Romans 7:7-13 Commentary

PREVIOUS NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work "Jensen's Survey of the NT"				

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The Frustration of Living Under the Law -- Part 2

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Romans 7:7 What shall we say then ? Is the Law sin ? May it never be! On the contrary, 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." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

In chapter 6 Paul deals with the subject of controlling sin. In chapter 7 Paul deals with the law. Out of the 77 times the word "law" is used in Romans, it is used 22 times in chapter 7. Paul actually brought up the subject in chapter 6:14: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace."

The verb translated "for you are not" is in the present tense. The word translated not, *ou*, means "not in any way shape or form". So Paul is telling us that spiritually we are not at any time under "the law" or any "law" however imposed. Instead, we are "under grace."

We need to understand that being "under grace" means that we are under the divine favor of God that cannot be earned or deserved. This should lead us to an attitude of gratitude and servitude. We come to the realization that we are under the "transforming power of God" working in our lives to do what we could never have done in our own fleshly efforts. Therefore, it causes us daily to place all of our trust and expectation in what God can and is doing and never in what we can do.

I believe Paul, in chapter 7, is vividly portraying for us the "frustration of trying to go back and live under law." For years, I did not realize it, but not only was I living as if I was under the law, but I'm sure that I also put others under it through my preaching.

I was miserable so much of the time and could not understand why. I was also critical of those who did not live up to my convictions. For example, we were convicted that TV had become an obsession to our whole family and so we gave it up for over a year. I can still remember how proud I felt when I heard others who watched what I wouldn't watch. How spiritually superior I sometimes felt. You see, living under the law makes you quick to judge anyone but yourself.

Living under the law doesn't necessarily mean that you are under the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, but you can be bound by the law of the denomination you belong to, or the law that you impose on yourself.

Living under the law doesn't mean that you are not determined, or self disciplined. It means that you measure your spirituality by these things and if they are not done, then you think you have failed to win the love and favor of God in your life.

We must understand the difference of living "under law" and living "under grace." In Romans 7:1-5, if you look carefully, Paul clearly shows us how it was when we had no choice but to be under the law. In verses 1-4 we see that the law ruled over us to control and condemn the works of our flesh when we were in union with Adam. We were not married to the law before our union with Christ. We were in union with Adam, and the LAW had jurisdiction over us as long as we were in this union with Adam.

Now, we must note in Ro 7:5 the most fundamental truth about living under the law. When we were under the Law, it actually *energized* and *encouraged* our sinful flesh to operate. The law actually *energized* our sinful flesh. In verse 5 we see the term "**in the flesh**" is associated with the controlling power of the sinful passions, and all this is associated with being in union with Adam and under the law: "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."

"In the flesh"—we were dead spiritually in the realm of flesh. We were in union with Adam. "The sinful passions" indicated that which is the result of the sin of Adam. These are the inordinate desires of our bodies that once controlled us.

"Which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." Actually, you could read that: "which were, through the Law (or by means of the law) at work in the members of our body." They were energized by the law. Paul wants us to see how that the law actually energizes the flesh.

Paul has just described a miserable situation. Under the law, the sinful passions of our flesh were energized and we could do nothing about it. They produced fruit in us, unrighteous fruit.

We have got to understand this. **When we are under the law, the flesh is always at work, and the flesh can only produce unrighteousness.** The flesh loves to work whether it be grossly sinful works or "religious works." In fact, it is in the "religious" realm that it is the hardest to detect. It is inherently rebellious to God and His ways, so even though it may appear to do good things, it trusts in it's own strength. And without the ingredient of "faith in God and His ability," the result is that our fleshly self always wants the glory for what it has done.

In the religious realm the flesh loves to obey laws, to observe holy occasions, even to fast. Paul had to chastise the Galatian believers over this. Look at Galatians 4:9-11:

> "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."

That is true even today. Years ago my wife and I were walking on a beach in Florida. This lady came towards us with a radio headset on. She was singing a Christian song at the top of her lungs. We stopped and spoke with her for several minutes. She never said a word about Christ. It was all about her church and what her church was doing and how active she was in her church. I had the overwhelming feeling that she had completely missed the point of what being under grace was all about.

The flesh also loves to boast about its religious achievements, of how many prayers were offered, or how many gifts were given. Look at Luke 18:9-14:

> "And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer.

> The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.'"

Folks, our flesh hasn't changed! Just as in the days of Genesis 11, when man became so arrogant that he thought he could somehow ascend unto Heaven, our depraved flesh always thinks it can somehow perform in such a way that God will accept it.

To go back and live under the law is to endeavor to live once again in the power of one's flesh. It is to invoke the guilt and the condemnation of the law which energizes the flesh. You say, "It is impossible for a believer to think that he can please God in his own fleshly efforts. He has been delivered from that kind of thinking." Has he? Listen as Paul addressed some believers at Galatia in Galatians 3:1:

> "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?"

He is saying, "You have a mind, and you have been taught, but you choose to refuse to understand. You would rather play church." "**Who has bewitched you**" has the idea of "charmed." Paul says, "Who has come to you and with smooth-talk charmed you into this foolish error of thinking you can please God by fleshly effort and religious habit?"

He goes on in Gal 3:2:

> "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?"

You see, the law, and all the works of the flesh to obey it, cannot save a person, nor can it "sanctify" one. To go back and trust in our flesh seeking to obey the law, or any law, is to commit spiritual suicide. Paul dealt with the antinomians in chapter 6, could it be that he is dealing with the legalists in chapter 7?

The same misery we experienced when we were in Adam under the law, which is the inability to ever produce righteousness in our fleshly efforts, will be ours if we go back to trusting in our own efforts. Our flesh is still just as arrogant and sinful. It has been rendered powerless, so it cannot control us unless we choose to allow it.

So far we have seen: the principle of law—it controls a person as long as they live; the practical illustration of the Principle—the law said that a woman who was married to a man still living could not remarry another until her first husband died; the purpose of the illustration Paul used—we were once in union with Adam with the law controlling and condemning us, but when we put our faith into Christ we died to that relationship and now we are free from the law and under His Grace in our union with Him; and the problem man had which required him to be joined to Christ—the problem was that man in union with Adam could never produce righteousness that God would accept.

Now we want to look at Ro 7:7-13 to see the picture of how the law is useful for our salvation. Ro 7:7:

> "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!" Just because we no longer serve the law, does not make it sinful. It served a temporary but wonderful purpose in our life. Paul gives his own example: "On the contrary, 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."

Know is to *experientially* know and understand. The word translated **not** is *ouk.* It means there was no way that I could have known otherwise. "**[The] sin**" is the sinful state I was in when I was in Adam.

Paul says that it was "through the law" that he came to understand that he was a sinner unable to meet the requirement of God. He explains that he did not know that what he was doing was coveting until the law said, "You shall not covet." And so he got up one day and said, "I will not covet." Verse 8, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead."

The word translated "**opportunity**" is **aphorme**. It refers to a "base of operations." So "the sin"—the rebellious nature of Adam that was resident in Paul's flesh—began to operate when the law came that said "do not covet."

"Produced in me," **katergazomai**, means to work out something, to bring something about, to accomplish, to carry out a task until it is finished (cp What believers are to do in Phil 2:12 = **work out** your salvation!). We see this word**katergazomai** several times in Romans (Ro1:27, 4:15, 5:3, 7:8, 7:13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 15:18). Look at just a few of them:

> Romans 4:15—"for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation."
>
> Romans 5:3—"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation **brings about** perseverance."
>
> Romans 7:13—"Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by **effecting** my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."
>
> Romans 15:18—"For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has **accomplished** through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed."

What did the sin produce in Paul? "Coveting of every kind." This is a word that means "to desire greatly, to lust after." These are the inordinate desires that cause us to intensely focus on the wrong things, obsessed with having them. Paul said, "I got up and decided not to covet, but my rebellious flesh took over and caused me to covet in ways that I did not think possible."

"For apart from the Law sin is dead." Sin is dead, inactive, when it is separated from the law. But the law excites it; it forces the flesh into operation either for the seeking to do good or evil. It depends on what law the flesh is put under.

Ro 7:9 continues: "And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died." The imperfect active indicative tense points to a life lived in the past. Remember that when sin is apart from the law, it is dead—a corpse that does not respond.

> "But when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died."

Became alive is *anazao,* which comes from two words: *ana*, meaning "again", and *zao*, "to live." Paul finally realized what he could not do in the energy of his flesh.

Ro 7:10:

> "and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me."

The commandment was "thou shalt not covet." Why did it result in death for Paul? Paul found it to be unto death because it showed how incapable Paul was in his own strength to obey.

Then in Ro 7:11 we read,

> "for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me."

Here the word translated "**opportunity**" is **aphorme**, the same word we saw in Ro 7:8. Again, the word is used for a base camp, the base of operations. The power of sin in Paul came alive and used the law as a beachhead upon which to operate.

Paul says the sin "**deceived me**." One of the best tools that sin employs is that it **deceives** a person. Look at Titus 3:3:

> "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, **deceived**, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."

Then Paul states in Ro 7:12-13:

> "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

It is not the law against murder that causes the punishment, but the murder itself that invokes upon us the sentence. The law is good, but when it comes, it exposes sin, and it is our sin that brings death. What a picture of how the law exposes sin, and is necessary for salvation to occur.

Well, Paul gives a picture of how the law is useful in our salvation. It cannot save us, nor can it sanctify us, but it can expose our need for God's grace to do so. This is why a person has got to understand that he is a sinner, completely unable to save himself, before he will understand his need of God's gracious gift of salvation.

I wonder if anyone reading this has foolishly put himself under a set of rules instead of a *person*, the Lord Jesus Christ? You couldn't save yourself any more than you can sanctify yourself so why have you foolishly decided to trust in your flesh again? You can't, God never said you could. He can, and He always said He would.