

## Salvation And Sin (Part 3)

Text: Romans 7:1-25

Series: Romans. [#10]

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Theme: **Jesus Christ, Not The Law, Brings Victory Over Sin.**

### Introduction

Ezekiel chapter 34 opens with God telling Ezekiel to prophesy against the false shepherds, or leaders, of Israel. God was going to judge them for looking after themselves and not the people. But God then told the people,

“As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another ... Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?’” (17-18)

Ezekiel 34 is far removed in the Bible, in time and in subject from Romans 7, which we are looking at today. So, “What’s the point?” Romans 7 raises some questions and issues on which “there has been a terrific controversy raging” since the early church.<sup>1</sup> Those issues are not the main point of this chapter, but they easily come to the forefront, squeezing out the main points. Now here is the connection I would like to make or, rather, a loose application or metaphor from Ezekiel 34—the challenge is walk through some of those details without fouling, without muddying the water, without obscuring Paul’s main points.

What is the main point in this third look at *Salvation And Sin*, the subject of chapters 6-8? What do we need to keep front and center? Paul’s prime focus in chapter 6 was on the believer’s relationship to sin. In covering that, he made some references to the Law. Now he turns to clarify the place of the Law. His overall point in chapter 7 is that *Jesus Christ, not the Law, brings victory over sin*. He makes this point by writing about the relationship of the Law and sin, the relationship of the believer and the Law, and the relationship of the believer and sin. We begin with the relationship of...

### The Law And Sin.

Let’s start with Paul’s question in verse 7. He asks, “Is the Law sin?” He answers his own question immediately and emphatically, “May it never be!” “May the thought never enter your mind!” Let’s back up a step. Where did this question come from? Earlier in the chapter he wrote “you were made to die to the Law” (4). He has told us that believers have been released from and died to the Law (6). But more than this, he wrote that our “sinful passions ... were aroused by the Law” (5). Then, back in chapter 5, he told us that “The Law came in so that the transgression would increase” (20).

Now, some Jewish and Gentile believers might think Paul was dismissing the Law because it was evil or sinful. To clarify, he made a crystal clear statement in verse 12, “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” God is holy, God is righteous and good and so are all of His commands.

“Okay,” we can say, “the Law is not sinful. But since we are ‘not under the law but under grace’ (6:14), what value does the Law have, if any?” Here in verse 7 Paul tells us that part of the purpose of God’s Law is to teach us about our sin. He writes, “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.’”

The Law expresses God’s holy, righteous and good truth. Back in chapter 2 we saw that all people, whether they have access to the Law or not, have the substance of the Law “written in their hearts.” So the conscience, as imperfect as it is, accuses or defends what we think or do (2:15). Paul tells us that before he came to Christ—and that is the period in his life he is referring to in this first section of the chapter—the Law convicted him of his sin. It lead him to see his sin as sin, to see it from God’s perspective, to see it as it really was.

The example he uses is the tenth commandment. Verse 7, again. “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.’” Coveting is basic to sinful human nature. It has self at the center, and so thinks about what *I* need and want. Coveting, wanting things that are not mine, wanting more, is a self-centered, insatiable monster we all know. Through the Law God showed Paul, just as He shows us, how sinful coveting is, and how sinful he was. There is value in the Law. We see some of it in one of its purposes: to teach us about the sinfulness of our sin.

So, the Law is good. It has the value to teach us about our sin. But, in addition to that, the Law has authority. The point of the first six verses, is that the Law has jurisdiction over all who are alive to it, but not over those who are dead to it. Look at the first verse. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?” His point is clear—the law applies to, has jurisdiction over us as long as we live. There is nothing complicated or ambiguous here.

Then Paul uses an illustration in the next two verses to make his point about God’s law and His people. He reminds us that a woman is bound by law to her husband (and, of course so is a husband to his wife). But if he dies she is free to marry someone else. This is the illustration. Here he is teaching about our relationship to the Law. Just as God’s law of exclusivity in marriage applies as long as both the husband and wife live, so the Law continues to point out God’s holy standards and our sins as long as we are alive to it. And then the Law rightly condemns us for those sins. In doing this the Law is holy, it righteous and it is good.

Another aspect in the relationship of the Law and sin is that the Law arouses our sin. Go to verse 5. “For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.” Whenever the sin

in us sees a law, a “You shall” or a “You shall not”, it rebels. “I will do what *I* want to do!” “The sign says 60 KM/Hour, but I can safely go at least 70.” This was our natural response when “we were in the flesh,” that is, when we were apart from Christ and under the reign of sin. And, of course, it can still be our response now if we are not following the Holy Spirit’s direction (cf. Galatians 5:16).

This happens because, verses 8 and 11 tell us, sin takes the opportunity, it sees an opening to assert self and, what we don’t realize at the time, to tear down and destroy us. And so, as verse 11 also states, sin deceives us. We think we are exercising our freedom, standing up for ourselves. Or, we know something we are thinking or doing is wrong, but to us it isn’t a big deal. Remember, the Law is holy, righteous and good. The problem is not with the Law, but with sin. As one writer states, “The villain ... is sin.”<sup>2</sup>

One more thing to note about the relationship of the Law and sin is the Law does not bring death, sin does. Paul makes this point a number of times in this chapter. In verse 5 he tells us our sinful passions were at work to bear fruit for, or bring the result of death. In verse 11 he writes that sin deceived and killed him. Yes, Paul like us, was responsible for all his sin. His point is that sin, not the Law, killed him, that is separated him from God. Then in verse 13 he asks, “... did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was *sin*.”

He is restating what he told us earlier. Chapter 5, verse 12,

“just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death  
*through sin*, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

In chapter 6 verse 23, “the wages of *sin* is death.” The Law does not bring death. It is holy, righteous and good. Sin brings death. Now let’s turn to the second relationship in this chapter, the relationship of...

### **The Believer And The Law.**

Going back to the truth from the illustration of marriage, Paul asserts that the believer has died to the Law. Look at verse 4, “... you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ.” And verse 6, “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound...”

This might sound familiar. Turn back to chapter 6. Verses 3 and 4 tell us we have been baptized into Christ’s death. Verse 6 says that “our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” The language is similar, and the reality of dying with Christ to the rule of sin over us is the same. Here Paul adds another part of this wonderful reality, that we have died to the condemnation of the Law. If we want to see Paul’s message on the relationship of salvation and sin clearly, if we are to not muddy the waters of his teaching, we need to see and follow this connection between chapters 6 and 7.

Just as we are no longer under sin but under grace, just as sin no longer is our master but Christ and His righteousness, so we no longer are under the condemnation of the Law. We know we still sin. At times we present ourselves to obey sin (cf. 6:13, 16). But just as sin is a usurper rather than rightful ruler over us, so the Law's condemnation of our sin no longer rules over us. Turn ahead to the opening phrase of chapter 8, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). This is what Paul means when he says believers have died to the Law.

And just as we died to sin to be alive to Christ, so we have died to the Law to be joined to Christ. Verse 4 tells us that believers "were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that [we] might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead..." Christ is our Savior, our Master and our Shepherd. We are His redeemed, His servants and His sheep.

Verse 4 also points to the purpose of being joined to Christ, "that we might bear fruit for God" as we serve Him "in newness of the Spirit", as verse 6 tells us. Remember Jesus said that those who abide in Him will bear much fruit and that their fruit will remain (John 15:5, 8, 16). Fruit that is real and meets God's test of quality, as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 3 (10-15). Fruit that consists of the "good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them", as he wrote in Ephesians 2:10.

While this chapter's focus is not about how we become more like Christ, nor about how we are fruitful for Him, it is important to notice that progress in Christlikeness, in holiness, in fruitfulness does not come from legalistic self-efforts of doing or not doing certain things. Paul addressed this head on, and forcefully when he wrote to the Galatian churches.

"You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (3:1-3)

We become more like Christ, we fulfill our purpose as we serve Him "in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

Remember Paul's main point in this chapter, *Jesus Christ, not the Law brings victory over sin*. He has walked us through the relationships of the Law and Sin. He has walked us through the relationship of the believer and the Law. There is one more relationship which completes the picture, the one of...

## **The Believer And Sin.**

Paul's perspective changes in verse 14. He has been looking back at his life prior to faith in Christ. Now he focuses on his present life in Christ. This is where the water can easily be muddied.

- Some believe Paul is not really talking about himself, but is speaking figuratively of others.
- Others see Paul continuing to speak of himself before he came to Christ, particularly because of his statement in verse 14, “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”
- Some think Paul is speaking of immature, *carnal*, or fleshly Christians as he did in 1 Corinthians 3.
- There are those who see Paul talking about himself in the present as a believer, but see him telling us that the normal Christian life is not only one where we struggle with sin, but of ongoing, continual misery as in his cry in verse 24, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

While Paul speaks about himself as a believer, here he is not characterizing the whole Christian life. He opens the window to just one aspect of his life, not the whole of his spiritual life, or even his typical day by day spiritual life. He writes about the reality of sin in himself and every believer. Other than his shout of praise in the last verse, here he does not touch on the unlimited strength God gives, nor his joy in Christ leading him in triumph from day to day as he does elsewhere. With this in mind and, hopefully, the waters not too muddied, let’s look at the relationship of the believer and sin.

The first fact to note is that sin dwells within us. Drop down to verse 17. “So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” Paul is not trying to duck responsibility for his sin. He is a new creation in Christ. He wants to live a holy life. But sin was still within him. Earlier in verse 14 he told us he was “sold into bondage to sin.” Whenever he sinned, he was sin’s servant in that act and time. Sin then was over him as a usurper, as we saw in chapter 6. His point is that sin still resided in him. However we describe or label this, there is still sin in us, or a sinful part of us. No believer reaches a place here on earth of being without any sin. We all will be fully and finally freed from the presence of sin only when we see Jesus face to face.

At the same time, the more we grow in being like Christ, the more we will be troubled, as Paul was troubled, by our spiritual weaknesses and sins. Listen to one writer’s comments.

“The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact of his continuing sinfulness, the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly. At the same time, it must be said with emphasis that the realistic recognition that we are still indeed [sold into bondage under sin] should be no encouragement to us to wallow complacently in our sins.”<sup>3</sup>

Sin is present in us, and it also continually wages war against us. Look at verse 15.

“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.” (15-16)

Now drop down to verse 22.

“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.” (22-23)

Sin within us continually wages war against us. Yes, Satan and his forces continually work to defeat and destroy us. But the sin within us also wages war against the desire we now have as a new creation in Christ to please God. That’s why Paul challenged us in chapter 6 to not let sin reign in our bodies so that we obey its lusts (12). It is the basis for his statement that opens the fifth chapter of Galatians, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

And, yes, in this war sin wins some battles. You may be thinking, “You really don’t have to remind me of that. I know it, better than I would like to.” Paul also knew this. He tells us there were times when he was sold into bondage to sin (14). There were times when he was not doing what he wanted to, but the very thing he hated (15-16). There were times when he served the law of sin with his flesh (25). And in those time he would cry out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (24)

This is true of us as well. If it were not, God would not have directed the apostle John to write,

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving 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)

Sin wins some battles, but Jesus Christ wins the war! When Paul remembered this truth he shouted “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (25)

For the here and now, God gives us all the resources we need for victory over sin. Let me repeat that, *for the here and now, God gives us all the resources we need for victory over sin.* As Paul wrote in his first letter to the church at Corinth,

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

In his second letter to that same church he gave his testimony which could be their's and ours, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ..." (2:14).

And then there is that final, that complete, that forever victory that lies ahead for all believers when we are with Christ in heaven.

- When Christ will present us to Himself as His bride without any "spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but ... holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).
- When "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).
- When He "will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes; and there will no longer be any death [so also then, no longer any sin] ..." (Revelation 21:4)

## **Conclusion.**

*Yes, Jesus Christ, not the law brings victory over sin!*

What does this mean to us? What does it mean for us? First, it releases us from the despair that comes from thinking we have to keep on trying harder and harder to climb higher and higher will all of our strength to meet God's standards, to satisfy His Law and overcome sin. Christ has done that for us! He has redeemed and justified us! We grow in being like Christ and experience His peace and joy as we live in the Spirit.

Second, it releases us from the despair that comes from the mistaken notion of perfectionism, which kicks us in the teeth with any and every sin.

Third, it helps us fix our hope on Jesus Christ and His appearing which, Scripture tells us, will enable us to purify ourselves, to be more and more like Him (1 John 3:3).

Fourth, it means that today and every day, every moment you and I are to act on, to move forward in our new identity in Christ knowing that whatever comes, because of Jesus, all is and all will be well with our souls.

In the next quiet moments, think and talk with God about this. Thank Him for your salvation and the victory Jesus Christ brings you over sin. And, yes, we all recognize where we fail, where we sin. Determine again, anew to live in light of the new creation you are in Jesus Christ, and in His provision for you.

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<sup>1</sup> Alva McClain. *Romans: The Gospel Of God's Grace*. Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1989, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles Of Paul To The Romans*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield. *The Epistle To The Romans, Volume 1*. New York: T & T Clark International, rev. 2001, p. 358.

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