

ROMANS 7:9-15 "Why Do I Struggle With Sin? The Answer May Surprise You!"

In this section of the letter to the church at Rome, Paul brings the law of God into the picture and describes it in a variety of ways, so as to help us understand its inability to make us just and holy, and its function to show God's holiness, His standard and its purpose of directing us to Christ.

Paul also emphasizes that the law is not the source for our ungodly behavior, but our sinful nature is; that nature which we inherited from Adam, as a result of his rebellion to God.

We saw last week how Paul uses the example of coveting, which the law of God calls sinful, to show how the mere command entices the flesh, or old man, to want to covet.

Rom 7:8 "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead."

The reason for the laws' inability to make us just and holy is because there is no power in the law to enable us to walk after God. That power was destroyed in the Garden of Eden because of sin.

And the point Paul is making is that though the law tells us clearly what pleases God it will not allow us to please God because of its inability to empower us for good works. As long as the law of God is in effect sin will be exposed, and yet sin will have an ally in the flesh.

That's why we read at the end of verse 8... "apart from the law sin is dead."

In other words, if the law didn't exist then sin would not be defined. Without definition we wouldn't have any reason to feel guilty because sin would not be alive in our consciences. It's true sinfulness would not be seen as alive and working. In that sense it would be dead apart from the law.

Let me just add here that mankind didn't need to wait until God delivered His law to Moses on Mt. Sinai to define what sinful behavior was. This was given very early on in the Garden when God told Adam not to eat of a specific fruit.

But more than that God built into man the knowledge of God's holiness and man's inability to keep it as we saw earlier in this very letter.

Romans 1:18-19 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

Now in Paul's case what he is describing is how every man uses his lack of knowledge of God's law as an excuse to sin, which doesn't mean that all men don't have a conscience which has been touched by the hand of God, but all of us prefer to be in the dark with God's law rather than have it expose our true sinful self.

For example: Someone who loves to fish finds a great lake which is tucked away from everyone's sight. Lots of trees have hidden its view from the road. You and your buddy find out about it and you get your gear and start walking through the brush and your buddy spots a sign which has been knocked down.

He walks over to it, picks it up and reads it. He walks over to you and just starts to tell you what it says and you stop him. You know that if that sign says POSTED... NO TRESPASSING that your conscience will not allow you to enjoy the day fishing.

Ignorance of the law allows you to feel as though the law doesn't exist in your particular case. And so if you don't know what that sign says you act as though there are no restrictions and you go about your business without any restraints or conviction.

But once you pick that sign up and read it the reality of its message comes alive. And that's what Paul says in Rom 7:9 "Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died."

In other words, as long as I don't have that sign telling me not to be on someone else's property, that property is not off limits. But the moment the commandment comes my awareness of its message comes alive and I am guilty, or as Paul puts it, I die. The law condemns me. Whether I react to that law or not is not the issue here, but the fact that the law has its effect. It condemns.

Now in the case of God's law it was always meant to be for the help of mankind. God didn't create the law to simply take away our fun. When He gives us His very word, which describes His

holiness, He is doing it to keep us from straying into areas which are harmful.

Again, we see this in Rom 7:10 "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."

What Paul is showing us here is that while the law was intended to bring life in the sense that it pointed to the life-giver, the very fact that we could never abide by its demands proves us to be guilty of its violation and the penalty for that is death.

Now the sense in which the law could bring life is meant to be understood in the light of what Paul spoke of in chapter 5 when Adam was in the picture. The law was given to Adam and was meant to be a means to life. Though the law there was only one command, Adams' compliance would have resulted in life.

And of course disobedience was to result in death. But since the law given to us by God is a picture of what perfect holiness is, to keep it perfectly would result in life with God.

But, of course the problem is, after sin entered into the world through Adam, no one is able to keep it perfectly. And James in his epistle makes it clear what happens if we keep the law and just mess up once.

Jam 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

God demands perfection as a means of being justified, made holy before the living God. That's why Paul realized that despite how noble his efforts to keep the law, once he broke even one law he was guilty of all of it. And the sentence was the same as if he broke two or three or a hundred of the laws.

Rom 7:11 "For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death."

Sin deceives us into thinking that God grades on the curve and that if I keep most of the laws that will be put to my account as something good.

It also deceives us into thinking that the law will meet our deepest needs of knowing God and walking with Him. Charles Hodge makes this comment on the phrase 'sin deceived me'.... [The Greek suggests that sin] "completely deceived me, or disappointed my

expectations. How? By leading the apostle to expect one thing, while he experienced another. He expected life, and found death. He expected happiness and found misery; he looked for holiness and found increased corruption."

You see, the whole point of the law is to show us that God demands perfection. And once we realize that then we understand we are dead men and women, guilty as charged.

And if that is what God is trying to convey to us through the law then the law has done its job. And we must concur with Paul in our text.

Rom 7:12 "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."

The law is a good thing. The law is holy and righteous for only one reason. The law of God comes from God who is holy, righteous and good. And in His grace He has given us the means to see ourselves for who we are..... sinners in need of someone who can keep the law perfectly and in that have a righteousness which is perfect and able to clear sinner's from guilt.

We all know who came into this world to accomplish that on our behalf. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But Paul is not done with the law. He raises another question.

Rom 7:13 "Did that which is good, then, become death to me?"

In other words, why would God give me the law and call it good and then take that same law and kill me with it, which in effect says that the law is the means of sin whose wage is death?

Is that why the law was given, to simply be the means of killing me? "By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

Though violation of the law brings death; it is sin that is the culprit. Sin in us is the one who must be blamed for our death. The law simply points us to that fact. Therefore, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Try as we may, we can't blame the law, we can't blame our environment or our past or our upbringing or anything else when it comes to what it is that will declare us guilty before God.

On that day when we stand face to face with God, there will only be two people; God and ourselves. He will not allow us to call in witnesses to defend us in our sin. He will not allow us to point to anyone or anything as the scapegoat for our guilt.

God has been very gracious in giving us the law to point us to the real culprit in this life. The culprit is us, and our sinfulness, which is rebellion to the God who has not only given us His law to show us the sinfulness of sin, but the One who has also given us His Son to stand in our place taking our guilt.

As believers, when we stand before God face to face, it will not be our sin which He sees, but the righteousness of Christ put to our account by faith in Him alone.

Paul knew this, but Paul also understood something else about sin which frustrates every believer in Christ Jesus in this world.

Rom 7:14 "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin."

Now, you won't catch what it is that Paul is saying through the rest of this chapter, unless you put this section back into the context of the entire letter up to this point.

The link which is connected to this section is found in Rom 6:5-11 "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, [Or be rendered powerless] that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

In this section Paul teaches us that there are two natures for the believer. The old self or man, which all men have in Adam, which has the power to please self only, and the new man, which is alive in Christ, who has freed us from the penalty and power of sin, which now has the ability to please God for the first time.

And so when we come to Romans 7 we must keep this in mind. Paul is speaking about the law and how it reveals the old man to be spiritually dead. In Christ we are spiritually alive which means in

Him we have the ability to see our sin problem and know what to do to solve that problem, which is to reach out to our Savior by faith.

And so, as believers in Christ we're operating in the sphere of two realities. On the one hand we were born into this world with Adams curse upon us, which has sin at the center of our beings. And yet on the other hand, in Christ, we are new creatures with the desire to please and love God.

And so when we come to verse 14 Paul is simply stating a fact about one of the realities of life, and that the law speaks to that reality.

Rom 7:14 "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin."

Paul recognizes this aspect of his life and addresses the reality of Adam's inherited sinful nature. "I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin." 'My natural self, or the old man, is nothing but bondage. It's in slavery to sin. I came into this world with that condition. In fact, I was sold into the slavery of sin from the 'git-go'.'

Robertson in his Word Pictures in the New Testament makes the comment on this verse: "Sin has closed the mortgage and owns its slaves."

When a black slave in the 19th century had a child, that child, even though it didn't realize until years later, was born a slave. That child was the property of the slave owner the moment it came into the world. It didn't have a choice.

That's Paul's point. I was born a slave to sin and therefore shared in the condition of sinful man which is unspiritual. He means to say that there is a side of me, even though I'm freed from the slavery of sin because of Christ, which still has its roots in slavery to sin. And this conflict between the two is very real.

When that black slave was finally set free by law after the Civil war, he or she could legally move to another state and flee from the tyranny of the slave owner.

However, you and I, though set free from the penalty and power of sin still find ourselves in the presence of the slave owner, who, despite the fact that he no longer owns us, still tries to act as though he does and tries to entice us back to the plantation to go to work for him.

The rest of Romans 7 explains this conflict. What Paul describes of himself in these next verses is what all of us in Christ experience. He doesn't share these things to excuse sin or to leave us in a hopeless state, but to make us aware of the battle, and how to identify the problem, so that the battle doesn't end up in constant defeat going back to the plantation to be put in chains again, despite the fact that we have the key to our release.

That's the frustration that Paul explains. On the one hand we're free from the slavery of sin and yet on the other hand, with key in hand, we place those chains on ourselves and then complain of bondage as though there were no way out.

Listen to what Paul says in Rom 7:15 "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Now, when Paul says, "I do not understand what I do", it's not as though he is ignorant of his behavior. If that were the case then he along with everyone else really would have the excuse to use the insanity plea every time we sinned.

The meaning here, as Hodge points out, is that despite the fact that I do these things "I approve not, ie., I do not recognize it as right and good.."

In other words, 'I don't understand why I do these things when I know better. Ever say those words? You weren't the first. But, again Paul isn't excusing his sin and neither should we.

But, what Paul is doing is reminding us of what he's been addressing in this whole chapter as he's been discussing the law. Once again I quote Charles Hodge: "It is enough to remark here, that every Christian can adopt the language of this verse. Pride, coldness, slothfulness, and other feelings which he disapproves and hates, are day by day, reasserting their power over him.....

..... He struggles against their influence, groans beneath their bondage, longs to be filled with meekness, humility, and all other fruits of the love of God, but he finds he can neither of himself, nor by the aid of the law, effect his freedom from what he hates, or the full performance of what he desires and approves."

This is the problem for you and me. We are all confronted with this struggle on a daily basis. But, what often times happens is that our solution to the problem is either fleshly, where we revert back to the wisdom of the world, or we use God's law as a list of do's and

don't's to try and accomplish sanctification, which is what this struggle is really all about.

The struggle is, 'I want to be more like Christ, but the old man or the flesh wants me to be more like the slave.' It's a spiritual problem and to try and bring in worldly solutions or solutions which do not give the power to overcome the problem, like the law, we're only going to find more frustration and disappointment and deception, which only masks the problem and doesn't get to its root.

I get a kick out of all the self-help books which are on the market today, which by the way, inundate the shelves of Christian Bookstores as well. And what's fascinating is that if there weren't a market for them they wouldn't exist.

The fact that such books flourish indicates that people are looking for answers. But in all of those books there is one common denominator. You can fix the problem with our advice. That's why they're called "Self-help" books.

What Paul is saying, and what the entire word of God is saying, is that whenever you sprinkle self-anything with the authoritative word of God you add a self-help element which can't get to the root of the problem.

And here's the reason why. If given the option to choose the expedient way, which doesn't require faith, but only performance, we will choose the path of least resistance. Faith takes trust and effort in One outside of ourselves. Performance satisfies the flesh with rules and schemes which have a form of godliness but deny the power of God.

And godliness is what this whole issue of life is all about for the Christian. How do we attain unto this godliness? Only through the means which God gives. His Son, Jesus Christ, His Spirit who indwells us and empowers us and comforts us and Counsels us .

And the Word which God has given us, which He wants placed in our hearts so that the power of His life shows through; not just the letter of the law which boasts only in the performance aspect.

To give you an example of how you can take the word of God and relegate it to simple performance instead of faith actions motivated by love for the Savior, let me again go to the Word of God itself.

Mat 7:22-23 "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Evil doers? It looks to me as though they were doing some rather religious and holy things for God. But in fact they weren't. They were simply going through the motions of being religious. Nothing of what they did was by faith. They didn't even have faith in the Christ God sent, which is why God had them depart from His presence.

They were performance oriented, not faith oriented. Anything which we do for the sake of only making us look holy, instead of allowing the Spirit of God to create a holiness of the heart, is fleshly in nature and its works will be burned in the final judgment.

What you and I want in Christ is to walk in a way that pleases God and submits to the power of the Spirit resulting in the fruit of the Spirit.

The struggle Paul speaks of here is something that is real and allows us to either walk and obey God by faith with thankful hearts, or to walk in a way which we hate, knowing that it doesn't please God. We need to first consciously commit ourselves to God's sovereign rule in our lives. In other words, trust Him completely.

Pro 3:5-7 "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil."

Learn to recognize sin. When Paul was instructing Timothy in helping Christians to turn from the ways of the world, he told him to lead them to a knowledge of the truth, "that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." (2Ti 2:26)

The knowledge of the truth, which is God's word, enables us by the power of the Spirit, to distinguish what God's will is so that we may walk with Him.

We then need to learn to nip sin in the bud. And that starts even with our thought life.

2Co 10:3-5 "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. *(And by the way this waging of war has to do with the way we flee from sin and unto God to further His cause in us and through us)*, 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

The war Paul speaks of in Romans 7 is eluded to here in 2 Corinthians. And the only solution are the weapons God provides according to His word and His power in the Spirit. We need to be willing to confess our sin to God when we do sin.

1Jo 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

And we need to pray with thanksgiving to God in every circumstance and not lose heart.

Phi 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I want to expand on this next week because it's important to know God's solution from His word regarding this war which is waging in our members and that causes us to say with Paul in Rom.7:15 "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

There's some good news that Paul has for us and we'll see how all of this works in God's way according to His will so that we don't have to always live in frustration, but in the power and the peace of God's presence.

Keep seeking God above, He will not leave you defenseless, nor hopeless or powerless. Sin is a real enemy, along with Satan, who knows how to use sin to entice us and draw us away, but never forget, the same God who created this universe is the same God who indwells every one of His children. And the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, is the One who is able to lift us up that we may magnify our Savior.