

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

April 5, 2023

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

Text – Romans 7 – *No Good Thing*

Introduction

We have been discussing the doctrine of sanctification, which is the process by which we become what God already sees us to be. He sees us as perfectly righteous and holy positionally, and that is what we will be someday in Heaven. But now, we are in the middle of a transformation process, a renovation from the inside out. God is making us into what we will someday be perfectly. God is not finished with us when we are saved. The process is just beginning at salvation. It will continue until you are at home in Heaven:

"6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 1:6)

Sanctification is the work of the Father:

"23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

It is also the work of the Son:

"25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word," (Ephesians 5:25-26)

It is also the work of the Holy Spirit:

"11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

It is also the work of the believer. The Bible teaches that sanctification is active:

- Rom. 12:1 – We are to actively present our bodies as a living sacrifice.
- Eph. 6:10 – We are to actively put on the armor and prepare for battle.

- Eph. 4:1 – We are commanded to walk worthy of our calling.
- II Cor. 7:1 – We are commanded to cleanse ourselves.

This growth requires great effort:

- I Cor. 9:24-27 – Racing and Boxing
- Ephesians 6:10-12 – Warfare
- II Timothy 4:7 – Fighting the good fight and finishing the course.

Sanctification is different than most doctrines since it is the work of God and man (God working through us!)

It is a 2-part process. Putting off sinful deed and thoughts. Putting on godly deeds and thoughts.

Ephesians 4

- Put off Lying / Put on Truth Telling
- Put off Stealing / Put on Working to give to the needy
- Put off Unwholesome speech / Put on Speech to build up
- Put off Bitterness and anger / Put on Kindness

In this chapter, Paul will dig deep inside the human flesh and uncover the source of our problem with sin. This section is very practical, not dealing with positional justification, but rather it will help us tremendously as we grapple with the question: “If I am saved, then why do I still have such a problem with sin?” If we are truly saved, the Holy Spirit of God is working through our new nature to fulfill the will of God in our lives but dwelling within the same temple (our bodies) with the Holy Spirit is our old, sinful flesh, which is at war with our new nature. Thus, there is a fierce battle raging within us.

So far in this Letter to the Romans we have seen the utter depravity of lost humanity, but then we discover that the same depraved and helpless sinner can be gloriously justified and set free from the penalty of sin through the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, however, we learn from this letter what we already know all too well from our own experience, and that is the forgiven saint still struggles with his sinful flesh. For the Christian, the penalty of sin is gone forever, but the power of sin dwelling in his still sinful flesh is very much the reality.

This chapter will do three things to the discouraged Christian who wants to do right, but still loses the battle occasionally:

- 1 **It will give you security.** Many Christians who don't understand the principles taught in chapter seven battle with eternal security. They wrongly assume that their desire at times to sin is an indicator that they have never been truly saved. Paul called himself a "wretched man" because of his own battle with his old man; his adamic sinful nature.
- 2 **It will give you strength** because you will better understand the problem that lies within. If you can clearly see the problem, you can then better understand how to fix it.
- 3 **It will give you solace (encouragement)** because you will understand that you are not alone in this battle. All other Christians are battling the same enemy – themselves.

"13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Illustrate – In the 50's there was a comic strip in the newspapers called "Pogo". Walt Kelly, the creator of the strip, wrote a book called the Pogo Papers and in the forward was this statement:

"Traces of nobility, gentleness and courage persist in all people, do what we will to stamp out the trend. So, too, do those characteristics, which are ugly. It is just unfortunate that in the clumsy hands of a cartoonist all traits become ridiculous, leading to a certain amount of self-conscious expostulation and the desire to join battle. There is no need to sally forth, for it remains true that those things which make us human are, curiously enough, always close at hand. Resolve then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tinny blasts on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us. Forward!"

The statement was later shortened and made into the famous quote: "I have met the enemy, and he is us."

The Apostle Paul had also met the enemy – it was him, and your enemy is you.

I once heard a missionary illustrate this situation by stating the new man and the old man are like two dogs, which are poised to fight each other. Which one will win? The missionary stated that the dog that is well fed would win the fight. The Christian that is feeding his flesh with the philosophies of this world and with the lusts of the flesh will have a hard time resisting sin. However, the Christian that is feeding the new man with the Word of God, with godly fellowship, and with service to others will have more victories over sin.

You will note that each section in our outline begins with a question.

I The Problem is Illustrated (vs. 1 – 6)

"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" (Romans 7:1)

The term "brethren" was used in a variety of ways in the Bible. It was used to refer to those who were part of the nation of Israel. It was also used in reference to all believers. The believers at this time in Christian history were mostly Jews, but even the Gentile Christians would be somewhat familiar with the Law, not only because of its being taught in the churches, but also because of the strong Jewish influence within the churches.

Illustrate – I am a Gentile, but because of my study of the Bible, I am very familiar with the Old Testament Law.

Paul is introducing this chapter with an illustration dealing with marriage. Paul states here that the Law should not be the deciding factor for the Christian. We should not do (or stop doing) the things that we do because of a set of rules that govern our conduct. We should do what we do because we are "in Christ" and we are yielded to the Holy Spirit of God within us. However, the Law is still part of our lives in some ways while we are here on this earth. Certainly, we would all agree that God's moral laws are still in place. God hasn't changed his mind about murder, adultery, theft, deception, etc. They are all still very wrong. The ceremonial aspects of the Law are no longer part of the Christian life because they all were fulfilled in Christ, and since we have the reality of Christ, we no longer need all the pictures, sacrifices, and ceremonies that pointed to Him:

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the

sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

(Colossians 2:14-17)

There are also civil aspects of the Law that deal with government, etc. The rules of conduct for the Nation of Israel as a society are not all applicable to us today.

But many aspects of the law show us what God thinks is right, or at least, best, for us. The point is that our lives will still be helped by the laws that teach us what God has determined to be right and what He also says is wrong.

However, when we die, these laws will no longer be a part of our lives. And, even now, the saved are not held eternally accountable for transgressions against God's Law, in that his sins won't be punished in Hell, because Christ has paid the sin debt already for us. Christ has fulfilled the Law completely by never sinning against it and by always obeying God, and He has also paid the price for our inability to keep it. The bottom line is that our lives should now be governed by our relationship with Christ, not adherence to the Old Testament Law.

"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband." (Romans 7:2)

According to the Law, when a husband died, the woman was no longer "bound" to her husband; she became free.

"So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." (Romans 7:3)

Since she was freed from the law that bound her while her husband was alive, she could now do something that was previously forbidden.

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." (Romans 7:4)

Because we are no longer "under the Law", we are, in a sense, dead to it. We are married to Christ. He is our new master. In the last chapter we saw that sin was our master, and here we see that the Law was a master, but now we have a new master whose yolk is easy, and burden is light. Our sin and the Law condemned us to death, but Christ gives us life.

See Ephesians 5:8 – 33 regarding our marriage to Christ.

"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." (Romans 7:5)

"In the flesh", meaning under the Law, or unsaved. The curse of sin and the condemnation of the Law have no power over us because we belong to Christ. We had no fruit because we ourselves were dead.

"But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." (Romans 7:6)

Since Christ has freed us from the penalty and the bondage of the Law, we have life and we can now serve in "newness of life" (Romans 6:4) as well as "newness of the spirit". We serve Christ today out of love, His love flowing through us.

But, as we shall see in the following verses, sin is still very much a part of our lives.

II The Problem Isn't with the Law (vs. 7 – 12)

In this next section, Paul will explain that the Law isn't the problem. The Law only condemns us because of our flawed nature. The Law only exposed the problem lying within us.

"Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." (Galatians 3:21-25)

"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." (Romans 7:7)

The Law clearly defined what sin was in a practical way, and it made it easy for us to know when we were in violation.

"But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." (Romans 7:8)

“concupiscence” – (ἐπιθυμία – *epithymia*) – this is another example of the self-defining nature of the King James Bible. “Concupiscence” means lust, or desire; mostly used for desire for the forbidden. Notice that verse 7 tells us that “lust” and “covet” both have similar meanings, as does concupiscence.

Our sinful nature loves to rebel against all commandments. Make a rule, and we will want to break it. The Law made it easy to see our sin nature in action.

"For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Romans 7:9)

Before the Law came, my sin was not as apparent.

"And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." (Romans 7:10)

The Law was designed to help people to know how to live happy and prosperous lives with the blessings of God. However, it ended up condemning people because the sin nature rebelled against it.

"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." (Romans 7:11)

The language here is almost allegorical. Paul is personifying sin and paints the picture of it as of a wicked person dwelling within us compelling us to do wrong.

"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." (Romans 7:12)

The problem wasn't with the Law; it was with the rebellion that is in me.

III The Problem is in Me (vs. 13 – 23)

"Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." (Romans 7:13)

The Law brought a much clearer vision of God's expectations, which then magnified the perception of my sin. The Law didn't make me do more bad things, it just made the bad things that I do more apparent. David said, “magnify the Lord”. We can't make God bigger, but we can see Him bigger. The Law put a magnifying glass to our sin.

"For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Romans 7:14)

The problem is me. This is the first time the word "carnal" (σαρκικός - *sarkikos*) appears in the Bible. It means to be fleshly, under the control of animal appetites.

"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." (Romans 7:15)

The idea here is that I don't want to do wrong, but my sinful nature will often do that which the new man does not want to do.

"If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good." (Romans 7:16)

My tendency to do wrong coupled with my inability to do right forces me to concede that the Law is right, and I am wrong. Herein lies a big problem in our culture today. We want to erase any standard that points out our flaws because we don't want to feel bad about not meeting up to the standard. For example, some schools have done away with failing grades, and some sports programs no longer declare one team to be the losing team.

"Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Romans 7:17)

The Law clearly reveals the sin nature dwelling within us. I am not only a sinner because I commit sins; I commit sins because of a depraved sin nature within me.

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Romans 7:18)

My stubborn will, my flesh, is in rebellion to the Law of God. I must understand that if I am going to get the help that I need from God. There is nothing good about my flesh as it is thoroughly depraved. It cannot be reformed. As Paul stated earlier in chapter six, the only hope for me is to "reckon" myself dead to the old, sinful nature, and allow the Holy Spirit of God to have free reign in my heart.

"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Romans 7:19)

This is the converse of what was stated in 15 – 17.

"Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Romans 7:20)

This verse really expresses the idea of the dual natures warring within us.

"I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." (Romans 7:21)

The Law reveals the sin and rebellion that is within me.

"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:" (Romans 7:22)

The "inward man" is the new nature, the saved part of us that is indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is working in my new nature, and His desire is that I do right.

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." (Romans 7:23)

The word "law" here refers to two opposing principles. There is the principle of me desiring to obey God's Law, but there is also the principle of me wanting to sin against God's Law. Both the desire to obey, and the desire to rebel are within me.

IV The Problem is Solved through Christ (vs. 24 – 25)

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24)

This is the place that we all need to get to. Just as we had to completely give up trying to save ourselves to be justified, here it is stated that we must understand that we are helpless in ourselves to live the way we should even after we are justified. Our only hope is Christ. The just are not only saved by grace through faith, but they live by grace through faith.

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." (Romans 7:25)

The new man wants to serve God, and wants to be in obedience to everything that God wants him to do, but the old, sinful nature will constantly be fighting against the new man, and will sometimes be victorious in causing the Christian to yield to sin