

Slavery to Sin (Romans 7:15-24)

¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I 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. ¹⁹For 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. ²⁰Now 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. ²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but 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. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Paul describes the frustration of living with a sinful nature, of wanting to do good, but at times being unable to do so. Likewise, he describes the frustration of not wanting to do evil, but at times being unable to keep from doing so again because of our sinful nature (v 18). We sometimes wrongly think of sin as nothing more than a single act that gives us a demerit or debits our spiritual account by one. That completely fails to account for our sinful nature and for the bondage, or slavery we at some point discover ourselves in as we continue to sin. We end up sinning not only because we want to, but even when we don't, even when it tears us apart inside and we're grieved and overwhelmed with sorrow and shame and we want nothing more than to stop sinning.

Sin is pleasurable for a time and to pretend otherwise is dishonest. But sin eventually puts us in bondage. By analogy, think about the things that are pleasurable, but which put people in bondage. People don't smoke because it makes them feel bad, but because it helps them calm down. People do not eat gluttonously because it makes them feel bad, but because it makes them feel better. People

don't drink or look at pornography because it feels horrible, but because it feels good. But over time they find that the very thing they wanted to do, the thing that brought pleasure, becomes the very thing they don't want to do anymore, but they can't stop doing. If you've ever struggled with sin, you can quickly and easily identify with Paul's exclamation in verse 24: *"²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* That brings us to verse 25 and the hope of Easter.

The Hope of Easter (Romans 7:25)

So who is it that will rescue us from this body of death? In verse 25, Paul says, *"²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Here's how it happened. Jesus lived a perfect life free from sin of any kind. To be clear, he was tempted just as we are, but he had no sin (Hebrews 4:15). So, he became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2Corinthians 5:21). In Colossians 2:14, Paul says that Jesus canceled the written code that stood against us by nailing it to the tree. In other words, the law of God that rightly condemned us for our sin was nailed to the cross, not that the law was destroyed, but that Jesus was punished for our sins and we were given the perfect righteousness of Christ so that the law no longer condemned us. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, we would still be slaves to sin and stand under the condemnation of the Law. Let me draw a few conclusions and we'll be done.

Conclusions

One, the law of God is a beautiful gift and should be thought of and used as such. The law of God reflects his perfect character and has provided direction to his people for millennia. The problem was not, nor is God's law, but our sin that the law points out. We have a tendency to shoot the messenger and that's true in this case as well. To disdain the law is to misunderstand the nature of the problem, which is sin. Sin brought us into opposition with the law. We should rejoice in God's law. We should read it and savor it and build our lives

upon its truth.

Two, this season is an opportunity for us to reflect on our own sin and our struggle with sin. It's not that we pretend we're not righteous before God, but that we remember our plight without Christ and we're honest about the fact that we still struggle with sin. We allow God to show us the sin in our lives that maybe we've just not noticed or thought about. Lent is, in some ways, like the time before communion. It's a time for us to reflect on where we stand with God, to reflect on the condition of our heart. It's a time to ask God to show us if there are any sinful obstacles that we've placed between us and him that prevent us from drawing nearer to him.

Three, this season is an opportunity for us to be reminded that Jesus has broken the power of sin, that we can experience freedom through faith in his death and resurrection. While we will always have to struggle against sin, we should not live as victims to it. Through Christ, we can be victorious over sin. We can receive freedom and healing. We can become slaves to righteousness instead, as Paul says in Romans 6:18. It's not to our own credit or by our own striving, but by trusting more fully in the work of Christ on the cross.



March 7, 2021

Pastor Jared Stoner



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Easter 2021 #1

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This morning I want to begin our series of messages leading up to Easter. Of course, we are currently in the season of lent, a season in which God's people prepare their hearts to fully engage with the events and proclamation about the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's worth noting that Scripture over and over and over again enjoins God's people to prepare themselves to meet with him in a special way.

So, we are going to prepare our hearts for this most important season. In order to do that, we must once again be reminded of the reason Jesus came at all, the reason he became a man, lived a perfect life, died a horrible death, and was raised from the dead. In order to do that, we're going to talk about three passages of Scripture in particular, Exodus 20:1-17, Psalm 19:7-14, and Romans 7:12-25.

The Bar (Exodus 20:1-17)

Exodus 20:1-17 says, ¹*And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below... You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name... Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

The Ten Commandments, also known as the decalogue, are one of the most important and recognizable groupings of laws from the ancient near east. They were given to God's people, who were gathered at the base of the mountain, as a summary of how to live in covenant with God. The laws cover both one's relationship with God as well as their relationship with other people. The commandments are so important that most of them carried the death penalty for transgressing them. If you've read the Old Testament, you'll know that God's people failed to keep the law. In fact, when the early church was deciding whether or not Christians had to keep the Law in addition to having faith in Christ, Peter says, *"why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear (Acts 15:10)?"*

Now, if you think to yourself, I feel pretty good about my score against the big ten, may I remind you of the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus talks to a group of people who felt pretty good about their record of keeping the ten commandments. He says, ²¹*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* ²²*But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell (Matthew 5:21-22).* Or better yet, ²⁷*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'* ²⁸*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* Our problem is no different than the Israelite's problem in the Old Testament or Peter's problem in the New Testament—we have not kept the law and to be clear, the problem is not with the Law, but with your sinful heart. Okay, my sinful heart too. We see that in Psalm 19:7-14.

God's Perfect Law (Psalm 19:7-14)

Psalm 19:7-14 says, ⁷*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."*

As you read through these verses, you realize that the Law of the Lord is an amazing thing. What are the benefits? The Law of the Lord revives the soul, gives wisdom to the simple, joy to the heart, and light to the eyes (vv 7-8). The Law of the Lord is certain, sweeter than honey. It provides warning and ensures reward. It helps us to discern our errors. The thing we don't like about the Law is that we don't really want to do what it says sometimes and not even on our best days do we really look forward to having our errors discerned and made known to us. TS: Finally, let's take a look at what Paul has to say about the Law?

Sin & The Law (Romans 7:1-14)

In Romans 7, Paul talks about the law, its authority, and its shortcomings. In verses 1-3, Paul explains that the law only has authority over someone while they're still alive. So, if a husband marries another woman while his wife is still alive, he would be considered an adulterer. But if his wife has passed away, he's free to marry with God's full blessing. Paul then explains that through the death of Christ, we died to the law, so to speak, so

that we might belong to God, or be joined to another (v 4). In verse six then, he says, *"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."* As it stands now, Paul says, we don't serve God by trying to keep the Law in our own strength, but we serve God through the Spirit, who directs and empowers us to keep God's Law from within. The question then becomes: if the Law is perfect, why would we want to be released from it?

Paul answers that question by explaining that sin took advantage of the law. Romans 7:7-8 says, *"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.'" But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.* Sin entered the world through Adam and affected every human heart since that time, afflicting us with a sinful nature. When the law said, "don't do this," sin popped its head up and said, "but I want to do that." It's the working out of the rebellious nature of the serpent. God told Adam and Eve, *"don't eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"* and in response the serpent said, *"did God really say that?"*

Romans 7:12-13 then says, ¹²*So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to 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.* So, the law was given to bring life, but because of sin, it pointed out our sin and led to death. The law made it really, really clear that, as Paul says in verse 14, "the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin." That brings us to verses 15-25.