

Gospel Reset, Part 3—Romans 7-8—9/4/2016

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It's been encouraging to hear your responses to God's Word as we take a few weeks for a Gospel refresher from Romans.

I love the God-exalting, grace-saturated treasures in Paul's letter to the Romans & I need to hear its truths regularly.

Renewing our minds in the promises & applications of the Gospel for daily life never grows old because we continually face the same battle.

As I talk with many of you, you often assume that your struggles are worse than others or that others have it easier than you do as if you are alone in the depth of your depravity.

You may place others on pedestals as if you could never be as fruitful or faithful as they are because they are inherently better somehow.

Or you may despair of change because of your past or your family or whatever difficulty or baggage you have.

But it's really not like that.

The truth is that only Jesus Christ completed perfect righteousness & never sinned.

Only Jesus was fully tempted & never failed even in His desires.

So the greatest need we each have is to trust Jesus as our righteousness & not look to ourselves to gain righteousness.

Our greatest need is to know that Jesus fulfilled the Law & died to forgive our law-breaking.

And He rose from the grave to prove it was accomplished.

Those are the glorious truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is the Good News of Jesus the God-man achieving what was needed to uphold the Law & to forgive law-breakers.

Those are the truths that we need to preach to ourselves every day because the implications of them reach everything we face.

Our spiritual battles boil down to what we believe & how the Gospel should transform our beliefs.

At its root, all sin is simply not trusting the goodness of God.

That's why when John Piper wrote a book on how to fight sin, he entitled it as *Battling Unbelief*.

Our approach to fighting sin is really an issue of faith.

It's not merely about self-discipline or accountability or good habits or knowing where to draw the line or when to flee.

All those things are important and helpful, but at its root, fighting sin happens by grace through faith in Christ.

Sin is overcome when we actually believe and respond to God as a Person who has given better promises.

When we act by faith to trust God and His grace in Christ, then we have renewed thinking & desires.

That's why Christian growth is not just behavior modification.

We must not think we have honored God if we merely stop a bad habit and start a good, biblical-looking habit.

We must not think we have fulfilled God's purposes if we do not first trust that He is good and His ways are better.

True biblical living includes feeling attracted to God & His goodness.

That's why Piper wrote a follow-up book entitled *When I Don't Desire God*, because our true need for change plunges down in into the depths of our lack of good desires.

We need to know how to fight by grace through faith to desire God.

After all, isn't that what it means to love God?

Love is surely an action; but it acts with affection & passion.

So when we talk about trusting Jesus to be saved, much more is involved than merely agreeing to some facts about Him.

Much more is also involved than making behavioral changes.

If you really have saving faith in Jesus, then the Bible is clear that you have a totally new relationship with Him.

And an integral part of that relationship is loving Him and longing to enjoy what He has said life should be like.

So kids, please hear this—we want far more for you than just being nice people who stay out of trouble.

We want you to love & enjoy the God who rescues in Christ.

We want you to have a whole new relationship with God.

And that new relationship can help you embrace your struggles with obedience as struggles of faith.

If you know the Gospel & want to be saved, but you never have assurance because you fail so much, then there's hope.

There's hope in the new life in Christ that promises new power & new desires as we talked about last week from Romans 6.

That hope is not in being free from the battle against sin.

That hope is in being free to fight the battle by faith in Christ.

The hope is in being able to experience relationship with God & His Law & His Spirit in a completely different way.

So if you are wrestling with lack of obedience as if you can't measure up to what it means to be a Christian, I pray today's message can help.

I pray that Paul's continued thought from Romans 6 into Romans 7&8 will give you hope from the new perspective of how you approach God & His law & life in His Spirit.

As we continue our Gospel Reset today in Romans 7-8, we'll highlight that new perspective as a way of honing in again on God's goodness.

Today I'll add 2 more points from 2 more chapters.

So turn with me to Romans 7 and let me tell you the 7th point overall and the 1st of 2 points today about the goodness of God.

We've breezed through chapters 1-6 with 6 ways to see the goodness of God through the truths of those chapters.

We said we can see the Goodness of God (1) in His creation & general revelation, (2) in His justice & special revelation, (3) in His grace & Gospel revelation, & (4) in His faithfulness & consistent revelation.

Then last week we said to see God's goodness (5) in His love & secure salvation & (6) in His promises & freeing power.

Now as a 7th point overall & a 1st point today, let's see God's goodness in His law & His new relationship for those who are in Christ.

#7, See God's goodness in His law and His new relationship.

You'll see what I mean by that new relationship as we look at Romans 7 for those who have a new relationship with God in Christ.

Christians have a new relationship with God with new life under His grace rather than under His law.

Paul made that distinction about being free from the law in Romans 6 & he explained it more in chapter 7.

So he began chapter 7 with an illustration of a wife who is bound to her husband while he is still living.

He was not giving a full explanation of the proper biblical view of marriage and divorce and remarriage here.

He was using marriage as an illustration of how the Christian's freedom from the law is like a widow's freedom to remarry.

Just as the death of a husband frees a woman to remarry, so also the Christian's death to the law frees us to marry Jesus.

Romans 7:1-6 says we were married to the law, but when we trust Christ we die to that relationship & are free to serve Him.

Read Romans 7:1-6 to see that. [READ]

When Jesus died on the cross, every person who ever trusts Him died there in our relationship to the law as our husband.

That truth becomes reality when we trust Christ and then we live the rest of this life applying that reality.

We all tend to forget this new reality of being dead to the law & alive & free in Christ as married to Him.

But it is so vital & helpful not only for how we view God, but also how we see His law & respond to His commands.

We need to see God's goodness in this new relationship because it is miserable to be married to the law.

The law will never 'give you any love' as your husband.

That's the way some people say it today, right?

When people want encouragement or affection or even praise—they say they want love—they say, 'gimme' some lovin'?

Well, know this—there's no love coming from the law itself!

If you want the law to encourage you or praise you or affirm you or give you peace, you will not find it outside of Jesus Christ.

Of course, many people misuse the law and assume they live up to its standards and proudly think it law affirms them.

They think they are ok & they don't see it rightly & feel utterly sinful.

If that is you, you are blind to your sin and lost.

God did not give the law to make us feel good about ourselves.

God gave the law to show us our sin and to continually reveal His high and holy standards that we'll never attain on our own.

That's why we need to die to the law and be released from our marriage to it in order to actually experience love.

When we are freed from the law & married to Jesus, we enter a new relationship where we serve in newness of the Spirit.

The Christian is freed from the law as our ruler & governor.

And instead, we are joined to Christ as our Ruler and Governor and it is now by His grace that we live.

Living to follow the law's standard by the detailed letter brought only death because the law has no power to change us.

But living to follow Jesus as our loving Savior brings new power by the Holy Spirit to live a new life of love.

So in Christ, our obedience is totally transformed.

Rather than an oppressive standard to measure up to, Christians approach the law as fulfilled in Christ so that the law's commands are desirable ways to enjoy God's goodness.

It's no longer a heavy, "I have to obey," but a happy, "I get to obey."

And in that scenario, though God's law could never save us, we still see the law itself as good.

The law had a primary and overarching purpose in God's plan—to show us our sin & our need for the Savior.

Read Romans 7:7-13 to see that. [READ]

Twice Paul vehemently clarifies that God's law is neither sin nor a cause of sin and death.

It is not the law's problem when people break it.

It is a problem with the law-breakers.

God's law does what it should do—it proves to all people that God alone is the source and standard of good.

So the law drives us to cry out to God to give what is good.

The law therefore is good & it reflects God's goodness.

And that's how we frame up chapter 7 here as a 1st point to see God's goodness in His law and His new relationship.

The law is good when we see it and use it as God designed.

That design is to lead us to die to the law by faith in Christ and to enjoy Jesus as the new husband we love and serve.

Then when we hear God's commands, we don't react & call it legalism or say that any attempt to govern us is legalistic.

Instead, we want obey God because we trust Him as good & we trust that He promises to help us in Christ.

We don't obey to get love, we obey in a grace-filled relationship of assured love with Jesus as our loving husband.

And to further see God's goodness in His moral law, just think what it would be like if God never gave any commands.

How awful it would be if God made us as complex creatures in His image & never clearly explained how we should operate.

It would be worse than abandoning an infant alone with pieces to a totally unmanufactured car & expecting him to put it together & drive.

He wouldn't even know what a car should look like, much less how to put all the parts together or drive it.

But God is not like that—He is good in giving His law.

He did not leave us clueless & he did not leave us hopeless.

God gave us His law and then He came to fulfill that law.

God told us what perfection should look like & He came to display it in Christ & then He offers Christ as ours by faith.

By grace, He rescues people out from the oppression of living under law and continually failing and never measuring up.

Jesus Christ fulfilled the law FOR us so that we can stand justified and counted as having fulfilled the law too.

Then He empowers us to respond with love & faith to obey with joy.

We can approach the law as a tool for guiding love rather than a taskmaster condemning our lack of love.

Yet that does not mean that the Christian life is easy.

All these marvelous promises and freedom and power do not make the road of obedience a cushy cakewalk in the park.

It is a daily battle that keeps us dependent on the Gospel both for God's acceptance and for His power.

We see that reality from Paul's words in Romans 7:14-25, so let's read that next—Romans 7:14-25. [READ]

The key to being encouraged by this passage is seeing the good and holy desires Paul described as a Christian wanting to obey.

God does not make us totally perfect in this life because He wants us to be continually humbled under our need for grace.

Since He does not want us to look down on others who struggle, He keeps us struggling at deeper levels as we grow deeper in Him.

I mean—when was the last time you obeyed the greatest commandment all day by loving God with everything in you?

If we understand this is a battle of love & trust rather than mere behavior, we will cultivate humility and gratitude and love and faith.

And we will shout the thanks to God of verse 25 here that Jesus sets us free and that He will finally set us free from sin forever.

Then we will move into Romans 8 and jump for joy over the assurance we have even as we struggle along.

Read Romans 8:1. [READ]

Our conscience may try to condemn us & other people may condemn us, but God says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Then read how this can be true in Romans 8:2-4. [READ]

Paul is speaking of the new relationship we have in Christ, but here he is applying it in a different way.

He is making clear that the power and Person of this new life in Christians is God the Holy Spirit.

With the Spirit, we are assured & kept forever in God's grace.

So let's note a 2nd point for today—in Romans 8, we see God's goodness in His Spirit and His persevering assurance.

See God's goodness in His Spirit & His persevering assurance.

Point# 1 today & #7 overall was to see God's goodness in His law & His new relationship.

And now point #2 today & #8 overall is to see God's goodness in His Spirit and His persevering assurance.

And as I said when we got to chapter 5 last week, these points apply only to genuine Christians.

God shows His goodness generally to all people, but He shows infinitely more of His goodness only to believers.

Part of God's goodness in giving His Spirit is that God not only forgives us and secures us in His love.

He also gives us the Spirit as power to fulfill His commands.

When the Spirit moves us, love happens & the heart of God's law is fulfilled through love.

Romans 8:5-11 describe that change of mindset. [READ]

Christians have a new direction in life, a new pursuit after the things of the Spirit rather than the things of the flesh.

A new dominion with new desires has come to reign in us.

This same Spirit is the One who secures future resurrection.

So if you have the Holy Spirit in you, He shows Himself by transformed passions and priorities.

That does not mean we will be perfect or that we won't have to fight to put faith into action.

Read Romans 8:12 where Paul again turns the promise of power into a command just like we found in Romans 6 last week. [READ]

Because Christians have the Spirit, we are under obligation.

The obligation to live according to the Spirit is implied in the command not to live according to the flesh.

Because we can live by the Spirit, we MUST do so.

That's how God commands us by grace—because of who He has made us & what He has done for us, He commands us to go enjoy it, to go live it out, to actively experience His goodness.

It's like someone making a delicious meal & saying, "Eat".

We don't snarl at them & tell them not to tell us what to do, right?

When you headed for vacation & someone said, "Enjoy vacation!", you didn't retort back with "I don't have to."

Those scenarios sound silly but they are like the command or obligation God gives to obey Him by the grace He has provided.

It's ridiculous to think of arguing against that because God has supplied all we need to feast at His Table & to enjoy His rest.

So when He says "Follow Me & do this & not that," we should be gladly eager to trust Him & embrace that obligation.

More so, His obligation is deeply anchored in the persevering assurance that the Spirit has sealed us as children of God.

Read verses 13-17 to recall the motivation that we are forever in God's family if we are in Christ. [READ]

God has spiritually adopted every person who trusts Christ and He does not kick His family members out and disown them.

I am an earthly father who has physically & legally adopted two sons.

And I can't imagine my life without them & I can't even begin to envision any nightmare where they'd not be mine.

If a selfish, fallen earthly father like me feels that way, how much more are the strong eternal bonds of the heavenly Father's love for His adopted children in Christ!

So see God's goodness in His Spirit in us making us His children & the persevering assurance that gives to us.

He securely keeps us even through suffering we face as His children.

And we have not begun to imagine how much greater it will be to see God's glory face to face as His children.

Verse 18 says that God's presence will be so much greater that all suffering and sorrow in this life will not begin to compare.

Read verses 18-25 for that promise & the added comfort that even creation longs for God's future glory. [READ]

If you are a Christian, don't look for this life to satisfy you.

It won't because this is a fallen world of sin and corruption and even the creation itself looks forward to a better time yet ahead.

If creation itself longs for future redemption, why should we get caught up looking to this creation for fulfillment?

The sin & sorrow & suffering of this world are like a neon arrow pointing forward in time and upward in hope.

And the goodness of God is that He has promised persevering assurance of reaching the greater glory of the end.

It is God's goodness to give Christians security & certainty even through the worst suffering we can imagine.

Even suffering itself can give us hope to point us forward & upward.

Whatever terrible trial you are facing or have experienced or will endure, you can find God's goodness in it.

God's good goal is for us to take our eyes off this world so we won't be perpetually and forever disappointed.

Pain & problems help to pry us away from clinging to creation.

Creation is God's tool, even in its corruption, to prove that our Creator must be so much better.

And read verses 26-27 for the further assurance that the Holy Spirit intercedes to be sure God's plan is finished. [READ]

Within the 3 Persons of the Trinity, there is inter-relational communication that absolutely anchors every Christian.

With that kind of inter-Trinitarian assurance, it is no wonder we are assured that God is working all things for our good.

Read that familiar promise & its fixed security from eternity past in Romans 8:28-30. [READ]

The salvation of every person in Christ is so sure that our future glorification can be spoken of as already accomplished.

God planned it, began it, caused it, is accomplishing it, & will finish it & it is all by His grace for His glory in Christ.

God started it & His will finish it & it is all free to us in Christ.

That just seems overwhelmingly too good to be true.

But it is true in the goodness of God for those in Christ.

May God open our eyes to these eternal marvels that are too grand to grasp and too amazing to fully appreciate.

How peaceful, how restful, how unconditionally loved & accepted we are now & forever in Christ!

Nothing & no one in all of creation compares to this.

And nothing or no one can come close to threatening or undermining or changing this wondrous love in Christ.

Read Romans 8:31-39 to see that. [READ]

We've read a lot & barely skimmed the surface of it all.

But it all can seem simply too good to be true.

But it IS true that those in Christ have God's Spirit & His persevering assurance.

So if you are in Christ, don't waver or doubt God's love or whether He'll forgive you again or give up on you or whether He'll accept you or somehow think you just didn't measure up.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ really is this gracious & free!

It really is all about what Jesus has already accomplished and applied to us by the Spirit so that nothing can take it away.

So see God's goodness in His law & His new relationship & in His Spirit & His persevering assurance.

See God's goodness in the Gospel & turn from your sin to trust Christ.

Turn from every other trust to rest your soul in Christ alone.

And live every day glad to have a new relationship with Him by grace alone through faith alone.

Live to know, love, and enjoy God's Person and His path.

And remember that it is all rooted in the Person & work of Jesus.

So as you bow your head to pray, let's prepare to honor Christ through the ceremony of communion at the Lord's Table.

If you trust Jesus, we invite you to remember Him with us.

If not, we invite you to watch and pray for Him to awaken a true love for Him in your heart today.

Pray alone in response to Him & then I'll lead us in prayer as the men come to prepare the Lord's Table.