

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Our Complicated Relationship with Sin, Romans 7

Date preached: April 15, 2018

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message

INTRODUCTION: Our relationship with sin is quite complicated because we make it complicated. At the end of my message, I'll tell you how Christ simplifies that complicated relationship we have with sin.

There are five points to the message today:

1. Dead people are free from the Law and sin.
2. The Law and sin are swallowed by death.
3. Knowledge removes any flicker of innocence.
4. God's perfect standards highlight our lack of perfection.
5. The sinful body wrestles with the saved soul.

First, DEAD PEOPLE ARE FREE FROM THE LAW AND SIN.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:1 *¹Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?*

EXPLANATION: Paul was talking to people who knew the Law. And, let me review—the Book of Romans was written to those in Rome—Jews who were in Rome and Gentiles who were in Rome. If you even just pull up a brief paragraph and read about Rome during that time, your eyes will be opened to the relevance and the meaning of Paul's epistle to the Romans. He wrote to people who knew the Law of Moses. I am sorry to be repetitive, but it is important to set this up so this sermon is understood as a stand-alone sermon. Paul's letter to the Romans would be circulated among many people in Rome, and eventually it would be circulated among us...as all of us have a copy of it this morning in front of us.

It was included in the Bible by the early Church councils who met and made the decision to include it. That's a topic for another time. In fact, I spent several

Wednesday nights teaching about how we got the Bible. The Bible didn't just float out of heaven on a parachute. It is a very interesting process how people met in the 300s, and they took all these letters and the Old Testament scripture, and they prayed about it, and debated, and really agonized about what to include and what not to include.

Paul wrote to Jews living in Rome who had been schooled on the Old Testament Law of Moses. My guess is all of the Jews Paul wrote to were trying their best to adhere to the Law. The fact the Law was ancient didn't matter to them. In America, when a law becomes an old law, we tend to ignore it. But, to the Jews living in the world at that time, it was still very relevant in their lives—to the Christians who were Jews and to the Jews who had not yet become Christians.

In Romans 6, Paul wrote when we become followers of Jesus, we become dead to sin. In other words, when we become followers of Jesus, our sins were transferred to the cross of Christ, and he died in our place. When we are baptized we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He atoned for our sins. We call it the substitutionary atonement because we did not atone for our sins. Jesus did it in our place.

SCRIPTURE: And, in 2 Corinthians Chapter 5, we read: *He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (Romans 5:21).

Listen, if you've never heard this before, it should be revolutionary to you!

- We died with Christ (even though we're alive today.) We were buried with Christ (even though we're alive today). We arose to a new life with him.
- Our sins died with him. Our sins were buried with him. We arose to walk in newness of life, free from the penalty and condemnation of sin.

So, go back to verse 1: Paul said the Law only has authority over a person as long as that person is alive. I don't mean to be morose. However, if we had a casket right here in front of us with a dead body in it, we could safely say that person is free from the Law. Could that person be fined for speeding? No. Could that person go to jail for any reason? No. Could that person be fined for not paying taxes? No, but the IRS would probably try! I believe you get the picture.

Now let's see what Paul meant – He was talking about the Law of Moses. The Law held no authority over a dead person. And, if we are dead in Christ, then the Law of Moses holds no authority over someone who is dead in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: To illustrate, Paul uses the example of marriage:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:2-3 ² *For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him.* ³ *So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.*

So, Paul makes his statement in verse 1, he provided an illustration in verses 2 and 3, and then he draws a conclusion in verses 4, 5, 6.

Review—

- Dead people are free from the Law and sin. Why? Because—

Next, THE LAW AND SIN ARE SWALLOWED BY DEATH.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:4-6 ⁴ *So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.* ⁵ *For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.* ⁶ *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.*

EXPLANATION: Those are powerful verses. Notice in verse 4 *you also died to the law*. Why is “also” there? *Also* means not only “this” but “that” as well. What’s the “also” he’s talking about? He already said through Christ you are dead to sin, but he goes a step further and says, “You died to the law.” When Jews professed Christ and were baptized, they were saying goodbye not only to the bondage, the corruption, and the condemnation of sin, but they were saying goodbye to the Law of Moses. They no longer needed to follow it.

While baptism has great meaning to all believers, it has even greater meaning, a dual meaning to Jews who come to faith in Christ. I would say most of you have never heard that before. Because when a Jewish person becomes a Christian and they are baptized, they are saying goodbye to the guilt and condemnation of sin and goodbye to the Law of Moses.

Review—

- Dead people are free from the law and sin.
- The law and sin are swallowed by death.

Next, KNOWLEDGE REMOVES ANY FLICKER OF INNOCENCE.

In hearing this dynamic presentation, Jews could have thought Paul was making light of the Law they held so dear. Jews could have thought Paul was equating sin with the Law, so he clarifies in verse 7:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:7-9 ⁷ *What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”*

⁸ *But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.*

ILLUSTRATION: Paul addresses two groups of people who knew the Law. And, the second group of people was the Gentiles who came to Christ outside of the Law. It sounds here that Paul is introducing a third type of person. You see, the first type—

1. The Jews who came to faith in Christ.
2. The Gentiles who came to faith in Christ, never having known the Law of Moses.
3. Then Paul even refers to himself of not having knowledge of any of it. And, then learning, “*Thou shalt not covet,*” he knew what sin was. So, Paul indicates there is such a category. In verse nine he says, “*Once I was alive apart from the law...*” Let’s explore this third category of people—

The question comes up often: “What about people who have never heard?”

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, I watched a video on YouTube about the last group of Inuit people who lived in igloos. The more common name in this part of the world for this group of people is Eskimos. The video was from 1970, and a photographer followed a small group of Inuit people for several weeks. The Canadian government was planning to build them permanent homes, and the producers of this video knew thousands of years of culture was about to be changed permanently. It was a fascinating video. The igloos were large, and there was lots of video of life inside the igloo. The only food they had was seal meat. All their clothing was made from fur. One thing I learned was how they had no laws, no government, no understanding of money, and no real structure to anything other than survival and the family unit. And, they seemed really happy. A little boy ran around naked in the igloo seemingly unaware how cold it was, happy as he could be.

These people would have had, spiritually no concept of the Law of Moses, or Jesus, or much of anything we know about. They would have had no idea about the Bible. Paul said apart from the Law, sin was dead. That’s very interesting when you consider a group of people who had no access to the knowledge of scripture we have.

But, the scripture is clear, *wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world* (Romans 5:12). If these people were descendants of Adam, and we believe they are—then they had to have knowledge of sin. And, after this video was made, they indeed moved into homes built by the Canadian government. They became mainstreamed into society, and then, as we know, they would have heard the truth of the scripture. But, even before that time, they knew right and wrong on some level.

APPLICATION: The same Jesus who died for me and you is the same Jesus who died for the Jews with all their knowledge of the Law. And, he is the same Jesus who died for those people in that video.

The real question here is not, “What about those people,” but the real question is, “What about you? What are you going to do with Jesus?” On judgment day, the question to you won’t be, “*What about them, what did they do with Jesus?*” Instead, the question will be, “*What about you, what did you do with Jesus?*”

It is very interesting, in Paul’s writing, how out of all the sins mentioned in the Bible, Paul chose coveting. It is interesting how out of all Ten Commandments, Paul chose coveting to talk about sin. Why did he do that? I believe he did it because coveting is the original sin. Eve wanted something she wasn’t supposed to have. Adam partook of something he wasn’t supposed to have. The full commandment says, “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*” In other words, the commandment was: “Don’t want something that is someone else’s.”

ILLUSTRATION: The Inuit people in the video didn’t have houses to covet, no servants, no oxen, no donkeys, but the men had wives, and they had some belongings. So, I’m sure they knew jealousy. I’m sure they knew what coveting was—the very sin Paul talks about—because coveting is the original sin. Coveting is the universal sin.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine, Mike, who was in Burkina, told me one day a man came back from the market with a Ford hubcap. He didn’t know what it was. Nobody had cars. It was just an aluminum hubcap. So, he adjusted his mud hut, and pushed in that hubcap. And, everyone in the village decided they needed a hubcap for their hut. And, so they went to the market, and they looked and looked. And, so over a period of a few weeks, more hubcaps started popping up—pushed into the mud walls of the homes. This is coveting—the original sin.

EXPLANATION: In his writing, Paul didn’t focus on the what-ifs of others but on himself. Go to verse 10 to see learn what the commandment about coveting did to him:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:10-11 ¹⁰ *I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.* ¹¹ *For sin, seizing the opportunity*

afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

EXPLANATION: Well, Paul said the commandment “*Thou shalt not covet*” was intended to bring life. If a person does not covet, then that person is free. Think about it. But, Paul, being brutally honest with himself, coveted—therefore, breaking the commandment and condemning himself to die.

Earlier, Paul asked the question whether the Law was sinful, but he clarified it was not, and he summarizes here in verse 12—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:12 ¹² *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*

So, when a person dies to sin and when, in addition, the Jews died to the Old Law, it’s two different things. The Law is not sinful. It is bondage, but it is not sinful.

Review—

- Dead people are free from the law and sin.
- The Law and sin are swallowed by death.
- Knowledge removes any flicker of innocence.

Next, GOD’S PERFECT STANDARDS HIGHLIGHTS OUR LACK OF PERFECTION.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:13 ¹³ *Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.*

EXPLANATION: No person has ever kept all of the Laws of Moses. No person has ever kept all Ten Commandments. Why? Because behind the Law and the commandments, there is the *spirit* of the Law and the *spirit* of the commandments.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: A young rich man came to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. He said, “*I’ve followed all the laws since I was a child.*” He thought he was

a perfect man. He thought he had followed all the laws. And, Jesus told him to sell what he had and give it to the poor. The young rich man walked away from Jesus with sadness because he didn't want to give up what he had to help the poor. In other words, while he kept the Law, he violated the *spirit* of the Law, which made him as guilty of breaking the Law.

APPLICATION: You see, the scripture says no one is righteous on our own accord. All of us are guilty of sin. All of us need a Savior. None of us can save ourselves from our own sin. If we keep the Law, but we have hate in our heart, then we are as guilty as if we've broken all Laws. So, you better deal with your hate. You better deal with your grudges and bitterness—because, the scriptures repeat this over and over.

Review—

- Dead people are free from the Law and sin.
- The law and sin are swallowed by death.
- Knowledge removes any flicker of innocence.
- God's perfect standards highlights our lack of perfection, and—

Last, THE SINFUL BODY WRESTLES WITH THE SAVED SOUL.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 7:14-25 ¹⁴ *We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.* ¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* ¹⁶ *And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.* ¹⁷ *As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.* ¹⁸ *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.* ¹⁹ *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.* ²⁰ *Now 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.* ²¹ *So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.* ²² *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;* ²³ *but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.* ²⁴ *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?* ²⁵ *Thanks be to God,*

who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

EXPLANATION: Paul sums it up right there. Upon first reading, a person might say it sounds like a tongue twister. Upon second reading, you might wonder what it means. Upon third reading, you'll say, "Yep I get it, that's me." Don't you appreciate how honest Paul was?

What we learn here is Paul was still a growing believer. The apostle Paul was still a growing believer, confessing he was having this struggle. We don't tend to think of him in that light, do we? We tend to think of him as the ultimate follower of Jesus. But, he was still growing in his faith, and he was honest enough to share his struggles.

If you don't understand verses 14 through 20, here's how to understand it. Instead of reading it as if Paul wrote it about himself, read it as if you wrote it. Let the "I" be you personally.

Later, in I Corinthians 15, Paul would say, "I die daily." I believe Paul meant he intentionally had a time everyday where he had to remind himself that his will had to die and God's will had to live through him. Paul accepted the fact he was a dead man walking—dead to sin, alive in Christ, dead to his own will, alive to God's will.

At the beginning, I told you the title of the message was "Our Complicated Relationship with Sin," but it really doesn't end there. Thank the Lord, because Christ simplifies it all. We really don't have to figure it all out, because we cannot. Jesus simplifies it all. He takes the complications of sin and nails it to the cross. He takes the complications of sin and simplifies it to this: Repent and believe. Isn't that Good News? That's great news for all of us. If you agree with the message, say "Amen."

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Nancy Claire Smith for her editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA