

Romans 7:1-4

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 December 2011

Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Romans chapter 7 is where we're going to be this morning. Let's read together the first six verses. Or do you not know, brothers, for I am speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives.

For a married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.

But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

But while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. For now we were released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Let's pray together. Father, I pray that you will bless our time together as we study your word, by the power of the Spirit within us, and that you give me words to speak clearly the truth presented here, and that you give all of us fears and hearts to receive it.

[1 : 17] I pray, Father, that the great truths of the gospel are not lost on us. We are your children, and we thank you for that. Father, I pray that you will now combine knowledge and understanding, so that we may have wisdom as to how we ought to live in light of these truths.

We pray this in the precious name of Christ. Amen. Amen. We're going to spend a number of weeks in these first six verses. I don't really know exactly how many yet, but we're going to get through verse four this morning.

Just so you kind of know, I'm not going to just neglect those last two verses in our reading this morning, but I really want to get us through verse four, and we'll probably need to stop at that point for the sake of time.

But just to kind of get our minds going, to get us back on page, to make sure that we know where Paul has been and where he's taking our thinking, let me remind you that he begins the book off and goes through about the middle of chapter three, approximately verse 20, is where he begins to wrap up the idea, the presentation that all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no chosen race of people that's exempt from the law. And that the law demands of us two things.

[2 : 41] The law demands fulfillment, and the law demands condemnation. Fulfillment we can see in chapter two, verse 13 of Romans.

Not the hearers of the law who are righteous for God, but the doers of the law will be justified. In condemnation, chapter two, verse eight, those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

We see in chapter three, verse 10, that none is righteous, no, not one. All of us have transgressed the law and are entirely incapable of keeping it.

Which creates a great problem for us, doesn't it? It puts us in a desperate state. If you don't know that this morning, that apart from Christ, if you were to have to work your way by fulfilling the law, by keeping the law, it is impossible.

There is no way. Your sinful heart inclines you to do the opposite. And as a result, you are an enemy of God, apart from Christ.

[3 : 57] So in the middle of chapter three, beginning in verse 21, he begins to give us the solution to the problem, and he runs that through the end of chapter five, in that Jesus Christ fulfills both of the demands of the law.

He fulfilled the law in his perfect life. Jesus Christ came and did not sin. And he meets the demand of the condemnation by bearing the wrath of God on our behalf.

So justification then for us, our right standing before God, is contingent only upon faith in Christ.

The belief that he did, in fact, fulfill the demands of the law, that he came as the Son of God, lived a sinless life, died as propitiation, the replacement for us.

Justification by faith alone, is such a precious truth. It absolutely ought to blow our minds.

I'm justified simply by my faith. Nothing that I have done has earned my right standing before God.

It is all wrapped up in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 22] I get trembling just thinking about it. It's an amazing truth that neither can I earn my way to heaven, but also I don't have to.

Christ has accomplished the work for me. It is finished. But there's some implications that come along with that.

It doesn't just stop there. When I am justified before God, I don't disappear. I don't go to heaven to be in His presence. I'm left behind for some very specific purposes.

What do we do then with these truths beyond what He's trying to say to us? Which is where He goes in chapter 6 and 7 and 8.

He begins to ask some hard questions in light of this idea that we're justified by faith alone. In a few moments, I think, we're going to sing the song Rock of Ages.

[6 : 24] The first verse of Rock of Ages reads this. Rock of Ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood from my wounded side which flowed be of sin the double cure save from wrath and make me pure.

I realized recently what the song was about. I admit to you that I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed. And I connected it, I just randomly, divinely in my mind to the story of Moses after the tablets had been broken and he went back to receive them again.

He asked, audacious claim, he asked of God to see His glory. And God granted that request in part. He said, well, you can't see my face. If you look on my face as a sinful man, you will die.

But what I'll do is I'll hide you in this spot in the rock. A cleft in the rock. I'll hide you in it. And I'll put my hand over it. And then as I pass by, I'll let my hand go and you can see my back.

But you cannot see my face. That's what the song is about. The rock of ages. Jesus Christ. It's a cleft for us. That we can hide ourselves in Him. That we might behold the full glory of God and not be destroyed.

[7 : 43] It's incredible. It's incredible. But some questions come out of it. Chapter 6, verse 1. What shall we say then? That's the question.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Because of the great work of God in our lives, this grace to us, should we go on sinning to prove Him gracious?

Chapter 6, verse 15. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace?

We've now been set free from the law. Are we just to go be lawless?

Paul emphatically answers both questions. He says, no. Absolutely not. And then we get to chapter 7. The overarching question throughout the chapter is, so what then becomes of the law?

So what value is it then to us? And that's kind of going to be the theme for chapter 7. The law. It is mentioned, that phrasing, the law, is mentioned 46 times in Romans.

[8 : 51] 23 of which are in chapter 7. Half of them are found in chapter 7. That's why the kids are supposed to give a thumbs up when they hear the law. Fail.

Fail. They're not listening. They're coloring right now. And that's fine. So in order for us to begin our journey through chapter 7 together, I think we just need to take a little bit of a step back and talk a bit about the law.

What is it that he's referring to when he talks about the law? Number one, specifically, he's referring to the Mosaic law. That law found in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

He's certainly referring to the Mosaic law, that law that was given to Israel, that was given to Moses, and he brought it to the people. That law that was meant to set them apart from the world, but to prove to them that they couldn't do it on their own, that they needed Jesus Christ.

All the clues were there for them to understand that they needed a Savior. Beyond that, let me read to you a couple of texts. Joshua 1, 7 and 8. It says, Be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you.

[10:04] Do not turn from the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

Isaiah 42, 21. Isaiah says, The Lord was pleased for His righteousness' sake to magnify His law and make it glorious. Psalm 1, 2 says that the righteous man's delight is in the law of the Lord. Psalm 119, a famous psalm, speaks in 176 verses about the law of God. Makes much of it. Psalm 119, 72 says, The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Psalm 119, 165 says, Great peace have those who love your law. Nothing can make them stumble. The law has great value.

And certainly, to the people that Paul is writing to, had great value. You'll notice in verse 1 of chapter 7, he says, Or do you not know, brothers, which clues us into the fact that he's speaking to the Jewish Christians, which would have been a large part of the church in Rome.

[11:26] Do you not know, brothers, the problem was that many Jews had inflated the law, had taken it beyond its intended purpose.

It had become not the way to point them to Christ, the condemnation that showed them they needed a Savior, but it himself had become their salvation.

They idolized it. They set it up as the thing they worshiped to the degree that they created new laws, they called them hedge laws, to prevent the breaking of the Mosaic law.

So even a converted Jew, somebody who had placed their faith in Christ, would have held dearly to the law, as we should, to a degree.

I'll give you an example of the degree to which they revered the law. The Babylonian Talmud, which is the primary collection of ancient rabbinical commentary on the Torah, those first five books of the Bible, rabbis wrote commentary and it became new truths.

[12:38] Rabbi Rabba said, the Holy One created man's evil inclination for theology, so dismiss that please, but created the Torah, the law, to overcome it.

He believed so strongly that the law was the redemption of man's evil inclination. There's a type of art called pointillism, if you've ever heard of pointillism or not.

John, I think, is going to throw a photo up there for me. Famous artist named Surratt in the 19th century painted this painting, you may or may not be familiar with it, called A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Hate.

Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Hate. It's huge. It's in the Chicago Museum of Art. I hope someday to get to go see it in person. It's incredibly large. It's six feet, ten inches tall and I think it's eight feet, ten inches, eight feet, one inch wide.

Huge. Takes up a whole wall at the Chicago Museum of Art. And pointillist paintings are painted with little dot brushstrokes. A modern version of this you've probably seen are the big pictures that are made up of little tiny photos of people and they put them all together in order, when you step back from it, you see the large picture of it all.

[13:54] I use this just as an example because if you were to walk really close to this huge painting at the Chicago Museum of Art and really get in there, let's say on the girl in the white dress in the middle, you would see simply dots of white.

Get in there close. You wouldn't really understand what's going on in the big picture of things.

Maybe you could see the girl. You know, your scope would be large enough to see, it's a little girl, that's fantastic, but you wouldn't see that she's holding the hand of her mother with the red umbrella, etc.

That's what the law had become for the Jews. They were so narrow, they were such a tight view of it that they missed the point. They missed the fact that it was meant to point them to Christ.

It was their condemnation. You fools, you can't keep this, you need a savior. Between the Old Testament and the New, God's promises to us have never changed.

It wasn't as if God had a plan and it got messed up. I'm going to give these people the law. I'm going to show them the way. And they just weren't good at it.

[15:03] Man, he thought, it's just not good enough. I've got to come up with something else.

Okay, I'm just going to have to take care of it for them. It wasn't the case at all. People were always

saved by their faith.

Before the law existed, Abram, his name at the time, was saved by his faith. He believed in the promises of God. Now, they couldn't see the whole picture.

Well, it's not fair. It's okay. They couldn't see the whole picture. We do. That's a blessing to us. We get to see the grand scheme of all things. But what they knew was that God was their salvation. He would redeem them from their sins. They just had to place their faith in that. So this is a really valid question coming up in our readers' minds.

We don't really feel the burden of the law, which is unfortunate. We should. But we don't really feel that burden. But the Jewish reader would have said, Whoa, Paul! What happened to the law?

[16:01] Does it not have value anymore? Should we dismiss the Torah and the prophets? Paul would say, Absolutely not. So it certainly refers to the law, the Mosaic law.

Secondly, though, and more generally, because there is no article in Greek in front of the word law. The law, there is no. So really, it could be read, For I am speaking to those who know law.

Any moral code, the Greek word just simply means moral code, rules set apart for the good of mankind. And we know laws.

We have laws of our land, which we are meant to obey. So generally, it means that, I'll give you an example, most people know, or make some mental assent to the fact that it's good to go to church. That's why, typically, Christmas and Easter celebrations at churches are widely attended. There are churches now that rent out stadiums to be able to seat the people that will show up on those days.

[17:14] Because in those people's minds, it's a good thing, it's a law. I must go do this good thing to be in right standing with God. I saw a TV show this week, actually, where it opened with the dad trying to rush the children out the door to go to church, and one of the little girls said, Dad, why do we have to go to church?

And his response was, we're hedging our bets. We're going to go just in case. that's required of us, so we'll be all right. We're going to hedge our bets.

So what then becomes of the law? What should we do with it as those who have died to it? How is it that those who have died to the law don't become lawless?

Christ hasn't delivered us from our sin and let us go into more sin? How is it that we don't actually become lawless?

And he gives us an analogy, which we see in the second half of verse 1 through 3, and it's pretty simple, so let's look at it real quick. Or do you not know, brothers, for I'm speaking to those who know the law, that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

[18:28] So it's a simple analogy.

It's all he's giving us here, and I think he explains it rather well. He says, if a woman is married to a man, her job as a wife is to serve him. With all that she is.

And if she doesn't serve him with all that she is, if she serves another man, she's an adulteress. The law requires her to maintain commitment to her husband.

However, if her husband dies, she's no longer held accountable to him in that way. The same is true of our modern day judicial system. If somebody commits a murder and then dies, they're not put on trial for the murder.

They're not held accountable to the law anymore because they're no longer alive. The analogy can be flipped around. It doesn't really matter. This isn't any kind of a teaching on divorce.

[19:40] It's not really the point of what he's trying to say. We can flip it around and say, a husband is to be committed to his wife as long as she is alive. And he's not to be committed to any other while that's the case.

That's simply what he's trying to say here. In order for him to get to verse four, where he says, likewise, in the same way. Many of your translations might say, therefore.

And he says, my brothers, you have also died to the law through the body of Christ. You have also died to the law through the body of Christ.

This phrase is, aorist, past, passive. I know most of you don't care about that. So what it means is, that it has been a divinely completed action.

If you were found in Christ, if you placed your faith in him, you have died. Not physically, you didn't kill yourself, but divinely your old self has been killed.

[20:44] Completed action in the past because we're found in Christ. our identity gets tied up with his identity and Christ died. In the same way, so have we.

Likewise, so that we're no longer bound to the law. We've died to it. We're not bound to it any longer. For what purpose?

So that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead. we have been set free from the marriage, if you will, to the law, so that we might be bound, we might be married to Christ.

Now, some of you macho men in here, your macho ego may not allow you to think of your relationship with Christ in this way, and my encouragement to you would be get over it, because it's a really good analogy of our relationship with him.

Ephesians chapter 5, we're taught as husbands to love our wives as Christ loved the church. I want Christ to love me that way. I'm cool with that. I can be a bride of Christ, no problem with it at all.

[21 : 55] Keep in mind, it's an analogy. It's not the reality of the situation. It's an analogy, trying to help us wrap our minds around what happens when we become Christians.

So we have been bound together with Christ. We belong to him. So what does that do then to the law?

What does that do for us? Romans 6, 2, as Chris preached on, the second part of verse 2 through 4, reads this way. How can he who died to sin still live in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

So we're bound with Christ in that, in the newness of life, because of our union with him. We have died with him in order to belong to him.

[23 : 10] 2 Corinthians 11, 2, Paul paints another beautiful picture of this. He writes to the Corinthians, for I feel a divine jealousy for you since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

It's where our allegiance lies as Christians. So we're joined together with Christ, but for what purpose? For what purpose? And you look at the very end of verse 4 there, so that we will bear fruit for God.

That's the end of the need. That's why we've been delivered, joined together with Christ, so that we will bear fruit for God.

2 Corinthians 5, 21, Paul said, for our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ came to fulfill the demands of the law, to live a sinless life, to give us the ability to be seen as perfected from the eyes of God.

[24 : 19] He also bore the condemnation of said law. So if we are bound up with Christ, we will care about what he cares about. We will fulfill the law as Christians.

There's not a lot of gray area in there. We will fulfill the law because we are from the heart joined to Jesus.

We are from the heart joined to Jesus. You can't be that. You can't be joined to Jesus from the heart and not have that change how you live.

You can't. It's impossible. If you have made a profession of faith in your life somewhere along the way and it didn't change you, you're not a Christian.

You don't believe in the risen Son of God because when you place your faith in Christ, you die to the law and you're joined to another Jesus Christ.

[25 : 23] And that will change your heart. The great theologian Charles Hodge wrote on this text, as far as we are concerned, redemption is in order to produce holiness.

We are delivered from the law that we may be united to Christ, and we are united to Christ that we may bring forth fruit unto God as deliverance from the penalty of the law in order to produce holiness.

It is vain to expect that deliverance except with a view to the end for which it was granted. You can't believe for a moment is what he's saying.

You can't believe that Christ would deliver you for any other reason than holiness. As far as we are concerned, that is why it was accomplished, to make us holy.

That's who is holy. So, if you're found in Christ, if you have placed your faith justified by faith alone in Christ, you're going to fulfill the law.

[26 : 24] do we do that perfectly? No. I wish we did. I wish that when the Spirit came to indwell us and we were regenerate, things just started working their way out.

Everything went perfect. We're going to get into some stuff that makes my head spin as Paul begins to try to explain the process in his life where he sees himself doing things he doesn't desire to do. But this kind of truth is a barometer for us. it's a test by which we filter our living. If we're faithful to God, we'll bear fruit for God.

If we're faithful to God, we will bear fruit for God, but we don't always bear fruit for God. And what does that then say of our relationship with him? If you're a Christian, you were bound to Christ, but most of us are unfaithful to that union.

I want to find myself faithful to my husband as a bride of Christ, devoted and serving him with all that I have.

[27 : 37] And that will be the fulfillment of the law. It's the first and greatest commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.

In those, all the other commandments are wrapped up, they're tied in that. If you do that, you'll do everything else. If you devote yourself to that whom you're bound up with, that was a terrible sentence, I'm sorry, devote yourself to whom you're bound up with, you will fulfill the law.

So where does that leave you as you're pondering such a thing and questioning your own life? I hope convicted. I don't think it's possible for us to think about the potential to fulfill the law in Christ and not feel some conviction because we don't.

If you think you do, you're incredibly prideful, which is a sin, or you're a liar, which is a sin. None of us, none of us are perfect. Found perfect in Christ by God, playing that out in reality, none of us are perfect.

And you have to ask yourself, am I even dead to the law? Do I try to gain approval with God because of what I do, or because of who I am?

[29 : 03] There's a big difference. Your identity in Christ, a child of God, adopted, not because of anything that you've done, but all because of his work on your life, his grace to you, justification by faith alone, or do you try to earn and work your way into his approval?

You may not be a Christian at all, or you may just need to repent and believe anew. A Christian life is a process of repentance, constantly looking to God, laying down the sins in your life.

You never stop that. It never ends. we'll always be repenting, picking back up faith, pursuing him.

But we ought to be able to look at the scope of our lives and see some movement towards Godliness. As I counsel people here in the church who are dealing with sins, habitual sins, it is easy for me to encourage them to continue on because they're so broken over the things that they do. there are men in this church that hate sin and love Christ. You can hear their voices, you can see it as they pray, as they lament over the stuff that they do.

[30 : 22] It's easy to encourage them. March on. God's at work in your life because the natural man doesn't hate sin the way you do. He doesn't abhor it this way.

Do you find yourself hating sin more and loving Christ more as your life progresses on or do you just revel in the fact that you're sinful? So verse 4, I'll leave it to us again.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

We'll talk more about this this week.