

## ROMANS 7

# When You Do What You Don't Want To Do

### *God's Wrath on Unrighteousness*

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and lawlessness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what is known about God is plain to them, because what God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For

... called to be saints, called to be holy, to obey the gospel of God, ... beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who descended from David<sup>2</sup> according to the flesh,<sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness

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Last time we saw in Chapter 6 that our old man, the old nature, has been crucified with Christ. Therefore, the believer is “reckoned” to be dead indeed to sin.

Now in Chapter 7, Paul vividly describes men as being either *natural*, *carnal*, or *spiritual*. The *natural* man is the unsaved man who can rise no higher than his intellectual, moral or personal will power can lift him. He is ruled by his senses.

The *carnal* man is a saved man who is still dominated at least partially by the power of sin and under the control of the old nature.

The *spiritual* man is the believer whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit. These three “men” are in view in Romans 7.

First, the Apostle tells us that believers are dead to the law (that is, human effort to be righteous). The law no longer wields authority over us in its demands that we obey it by our own strength; that our level of righteousness hinges on our own performance.

**Romans 7:1**

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?

Naturally, when a person dies, the law (any laws for that matter) has no more power over them. They are dead to it and it to them. A book of laws is an irrelevant document to a dead person.

Keeping that in mind, Paul now gives us an illustration involving marriage.

**Romans 7:2-3**

For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. 3So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called

an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

Picture for a moment an unhappy marriage in which the marriage vows have become a hated, resented burden. Yet even so, there is no release from this bondage until death severs the relationship. The “law of marriage” holds the couple firm and fast in God’s sight.

But when one of the two dies, the other is set free from the marriage vows. The death of the one makes void the other’s status as a spouse in the eyes of the law.

Paul is making the case that the *law’s power ends at death*. The law represents “performance” religion where one is forced to “try” to be righteous, “try” to live up to God’s standard in his own strength and will-power. It is indeed a miserable marriage.

But the spiritual believer knows an easier way to victory.

#### **Romans 7:4**

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

When a person turns to Christ for forgiveness and is justified by grace through faith, the claims of the law are broken. That is, our righteousness is no longer dependent upon our own performance, seeing that we were never able to fully obey the law in the first place.

The old miserable marriage to sin, hateful and unbearable, and made even worse by the law, which only served to magnify the sinfulness of our sin, is over! That marriage is now dissolved, not by divorce but by death. Now the believer is “married to another.”

Let's remember back a moment. Do you recall the day the Holy Spirit came and pointed you to God's dear Son, and prompted you to call on Him for forgiveness?

In essence the Spirit was saying, "Do you take this Man to be your Savior?" "Will you take Him for richer or for poorer, for sickness or for health, for better or for worse, for time and eternity?"

You said, "I do." In that moment the old marriage to sin was dissolved and you were married to Another, "even to him who is raised from the dead."

Now the believer belongs to Christ, and our love, life, and loyalty all belong to Him. Rather than living under the performance demanding tyranny of the law, the believer now lives on the terms of intimate relationship with that risen One who has cancelled sin and conquered death and satisfied the law!

**Romans 7:6**

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Let's be clear. It is not the law that God has put to death. It is the believer. Instead of the pressure to perform and conform to the "letter" (which is the rules of conduct demanded by the law), the believer, now in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit, fulfills the spirit of the law.

In other words, the believer now walks by grace, not rules and regulations impossible to live up to.

## Our Struggle With Sin

Next, Paul makes clear that just because the law revealed to us our sinfulness doesn't make the law bad.

### **Romans 7:7**

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

The proposal that the law was "sin" was ridiculous to Paul. The law was not a bad thing. What it revealed is what was bad, for the law exposed and highlighted the exceeding sinfulness of our sin.

Paul says, "I did not fully realize that I was covetous until the law (Moses' commandments) made it clear to me."

The law, in fact, was designed to bring man to the end of himself and all of his own efforts. The law defines sin and makes us aware of it. Once we see the exceeding sinfulness of our sin, and our helplessness in overcoming it, the law drives us to Christ.

### **Galatians 3:24**

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

There came a time in Paul's life when he utterly came to an end of himself. This is what he is describing in the following verses:

### **Romans 7:8-10**

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. <sup>9</sup>Once I was

alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. <sup>10</sup>I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

As a natural, unsaved man, Paul found that the law exposed the hidden nature of sin by first *revealing to him his own sinful nature*.

The great function of the Mosaic law is to expose sin. Men try to cover sin, excuse it, and camouflage it. They call sin by other names. They remove the skull and crossbones label from the bottle of sin and replace it with something attractive and appealing. But the Mosaic law will not allow man to do this with impunity.

- The function of the law is to give sin its proper name and to expose it for what it is.

Paul next points out another fact about the law. It actually provokes sin.

#### **Romans 7:11-12**

For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. <sup>12</sup>So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

Paul next asks a question: “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means!”

Sin was the culprit, not the law. The law is good and only because it is good can it expose the sinfulness of sin.

#### **Romans 7:13**

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.

At this point in Chapter 7, Paul switches from past to present as he continues to explain the relationship between the Law and sin:

**Romans 7:14**

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

A slave cannot act on his own will. He is bound to obey his master. His noble desires will be overruled and crushed by the one who owns him. Through this illustration of slavery, Paul explains why he was unable to obey the law. As sin's slave, he had to do his master's bidding. No matter how much he delighted in God's Law, he was powerless to fulfill it.

**Romans 7:15-20**

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup>And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup>I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

In verses 21-25, Paul transparently lays out an autobiographical account of the struggle in his life between the Law of God and the law of sin. Both of these laws contended for the mastery of him. The Great Apostle had been eager to obey the law of God, but the law of sin would not permit it. Listen to his description of the struggle:

**Romans 7:21-23**

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup>For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup>but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

Caught in the grip of this intense battle, the Apostle cried out for deliverance:

**Romans 7:24**

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

In the same breath he provides the answer,

**Romans 7:25**

Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The frustration of Romans 7 sets the stage for the triumph of Romans 8. It is a fact of the Christian life that most earnest believers experience the two conditions described by Paul exist in a sort of cycle. Recognition of our inability to live up to our deepest spiritual longings (Chapter 7) leads us to cast ourselves upon God's Spirit for power and victory (Chapter 8).

This sanctifying of our life is a gradual and lifelong process as we learn through failure and success, ups and downs how to depend upon the indwelling Holy Spirit.

*“So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”* End of vs. 25

