

Romans 7

Good morning and welcome to Calvary Chapel. You have many places to choose from to fellowship, and we're glad you joined us this morning.

Before we get into our study, I want to take a moment and speak to all the moms on this Mother's Day.

On October 11th 2020, the most famous and dominant basketball player of our generation, **SHOW LEBRON PIC** LeBron James, once again celebrated winning a championship that night. It wasn't much of a surprise; it was the 4th of his career. But LeBron James' post game phone call is what really drew my attention.

When the championship festivities began to calm, the champagne had been sprayed, LeBron FT his mother. And do you know what the most dominant basketball player of our generation said to his mom?

"I hope to make you proud." **CLOSE LEBRON PIC**

Here is one of the most famous athletes in sports history, still looking for his mother's approval.

Moms-you know you have an endless and thankless job. In the face of the frustration and fatigue you likely encounter on a daily basis, I hope you never take for granted the incredible influence the Lord has gifted you in your role as a mother.

Would you now please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 7?

I've mentioned it before, but one of my most favorite things about the Bible is that the Holy Scriptures make no attempt to cover up or gloss over the flaws of its subjects. And this morning's chapter, chapter 7 is certainly no exception as Paul, inspired by the HS, flings open wide the doors of his heart for all to see his struggles.

We're going to study all of chapter 7 this morning, and the title of this morning's message is THE SELF PORTRAIT OF STRUGGLE

And if we look carefully, every single one of us will find ourselves embedded in these words.

LET'S PRAY

Often times we think that Christians should be perpetual motion machines of joy and excitement. After all we have nothing to fear! We don't even have to fear death! And we have Jesus with us- what's better than that?

Yet even the strongest, most faithful followers of Christ go through periods where they are struggling in life.

SHOW SPURGEON PIC CH Spurgeon, often called the prince of preachers, in his lectures to students, had an entire section called 'the ministers fainting fits', detailing his own personal struggles as a Christian. **CLOSE PIC**

Even the incredible apostle Paul struggled with life sometimes.

Chapter 7 of Romans is Paul's taking of a paint brush and unapologetically showing us his un-filtered self-portrait, where he details his struggles, both before he was a Christian and his struggles as a Christian.

Now a few things you'll notice in chapter 7. 23 times the OT Law is mentioned in this chapter. And not once is the HS mentioned. Now when we get to chapter 8, we'll see how the mood and direction has changed, as chapter 8 describes the new life in the HS, how to live out our lives.

47 times in this chapter Paul says I, me, or mine. See chapter 7 is describing the human experience of trying to grind out righteousness on our own energy and strength.

Romans 6 teaches us that Christians are free from sin! While, Romans 7 teaches that we're also free from the demands of the OT Law.

Jewish children were nurtured on the Law of Moses. They read it, studied it, memorized it, and when a boy turned 12 he was "bar mitzvah(ed)." He became a "son of the law." He was accountable to God's Law.

Of course, the Law didn't just consist of the two tablets, or Ten Commandments. It was made up of 613 commandments - and the Jews measured their status before God by how they performed up to all those rules.

Yet living by the Law is like riding a rollercoaster. Legalism creates a vicious cycle - puffed up with pride for a bit, then feeling obliterated when we fall short.

Why spend so much time talking about the law? We need to understand the believer's relationship to the Law because of our natural tendency to view keeping laws as a means of making progress, even progress in sanctification.

J Vernon McGee titled verses 1 through 14 "the shackles of a saved soul," and verses 15 through 25 "the struggle of a saved soul."

1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? Last week in our study, we saw the Bible tells us that as Christians we aren't under law but under grace. **Romans 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

The remainder of Romans 6 then gave us the practical implications of us operating under grace. Now Paul explains more completely how it is that we are no longer under the dominion of the law, and he starts off by giving a very practical example.

2-3

2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. 3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Paul makes the point that death ends all earthly obligations and contracts. A wife is no longer bound to her husband if he dies because death ends that contract of marriage. If her husband dies, she is free from the binding of that law.

But what does that have to do with us?

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. In Christ, we're not only dead to sin as Romans 6 teaches, but we're also "dead to the law."

Remember, the Law has no jurisdiction over a dead man. If I robbed a bank, and in the act, I had a heart attack and died, would the cops still cuff me and book me?

Would I be brought to trial and my corpse slumped in the defendant's chair? Of course not! The Law doesn't care about a corpse.

A dead man is free from the Law. And look at the byproduct of walking in grace and not the law at the end of verse 4-is that we're to bear fruit to God.

Now it's important we clarify. The Law did not die, the law is still in effect for everyone who has not had their sins forgiven by Jesus.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

In verse 5 Paul uses the term "flesh", and this word describes each of us apart from Christ. The flesh is us and our efforts.

And even when the flesh tries to please God, it fails. This is why living under the Law is counterproductive to godliness. It relies on the flesh rather than on grace.

Now just as union with Christ is to bear fruit for God (v. 4), life in the flesh produces sin, which brings forth death.

Verse 6 summarizes the theme of these 1st 5 verses

6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” Just as believers have died to sin, believers also died to the need of obeying the OT law.

And why did we die to the law-because the OT law cannot justify us; it does not make us right with God. The law also cannot sanctify us; it doesn't take us deeper with God and make us more like Jesus.

All of these verses might lead someone to think there is something wrong with the law...

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”^[fn] The Law is similar to an X-ray machine that reveals a tumor. The machine itself is not bad because it reveals something bad.

Apparently, Paul was convicted of sin when he realized the 10th commandment. **Exodus 20:17 You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.**”

8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. The Law revealed sin, but in doing so it also aroused sinful desire. And this can be the case today too. The law’s condemnation of sin can often become a suggestion to sin.

SHOW HOTEL PIC When the Flagship Hotel was built in Galveston, Texas, right along the waterfront, this multiple-story building was a thing of towering beauty. On the first floor was a lovely dining room with a big, expensive picture window.

But the hotel manager constantly had trouble because guests in their rooms above would fish from their balconies. The heavy lead sinkers from the guests’ fishing lines would swing in the breeze, crashing into the window and cracking it. The manager was at a loss as to how to stop this.

Finally, someone suggested that the staff remove the signs from the rooms that read, “Absolutely no fishing from the balcony.” After removing the signs, people stopped breaking that window because they stopped fishing. **CLOSE PIC**

The Law had stirred up the very action it was intended to prevent.

One of my earliest memories as a child was my parents telling me not to touch a lightbulb that was lighting the room. I remember them telling me-don't touch it. And guess what I did?!

Whenever a law is established prohibiting something, the natural tendency of ours sinful nature is to resist it. Just look at the effects of prohibition in the 1920's!

But let's bring this a little closer to home. If I were to try and implement a rule, and had signs printed in here that said whatever you do, do not think of monkeys eating ice cream cones, guess what you're thinking about right now!

Folks you can pass all the legislation we want, but laws only reveal sin, they do not solve the sin issue in the heart. Only Jesus can do that.

9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. When the commandment entered Paul's consciousness, it aroused sin, and he died, in the sense that he became aware of his spiritual deadness.

10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. The original intent of the Law according to Leviticus was to bring people blessing as they obeyed it

Nevertheless, because Paul did not obey it, he found that the law condemned him.

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. It isn't the law that deceives us, but it is sin that uses the law as an opportunity to rebel against God. This is why Jesus said, **John 8:32** "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The truth makes us free from the deceptions of sin. And sin is so devious and deceptive, it can even cause us to misuse God's law.

See the weakness of the law isn't in the law – it's in us. Our hearts are so wicked that our hearts can find opportunity for all types of sin from something good like the law of God. **Jeremiah 17 9-10** "The heart is deceitful above all things,

And desperately wicked;

Who can know it?

Now I doubt any of us here this morning are trying to be obedient to all 613 OT laws, but there is a very real danger for us regarding legalism. Legalism is a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations in order to achieve spiritual growth.

If you want to take the joy out of reading your Bible, adopt a rigid reading plan...

To lose the joy of giving, just make it mandatory...

Want to turn coming to church into a miserable experience, make church an obligation, rather than an opportunity...

All that we do must come not from a sense of duty to fulfill a commandment, but rather an outflowing of love for our Savior!

12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. The Law isn't the problem. We're the problem. To save us God in His wisdom developed a righteousness apart from the Law through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and return.

13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. Law exposes my sin and casts a spotlight on my sin. It heightens my awareness of my sinfulness. But under God's grace our focus shifts-it's not about my failures,

but His victory on the cross! Under grace, it's all about Jesus, not me!

Folks we grow in sanctification as Christians not by fighting with our sin, but by following the Son of God.

SHOW PIC OF YOKOI In January 1972, two hunters on the island of Guam, found a World War 2 Japanese soldier named, Shoichi Yokoi. Yokoi was hiding in a jungle cave. Afraid of capture, he would only come out at night.

See in 1947 Shoichi had read a flyer dropped by a US plane, declaring America the victor, but he didn't believe the news. And so he'd spent 25 years fighting a war he didn't know was over.

CLOSE PIC

Sadly, this is the plight of many Christians. The war is over. Victory was decided by Jesus on the cross! We are free in Christ! We don't need to earn God's approval-He's already shown it to us through Jesus!

Now you'll notice through verse 13 Paul has spoken in the past tense-before he a believer

From 14 to the end of the chapter Paul speaks in the present tense-and reveals his struggles as a Christian.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. Here, Paul introduces a new term in Romans. He calls himself "carnal."

"Carnal" is someone who leans on their own resources, rather than the influence of the Holy Spirit.

For many years, I was what you would call a carnal Christian. I had accepted Jesus, believed in Jesus, even read my bible from time to time. Yet my goal was to please myself, and achieve my

ambitions rather than obey the instruction of the HS. I was ruled by the desires of my flesh-I was a carnal Christian.

The beginning of Romans 6 tells us when we came to Christ the old man was crucified. We're dead to sin.

But the flesh, or the body of sin that was conditioned to do evil stays with us. The old man is dead, but our flesh keeps his tendencies alive.

And when we fall into those habits, we're being carnal. Apparently, this was Paul's problem...

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. We all know this feeling, don't we?

Paul's problem wasn't a lack of desire – he wanted to do what was right.

His problem wasn't knowledge – he knew what the right thing to do was.

And we've all been there, haven't we? What I want to do, I don't do. I say no, then there I go!

Paul is candid about his struggle with the old, sinful nature. This passage is the testimony of an honest man.

In Paul's flesh, in my flesh—and your flesh—there remains an old, sinful nature during this life. The result is that we often do what is wrong even though we don't want to. The mind is willing but the flesh is weak.

I really don't want to get irritated about the guy who cuts in front of me on the road—I don't want to memorize his car and see where he turns so now I know where he lives. I don't want to do those things yet I still do sometimes.

What is at work in these situations? My old nature! My old, sinful nature wants vengeance and punishment for almost causing an accident! And I get all worked up, my hand gets tired from holding it on the horn for 2 minutes....

But praise God in those moments, the Spirit of God is also at work. Thank God for the Spirit who convicts us!

16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Is Paul denying his responsibility as a sinner? No he's not. He recognizes that as he sins, he acts against his nature as a new man in Jesus Christ.

To be clear a Christian must own up to their sin and confess their sin. We can't blame others, say it's not our fault, or any other lame excuse.

But it is important to realize that the impulse to sin does not come from who we really are in Jesus Christ.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. Whenever we're disappointed in ourselves, it's because we have the wrong views of ourselves.

So now let's read the 1st part of verse 18, but instead of the word me, insert your name. For I know that in Brian, that is, in Brians flesh, nothing good dwells.

I sometimes struggle with this. I understand the concept theologically and can quote the verse from memory. But sometimes I think, there's gotta be SOME good in me—isn't there?

Those who have a tendency to despair in life do so because they think there's something good in them that they're failing to utilize.

But their thinking needs to be adjusted to this verse. Don't be disappointed-there's nothing good in us in our flesh.

This verse isn't a depressing verse, it's a freeing verse. Because when I understand that in my flesh, there's nothing good, I then know that all the good that comes from me is a result of the HS living inside of me.

19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. You can feel and hear Paul's frustration can't you? And perhaps this morning you can relate.

Here's a man used by God in the most amazing of ways. Yet Paul still struggled just like you and I do.

20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. Paul declares that it's not truly him - the real Paul - doing it when he sins. It's his flesh.

SHOW PHILLY PIC

One of the most iconic team mascots in all of sports is the "Philly Phanatic" - mascot for the Philadelphia Phillies. On the outside he's a green, furry monster who he does crazy stuff. He taunts opponents and incites the crowd. But when you see him, remember the furry exterior is just a costume. There's a man on the inside, and the person on the inside is the real person.

CLOSE PIC

The guy inside the Phanatic is not the monster, yet he's still responsible for his monster-like behavior. And this is Paul's frustration!

Anyone who has tried to do good is aware of this struggle. We never know how hard it is to stop sinning until we try. CS Lewis said "No man knows how bad he is until he has tried to be good."

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 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.

As believers most of us want to walk in God's ways and keep His commandments. But our body rebels and fights against us. Our eyes are prone toward looking at that which we ought not to look at!

Our ears are drawn to hear that which we shouldn't hear.

Why is this? There's a war going on within every Christ follower. **Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

You can feel the intensity in Paul's writing building....

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Rome had an extremely harsh sentence for ruthless murderers. The corpse of the person who'd been murdered was strapped to the man who murdered him. The perpetrator carried around the rotting flesh of his victim. Wherever he went, the corpse went with him.

And this is how Paul sees himself as he cries out "O wretched man that I am!"

He's attached to rotting flesh, his own body of sin. And until he dies, he carries the flesh around with him. What an awful dilemma, yet there is hope!

Notice carefully Paul's perspective finally turns not to something, but to someone outside of himself.

Paul has so far referred to himself some 40 times since Romans 7:13.

In the pit of his unsuccessful struggle against sin, Paul became entirely self-focused and self-obsessed. This is always what happens when a Christian is wrestling with sin—they become completely self-absorbed.

In verse 18, Paul said, “How can I get victory?” After struggling a little longer, he realizes it’s not “how.” It’s “who.”

Many Christians are concerned with “how.” What are the procedures, plans, and programs what are the steps,” they say, not realizing those things only produce perpetual struggle.

The flesh always cries, “How?” The Bible always answers, Jesus!

25 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. Finally, Paul looks outside of himself and unto Jesus. As soon as he looks to Jesus, he has something to thank God for – and he thanks God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word ‘through’ means that Paul sees Jesus standing between himself and God, bridging the gap and providing the way to God.

Lord means Paul has put Jesus in the right place – as Lord and master of his life.

In verse 25 Paul acknowledges the struggle is real, but thanks God for the victory in Jesus.

Paul doesn’t pretend that looking to Jesus takes away the struggle – Jesus works through us, not instead of us in the battle against sin.

The glorious truth remains: there is victory in Jesus! Jesus didn't come and die just to give us more or better rules, but to live out His victory through those who believe.

The message of the gospel is that there is victory over sin, hate, death, and all evil as we surrender our lives to Jesus and let Him live out victory through us.

Paul never found any peace, any praising God until he looked outside of himself and beyond the law to his Savior, Jesus Christ.