

Romans 7:21-8:8
Who Shall Free Me from Sin?

Sermon

Hobart, April 9th, 2017

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²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God’s law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power* within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Chapter 8

Life in the Spirit

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power* of the life-giving Spirit has freed you* from the power of sin that leads to death. ³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature.* So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin’s control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

⁵ Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. ⁷ For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will. ⁸ That’s why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. ¹

* **7:23** Greek *law*; also in 7:23b.

* **8:2a** Greek *the law*; also in 8:2b.

* **8:2b** Some manuscripts read *me*.

* **8:3** Greek *our flesh*; similarly in 8:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Ro 7–8:8). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. SIN

A. SIN ISN'T A POPULAR CONCEPT THESE DAYS

1. It used to be

- a) People had all sorts of lists of what constituted sinfulness
- b) One of the famous lists is the "Seven Deadly Sins" was compiled by Pope Gregory I in about A.D. 600.
- c) pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

2. Many religious people today have their own lists as well;

- a) including such behaviors as watching movies, playing cards and dancing.
- b) Others list drinking alcohol, or even Coca Cola and coffee as sins.
- c) These types of sins are seen as less severe or "venial" sins, compared with sins such as adultery or murder that are classed as "mortal" sins.

3. There are many lists of sins in the Old and New Testaments

4. E.g.s; —one from the Old Testament and two from the New:

Proverbs 6:16-19

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

Galatians 5:19-21

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

5. As Joseph Tkach wrote recently;

All the behaviors in these sin lists are considered by Christians (and others) to be sin because, to one extent or another, they “miss the mark” of moral conduct. This idea of missing the mark is conveyed by some of the Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible for sin. The idea is that to sin is to depart from (miss) the right path, which raises this question: *How is the right path defined?* Typically, people think of sin in terms of wrong actions and thoughts. That’s how I viewed sin for much of my life, defining it by the laws in Scripture. Others might define it by civil laws (... there are laws against nearly all the behaviors on the sin lists quoted above).

But sin is far bigger than all the laws written in all the law books. I submit that there is a much higher, more all-encompassing standard we should use in defining sin.²

A. AS WE NEAR GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER SUNDAY

1. It is good for us to think about

- a) the nature and seriousness of sin
- b) and about why Jesus’ death and resurrection are so necessary
- c) How they release us from the old ways of the law and legalistic forms of religion, doubt and fear,
- d) And constitute the core of our faith and life, and are the only basis for our future hope and that of all mankind

B. PRAYER

² Joseph Tkach, Weekly Update, <https://update.gci.org/2017/03/sin-is-bigger-grace-is-deeper/>

BODY:

II. OUR SIN

A. EASTER ADDRESSES THE BIGGEST PROBLEM OF ALL

1. The separation of man from God
 - a) Self reliance rather than God reliance
 - b) Unfaith, instead of faith
2. Any attempt to find self-fulfilment, approval or goodness or pleasure apart from God and his Son and Spirit is by definition, sin
3. Both the Old and New testaments tell us the story of sin and its consequences, and the solution that is found fully and only in Jesus Christ and the events Easter commemorates
4. From the beginning, God in his holiness made clear what characterises true relationship and fellowship with him.
 - a) Sin is anything that threatens or goes against that relationship
 - b) It is much more than breaking laws or moral codes
5. God in his righteousness and love condemns and promises to annihilate all that hurts, harms and breaks that relationship.
6. As one of the most significant and helpful theologians of recent times, Karl Barth wrote;

Sin is whatever disturbs and makes this fellowship impossible.³
7. Sin is living outside of God's life and will. As Joe Tkach wrote,

³ Barth, K., Bromiley, G. W., & Torrance, T. F. (2004). *Church dogmatics: The doctrine of God, Part 1* (Vol. 2, p. 364). London; New York: T&T Clark.

Sin is failing to relate to God in the way God ordained—in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man.⁴

8. Living contrary and outside that relationship makes it impossible for us to be who we were created to be.

a) Barth adds;

Since his sin disturbs this fellowship and makes it impossible, man himself becomes impossible. As a sinful man he cannot stand before God. He must perish.⁵

9. In other words sin makes us nothing,

a) Sin breaks our relationship with God, which means we have no life, no future

10. This is the death Paul describes in various places in Romans including the end of Romans 6:

Romans 6:20-23

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. ²¹ And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. ²² But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. ⁶

11. Today our focus is on Romans 7 and 8

Romans 7:1-8:8

No Longer Bound to the Law

Now, dear brothers and sisters*—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only while a person is living? ² For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. ³ So while her husband is alive, she would be

⁴ Joseph Tkach, Weekly Update, <https://update.gci.org/2017/03/sin-is-bigger-grace-is-deeper/>

⁵ Barth, K., Bromiley, G. W., & Torrance, T. F. (2004). *Church dogmatics: The doctrine of God, Part 1* (Vol. 2, p. 364). London; New York: T&T Clark.

⁶ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ro 6:20–23). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

* **7:1** Greek *brothers*; also in 7:4.

committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

B. THE LAW

1. Just like a woman whose is freed from her marriage when her husband dies, we have been freed from the Old Covenant, and its condemnation of death by the death of Christ which we died with him

⁴ So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. ⁵ When we were controlled by our old nature, * sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death.

2. When we trust in Jesus Christ, surrender our self-will and put our lives in his hands and die with him, we are brought back into fellowship with God through him
 - a) Sin is undone
 - b) Through God's act of mercy and grace in Jesus, we are forgiven. The past failed relationship is put behind us
 - c) Atonement, redemption, restitution, restoration and reunion are accomplished
3. As in v6 here, (and later chapter 8 emphasises), we are now free to live in relationship with God through the new way of living in the Spirit

⁶ But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

4. Trying to be righteous by being religious, keeping laws, looking to our own moralistic efforts is self-defeating and self-condemning
 - a) Instead, now we are free to live by faith, by the new way of living in God the Holy Spirit

* 7:5 Greek *When we were in the flesh.*

God's Law Reveals Our Sin

⁷ Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet."* ⁸ But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power.

⁹ At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, ¹⁰ and I died. So I discovered that the law's commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. ¹¹ Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me.

¹² But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.

5. God's law and commands are good

- a) They reveal our sinfulness and our need of Jesus Christ
- b) The law was a sign-post, a map, or as Paul says in Galatians a tutor or chaperone who pointed us to and brought us to Christ⁷
- c) But when we look to them as our standard, as our way to being right, we fall to the sin of trying to be right by ourselves
- d) *Sin*—being our desire to be good of ourselves, to be prideful and independent—takes advantage of the law and its commands and deceives us
- e) *Sin* deceives us into thinking that Christianity, and pleasing God, is about being right, and focusing, too often fearfully on doing everything right
- f) It lacks trust in God's grace and mercy, which is sin at its heart and core

(1) Our life and salvation are totally and completely reliant on who God is; merciful, forgiving and gracious

6. Sin extends to focusing on others' beliefs and behaviours, instead of on God's grace and mercy towards them

* **7:7** Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21.

⁷ Galatians 3:24

a) It leads us to worry about standards, and draw lines in the sand fearing people will become lax and unrighteous

b) This is one way in which sin takes the law, which is good in itself and deceives us

7. It leads us to focus and trust in behaviours, morals, and dogmatic view points instead of viewing ourselves and others through God's eyes, and in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection

a) This was what Jesus spent so much time and effort in opposing in the Pharisees and religious experts of his time

b) He came and called them and all of us to trust in him instead and view others as God's beloved children

¹³ But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes.

Struggling with Sin

¹⁴ So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶ But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.* I want to do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

C. THIS IS THE PROBLEM

1. Trying to do good on our own, and insisting others do as well

a) But that is religious legalism, self-righteousness

b) We cannot free ourselves from our sinful nature of and by our own efforts to be right and good and correct and approved

2. Simon Ponsonby writes;

* 7:18 Greek *my flesh*; also in 7:25.

In some respects it is easier to follow the Torah: it is fixed, static, given, the rules are there. Many become legalists and “fall from grace” because they want to be “rule-book” Christians, not “relationship to the Lover” Christians. To walk in the Spirit, to live by the law of Christ, to follow the way of love, requires a dynamic relationship, a daily dependency on the Spirit in intimacy with Christ.⁸

a) G.K. Chesterton wrote, ““Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.”

3. Paul continues

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God’s law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another power* within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am!

Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

D. THIS IS THE ULTIMATE QUESTION AND PROBLEM THAT EASTER ANSWERS

²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

E. IT IS GOOD THAT WE DESIRE TO OBEY GOD

1. But it is only through Jesus, his incarnate life lived in our place, and through his death and resurrection that we can be **right with God**,
2. It is only through him continuing his incarnate life in us through his Spirit that we can **live God’s life**

⁸ Simon Ponsonby, *God is For Us, 52 Readings from Romans*, p. 203

* **7:23** Greek *law*; also in 7:23b.

Chapter 8 *Life in the Spirit*

1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

F. HOW AND WHY DOES THIS NEW WAY WORK?

1. Because it is trusting and relying fully on God's way and work, not ours
2. Instead of trusting in morals and rules and focusing on being right about everything—we trust in Jesus and the Spirit to free us from trying to be good and right by our own efforts
3. This new way works because it is God's work, not ours. It is God with us, for us, and in us
 - a) Not a sinful, weak and vain, self-based attempt at being good or right
4. God frees us through Jesus standing in our place, taking on our life and our sin and our death, and by being in our hearts and minds and lives through the Spirit

8:1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

G. THE CORE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS HERE

1. All that is sin, all our attempts to live independently, to be righteous apart from God's grace
 - a) All our deeds that have harmed others,
 - b) All that we have done to cause pain and suffering
2. All this is taken by Jesus Christ into himself as one of us, as all of us

a) And forgiven, destroyed and brought to an end through Jesus' sacrifice for our sins on the cross

3. Our sinful nature no longer has control and determination over us when we surrender our self-will to God in Jesus, through the Spirit

⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

⁵ Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.

H. **THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT**

1. It involves following and focusing on the things of the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit

a) God's way of love, mercy and grace

b) Focusing on the positive promises and hopes of the Gospel rather than legalistic matters, condemning ourselves and others

c) It is life and relationship building, bringing peace, harmony and fellowship, not the opposite

2. This is the good news, and the hope that Easter celebrates and promises for us and for the future of all creation

⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. ⁷ For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. ⁸ That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

3. No matter how hard we try to be right and good and have the right knowledge and attitudes—we fail!

a) And we too easily become like the Pharisees, self-righteous, fearful, negative, picky and judgmental—all of which are fruits of the sinful flesh

4. But as we read in v. 6

⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

CONCLUSION:

III. GOD'S SOLUTION IN CHRIST

A. JOSEPH TKACH

As broken as we sinful humans may be, the God of love and grace does not throw us away. He does not give up on us, but remains faithful. Instead, he brings the dead to life through Jesus Christ. He is restoring the broken to a pristine new condition. He restores, redeems and reconciles us to himself through his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are no longer simply sinners, we are forgiven sinners who receive his grace and forgiveness daily.

God's goal is for us to have eternal life in his presence—to be spiritually perfect as he is perfect. But to accomplish that purpose, God must clear away the imperfections (the sinfulness) that are part of our nature. We have to be remade, refashioned, regenerated or spiritually reborn (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5-7)—and that is exactly what God accomplished for us in Jesus Christ.

Note how Paul ended his thought in Romans 7: 24-25: “Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

By the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit we can share in Christ's own justified and sanctified human nature, day by day as we look forward to one day sharing fully in his glorified humanity. That is how deep God's grace reaches through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

...Jesus took our sinful nature upon himself, thus sanctifying our fallen human nature in himself, bringing it into a full and faithful obedience to God. His entire life, lived in our place and on our behalf, culminated in his words from the cross: “Father into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). Jesus did all this so that we could be spiritually reborn, enabling us to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in the way that transforms us in a *Christomorphic* direction.⁹

B. PRAYER

⁹ Joseph Tkach, Weekly Update, <https://update.gci.org/2017/03/sin-is-bigger-grace-is-deeper/>