life of the Christian?

And so, in verses 7-13, he uses the past tense. Can you just look down and see that? You'll see he says, I was, or I died. That was in the past.

[ 4 : 32 ] But in verse 14, there's a change in the tense. I am, or I do. In the first half, he's been dealing with what he was, what he had been before he became a Christian.

But now he's dealing with who he is. And the argument is exactly the same. He's shown that the law by itself cannot change people.

And now he's going to show that the law by itself cannot make you better. The law by itself can't make a good person better. And so, that is the point which is being made.

Now, certainly, let's come to the proofs that he offers. The proofs that he offers. And rather unusually, Paul begins to speak about himself. He speaks about his own experience. And he uses himself as an example.

He says, God has changed me. God has given me a new heart. And because God has given me a new heart, I want to obey God's law. He loves it. He believes God's law is a good thing.

[ 5 : 38 ] He wants to keep it. But he can't. He can't do it. At least he can't completely. He can't the way that he wants to.

He longs to keep it. But he can't do it like he wants to. And he's deeply disturbed about that. And it grieves him. And it upsets him.

And he's not satisfied with himself. And he's not satisfied with life. And he realizes that the law by itself is not enough. And it never will be enough. And he needs help from elsewhere.

Now what is really striking about this passage is that this experience of the Apostle Paul is not unique to himself, is it? Some of the Apostle's experiences were really unique.

He met the risen Lord Jesus. On the road to Damascus. Physically saw him. You've not. I doubt if any of us here have been caught up into the seventh heaven and been given a vision of God.

[ 6 : 39 ] That was unique to Paul. But as we read the words at the end of Romans chapter 7, we say to ourselves, don't we, I identify with this.

This is me. I am being described here. This is not something unique or unusual. If you are a Christian, you will want to keep God's law.

But all too often, what do you find? You find that you can't. I do the things I don't want to do. And I don't do the things that I want to do.

And experience, of course, experience can never be the ultimate guide. But here are a series of statements that those of us who are Christians instinctively we identify with.

And when we read Paul's struggle with sin, we don't say to me, well, I'm not like that. We say, I am like that. I'm exactly like that.

[ 7 : 39 ] Because this portion of the word of God is talking about you and me as the people of God. And we have the proof of Paul's teaching in our own hearts. And the point which is made, the proof which is offered.

Now, thirdly, let's see the pattern which is observed. He gives us a kind of example, the pattern that is observed. And there's three elements, I think. First, there's his goal, his aims and his desires, his goal.

What he wants to do, what he wants to do. So look at verse 16. What is his purpose in life? He says in verse 16, doesn't he, I agree with the law, that it's good. Verse 18, he says, I've got the desire to do what is right.

Verse 19, he talks about the good I want. Verse 21, he says, I want to do right. Verse 22, he says, I delight in the law of God in my inner being.

And verse 16, he says, I agree with the law of God. But it's much stronger, isn't it? He's saying, not only do I agree with the law of God, but I love it.

[ 8 : 46 ] I honor it. I delight in it. It represents who I want to be. So when Jesus summarizes the law of God, somebody says, well, what's the most important command?

And he says, well, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. And then to love your neighbor as yourself. That wakens up, doesn't it, accord in our heart.

Paul says, that is who I want to be. And that is what I want to be. And that is what I want to do. And so then in verse 25, he says, So then I myself served the law of God with my mind.

Here's a description of a true believer. Here's a converted man or woman who's been born again and their highest and best aspiration is towards holiness and obedience. And if you've been born again by God's Holy Spirit, that will be your aspiration. You know, you don't do it perfectly, but you will want that.

[10:03] You will want to be loving. And want to be holy. And want to keep God's commandments. And so when you hear God's commandments, you don't say, oh, no, I wish God hadn't asked that.

You think, I wish I could keep that more fully. And if you don't feel that way, you're not a Christian. The aspiration and the goal of the believer.

And those things could never be true of somebody who's not been born again by God's Spirit.

There's a little phrase that ESV translated as the inner being.

The inner being. It's used in two other times. In the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 4, it says, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed. Our inner being is being renewed day by day.

That's a Christian. And the same phrase is used in Ephesians 3.16. I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being. That's the only three times it's used in the New Testament.

[11:15] It's the only true of a Christian. And so here are a Christian's goals or desires and aspirations. That's the first thing. The second element is Paul's sins and failures.

Paul's sins and failures. Look at verse 14 with me. Verse 17.

So it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. And then verse 18. For I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh. For I've got the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Isn't that true of every one of us who's a Christian? We've got the desire to do what is right, but we just cannot do it. Or even more poignantly, look at verse 19.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, that is what I keep on doing. Would there be any of us that would dare to say, that's not true of me?

[12:21] It's true of us, isn't it? The things we hate, we find ourselves saying. And we often find ourselves saying, why did I say that? But I did say it.

I said those cruel and hurtful words. We do things and we hate ourselves for doing them. And that is Paul's experience. On the one hand, his desires and his goals and his aspirations.

And then on the other hand, his sins and failures. And the third element is this conflict, isn't it? This tension. He says in verse 15, just look there.

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but the very thing that I hate. I don't understand it. He says in verse 21, so I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

And then he says, oh, wretched man that I am. Now here's the most important point of the whole sermon, all right? And so if you grasp this, it will help you.

[13:29] Paul is not talking about the whole of the Christian life. And Paul is not talking about the whole of Christian experience. That's key to understanding this.

Where people go wrong is they think Romans 7 is basically, that is the Christian life. Mostly, the Apostle Paul's Christian life is one of joy and peace and a victory.

Most of the time he does obey God's commands. He battles and he overcomes sin. Most of the time, he resists temptation.

His heart gets filled with joy and gladness that he's at peace with God. But what he's writing here is what happens when he sins.

What happens when he sins? And when he sins, at that point, he feels wretched. He feels wretched. Let's say this guy, he's 30 years old, right?

[14:37] He's as handsome as can be. He's a superb athlete. He's a multi-millionaire. He's got houses everywhere. Ferraris and bikinis. He's got a yacht. He's married to a really beautiful woman.

They've got three adorable children. He's got a wonderful career. He's got family. He's got lots of investments. He's got loads of friends. Everything in life is absolutely perfect.

But this morning, he went out in his car early to avoid the Ealing Half Marathon. And as he slammed the door of his car, he caught his finger in the door of his Ferrari.

And as the door closed, it smashed his finger. And there's a bone sticking out the side of the finger. And so, he ends up having to go to Ealing Hospital.

His face is contorted with absolute agony. And he goes to the doctor. And he shows the doctor his finger with the bones sticking out and blood everywhere. He says, Doctor, I've broken my finger. [15:47] And the doctor says to him, Come on, man. You've got 157 bones in your body. 156 are absolutely fine. You've got a beautiful wife.

You've got millions in the bank. Your whole life is wonderful. You've got investments. You've got a yacht. You've got two gorgeous children. What are you yapping and moaning about? Like a little dog. The millionaire would say, Well, I don't deny any of that is wonderful. But this finger, this finger is very, very, very sore at the moment. Do you see the point? Probably not. But look in the face. So, you and I, we commit to sin.

We do something disgraceful. We do something inexcusable and horrible. And we're ashamed of that, something that is ugly and hateful and foul. That is the broken finger, all right? And we know that our Christian life actually is joyful.

And we know that we're blessed. We know that our sins are forgiven. We know that we have the hope of heaven. And we know that Christ is with us. We know great joy in that.

[16:55] But at that moment, we feel ashamed and heartbroken. And wretched. And we feel disgusted with ourselves. And we ask ourselves, Why did I do that? I didn't mean to do it.

I didn't want to do it. What is wrong with me that causes me to do that? And I want to say to you, that is the mark of spiritual health. So, let's say you've completely lost your temper with someone that you love.

and you've said really hurtful and unforgivable things. Let's say it's your husband or your wife or your mother.

And she's sitting there and she's weeping and you've hurt her and you've really, really hurt her. What are you going to say at that point? You're going to say, Well, I've got the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

And God sees me as perfect in him. And all my sins are forgiven and I'm going to heaven. I don't need to be concerned about my mother. No, you don't, do you?

[18:06] When you wake up to what you've said and what you've done, you say, What a wretched man I am. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And that moment, that's how you feel.

And that's what Paul is dealing with here. He's saying when he sins, as he does sin, and as you and I sin, he feels wretched. And the law can't help him. The law's no use at that point.

The law can't deliver him. He can read the Bible all he wants, but it won't change what he is. He can try his best to keep it, but it'll make no lasting difference. The problem is not with the law, the problem is with the flesh.

It's like using a tool for the wrong purpose. It's like, I've got an axe in my shed.

And Claire says, I've got a friend coming around tomorrow. She's really posh. Can you make those dainty cucumber sandwiches? Will you cut the bread for me? And I come in with my axe.

[19:17] It's not going to do a great job on the bread, is it? That's not the fault of the axe. All right? The axe wasn't designed for making sandwiches.

It wasn't meant for that. The axe was meant for something different. You see, there's nothing wrong with the law of God. There's nothing missing in the law of God. The law of God never fails, but it wasn't given to make people better.

And if you try to use it for the wrong purpose, you will end up massively mistaken. So this then is the pattern that Paul sees. But one question should be in your mind if you've been here for the last few weeks.

Doesn't all of this contradict what Paul said in chapter 6? Do you remember what he said in chapter 6? Sin will have no dominion over you. It won't rule over you. And so are we just doomed to struggling and sinning and failing and sinning and failing?

And so we come lastly to the purpose which is fulfilled. And the argument here is beautiful. There's a symmetry. It's the same as the first half of the chapter. The law broke the unconverted person.

[20:35] And it enabled them to turn to the Lord Jesus. Because the law convicts us of sin. But it doesn't just make us feel awful and horrible.

It's so that we might come to faith in the Lord Jesus. And so here, it's the same argument. The law shows us our weakness. It brings us to the point where we will say, wretched woman that I am, wretched man that I am.

But not that we live like that and we wallow in it. Or we give up. Or we turn in on ourselves. But no, we turn to the Lord Jesus who empowers us.

So Paul in verses 24 and 25, look what he says. He says, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It's he who changes you. It is he who brings you to life. And so the law's purpose is to drive us to look to Christ.

[ 21 : 47 ] And so what is wrong with so much of the nonsense which is on God Channel TV and all this sort of stuff? What is wrong with so much of pseudo-Christianity with Joel Osteen, with Joyce Meyer, with all these type of people is that they try to persuade people that you are strong enough and you're not.

Because the Bible says that you are weak but he is strong. And Jesus is a strong one. And so it's in his strength that our weakness is made perfect.

And the more we advance as a Christian, the greater the tension becomes. The more that we advance as a Christian and grow as a Christian, the more we will mourn over our sin.

It's the mark of the greatest saint that they are the humblest and they mourn the most. And the closer we get to God, the more we'll see our sin.

The brighter the light of Christ shines in our lives, the more we will see the dirt. Leon Morris says in his commentary, he says, great saints throughout the ages do not commonly say how good I am.

[ 23 : 14 ] Go away from me, I'm a sinful man is the authentic cry not of someone who does not believe but of someone who does. Alexander White was one of the kind of godliest preachers of the 19th century in Scotland.

someone said to him he was kind of regarded as this kind of godly man and he said if you knew what I was like you would spit in my face.

And so here is the goal and the climax of this chapter. The purpose is not to take you away from Christ. The purpose of the Bible is to bring you to Christ.

We must avoid legalism and complacency and all self-confidence. The word of God is always going to bring us down so that we'll be brought closer to Christ and we'll more intensely feel our need.

There's times when the teaching of the Bible makes you feel wretched so that you will go to the one who will heal and restore you. Martin Luther put it well. He says this it is a characteristic of a spiritual and a wise man that he's dissatisfied with himself.

[ 24 : 39 ] It is a characteristic of a carnal and a foolish man that he's satisfied with himself and loves his life here in the world. And here's the point everything is a blessing which makes you and me feel weak.

Everything is a blessing which makes you and me feel weak. It throws us again on Christ. Christ. The truth is this isn't it?

We're far worse than we realize. We don't really see a fraction of our sin. But that doesn't matter. because Christ has borne all our sin and given us his righteousness. Stuart Olliot writes on this passage and he says the Christian life is a life of intense conflict with sin not rest from it.

It is a life of agonizing dismay and imperfection not of claimed victory. It is a life of earnest longing for glory not of satisfaction at having arrived. it is a wonderful wonderful statement in verse 20 for this tear stained heart heart sore broken man looks up to God who knows all things and says I do not know what I now if I do what I do not want it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me.

[ 26 : 08 ] we can say I think as Christians we can say to God Lord you know that is not me. There are times when I have screwed up and you have screwed up and we can go to God and we can say Lord that is not me.

I hate what has happened I don't want it to happen again and if you are a Christian you can say that. Do you remember Peter?

Peter had denied the Lord Jesus three times he denied it with curses he was really mixed up he was confused and Jesus kept asking him again do you remember do you love me?

Do you love me? Simon son of Jonah do you love me? And Peter was mixed up and he was confused why is Jesus asking me these things and then in the end he says Lord you know all things you know that I love you.

And so despite all the evidence Lord underneath all the rubbish and the disobedience and underneath all the failure there's a part of me there's a real part of me a real part of me that you have made that you have created and in my heart of hearts you know that I love you.

[ 27 : 26 ] And so we finish this morning wherever we are this afternoon and we thank God that he sees and he knows and he knows the real us.

And I think that applies when we think about other people as well. And so when other people in the church life say something daft or they show real inconsistencies and they hurt us and they annoy us I think this insight can really help us because we treat them in the same way that we treat ourselves and of course they said it and they shouldn't have said it and they did it and they shouldn't have done it but I believe in their heart of hearts they love the saviour and so I can overlook that let's bow our heads in prayer let's pray together let's pray Thank you.