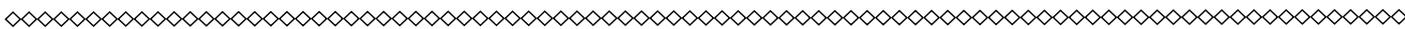




Pastor of the
International
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in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Rom. 7:7-25
Title: Indwelling Sin
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

In this second sermon on the theme of 'sin' and 'sinfulness' we take a further look at the biblical concept of human sin. This time we examine the understanding from Rom. 7:7-25 in the apostle Paul's discussion to the Christians in ancient Rome.¹

7 What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived 10 and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Paul's discussion here is rather challenging, but contains some extremely important insights into the nature of sin. Understanding the context of this passage is critical to making correct sense of Paul's words. In the body proper of this letter, Paul began with a discussion of the human need of redemption (1:18-3:20). Then he turned to a discussion of God's provision of redemption in 3:21-8:39. Our text is a part of that larger discussion. This divine provision of redemption is discussed around two central topics: the justification of the sinner in 3:21-5:21 and the sanctification of the believer in 6:1-8:39. Under the second topic comes our passage as the second unit of the idea of sanctification. In chapters six through eight Paul focuses on the believer and sin (6:1-23), the believer and the Law of God (7:1-25), and the believer and the Holy Spirit (8:1-39).

We are looking at this emphasis in chapter seven today. The dominant emphasis of Romans chapter

¹ 7:7 τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν; ὁ νόμος ἁμαρτία; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνω εἰ μὴ διὰ νόμου· τὴν τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ἤδειν εἰ μὴ ὁ νόμος ἔλεγεν, Οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις. 7:8 ἀφορμὴν δὲ λαβοῦσα ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς κατειργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πάσαν ἐπιθυμίαν· χωρὶς γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία νεκρά. 7:9 ἐγὼ δὲ ἔζω χωρὶς νόμου ποτέ, ἐλθοῦσης δὲ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἡ ἁμαρτία ἀνέζησεν, 7:10 ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπέθανον καὶ εὐρέθη μοι ἡ ἐντολή ἢ εἰς ζωὴν, αὕτη εἰς θάνατον· 7:11 ἡ γὰρ ἁμαρτία ἀφορμὴν λαβοῦσα διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς ἐξηπάτησέν με καὶ δι' αὐτῆς ἀπέκτεινεν. 7:12 ὥστε ὁ μὲν νόμος ἅγιος καὶ ἡ ἐντολή ἀγία καὶ δικαία καὶ ἀγαθή.

7:13 Τὸ οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο θάνατος; μὴ γένοιτο· ἀλλὰ ἡ ἁμαρτία, ἵνα φανῇ ἁμαρτία, διὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μοι κατεργαζομένη θάνατον, ἵνα γένηται καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἁμαρτωλὸς ἡ ἁμαρτία διὰ τῆς ἐντολῆς. 7:14 οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ὁ νόμος πνευματικὸς ἐστίν, ἐγὼ δὲ σὰρκινός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. 7:15 ὁ γὰρ κατεργάζομαι οὐ γινώσκω· οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, ἀλλ' ὁ μισῶ τοῦτο ποιῶ. 7:16 εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω τοῦτο ποιῶ, σύμφημι τῷ νόμῳ ὅτι καλός. 7:17 νυνὶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. 7:18 οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἀγαθόν· τὸ γὰρ θέλει παράκειται μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ· 7:19 οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τοῦτο πράσσω. 7:20 εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ θέλω ἐγὼ τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. 7:21 Εὐρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, ὅτι ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται· 7:22 συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, 7:23 βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου. 7:24 ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; 7:25 χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. ἄρα οὖν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ τῷ μὲν νοί δουλεύω νόμῳ θεοῦ τῇ δὲ σαρκὶ νόμῳ ἁμαρτίας.

seven pertains to how the believer comes to grips with the law of God, especially that found in the legal code of the Old Testament. The matter of sin for the believer, first surfacing in chapter six, remains a major emphasis in chapter seven as well. To be sure, the major thrust of this discussion pertains to the individual having grown up seeking to obey the Torah of the Old Testament and how that divine Law now applies to him as a believer in Christ. But the relevancy of Paul's discussion to the non-Jewish world of today is powerful because of popular conceptualizations of achieving salvation by living a reasonably good moral life. For us as non-Jewish Christians there comes often the dilemma of how does the Old Testament apply to us? What is the connection between divine law and sin? These are vitally important issues that we need clear understanding of if we are to live a victorious Christian life.

These verses, 7-25, naturally fall into two core units of idea expression. From that I want to make two basic points about the nature of sin. The Law of God defines what sin it (vv. 7-12), and sin uses the 'flesh' as its launchpad in our life (vv. 13-25).

Now let's see if we can make sense out of Paul's words.

BODY

I. Sin defined as sin by the Law, vv. 7-12

7 What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 10 For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 11 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

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Right off the bat we need to note the role of the little word 'then' (οὖν). It plays an important role in connecting 7-25 to vv. 1-6² and in particular to verses six. The purpose clause in verse six, "so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit," sets up the discussion in vv. 7-25 as well as in chapter eight. In redemption from the curse of the Law we have become slaves, Paul declares. But not slaves "under the old written code." Instead, we have become slaves to God in Christ "in the new life of the Spirit." The 'old written code' part is expanded in vv. 7-25 and the 'new life of the Spirit' in chapter eight. Paul's concept of slavery here is absolute ownership of our lives by God. We belong to Him lock, stock, and barrel! God controls our life and our living. Our obligation is to please Him in everything we do.

But how can we do that as believers? Paul's first point in chapter seven is that we can't do that as 'law keepers.' Sin is too powerful a force over our lives to ever allow that to happen. But are we as believers obligated to follow God's Law? YES is Paul's emphatic answer! The Law of God remains binding upon us. But we now as redeemed believers are 'dead to it' Paul has declared. For the first century Jewish believer and proselyte Christian believer, there had been captivity to the Law prior to Christ that compounded their spiritual death. The Law of God was utterly unable to generate spiritual life, no matter how thoroughly obeyed. But before Christ came into their lives they were enslaved to this old written code.

So is God's Law bad? Notice Paul's response to this question in vv. 7-12. Put another way: what is the connection between sin and God's Law. The link is complex and interactive. Let me try to throw some light on Paul's words here.

The Law of God defines sin. This is Paul's first point. To his question 'Is the Law sin' Paul gives a twofold answer. First comes his emphatic denial: μὴ γένοιτο. Absolutely not, thunders the apostle. The Law of God never becomes bad even though it indeed stands as an instrument of death. The second part of his

²7:1-6 (NRSV): 1 Do you not know, brothers and sisters — for I am speaking to those who know the law — that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? 2 Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. 3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. 4 In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. 5 While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

answer in verse 6 is simply that God's Law defines sin as sin. How do I know what is wrong behavior? God's Law is critical here. In the Law of God actions that are wrong in God's eyes are spelled out and forbidden to those seeking to follow God.

Paul uses the example of covetousness to make his point: "Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" The behavior aspect of sin is defined by God's Law. God said, "Don't covet." His illustration in 7b is the tenth commandment against covetousness found in [Exodus 20:17](#) and [Deut. 5:21](#). Exod. 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." And Deut. 5:21 says, "Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Paul summarizes this commandment with the simple statement, "You shall not covet." Because the Law prohibited coveting, we recognize this action as wrong.

Sin is wrong behavior. The Law of God defines what behavior is wrong. For Jewish Christians of the first century this was a 'no brainer.' No one would argue against this point. In our world, however, lots of people don't want God to define anything in their lives. And especially to define some of their behavior as wrong and sinful. But Paul's point remains valid in our day and will continue to be so until Jesus returns. God says what is sinful; not we humans. Our accountability to God in final judgment will be based on God's standards; not those we have created.

Sin manipulates the Law of God to produce death. So what is the problem? If God says don't do something, isn't all we need to do then is to obey God? This was the viewpoint of Jews in Paul's day, and remains pretty much the same in modern Judaism. A somewhat similar version of the same thing lays at the heart of Islam. If the God of this world has defined right and wrong conduct, then human responsibility is to abide by what God has said. If one successfully does what God has mandated, then won't he be okay with God?

Paul's answer is 'Absolutely not!' Sin is so much more than wrong behavior. Notice what Paul says, "But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness" and "sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." Sin "seized an opportunity" (ἀφορμὴν λαβοῦσα); sin "produced in me all kinds of covetousness" (κατειργάσατο ἐν ἐμοὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν); sin "deceived me and killed me" (ἐξηπάτησέν με καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν). What Paul is getting at here is the nature of sin as a spiritual power and force. Sin, not God's Law, produces covetousness. Sin, not God's Law, deceives. Sin, not God's Law, kills. We are dealing with a spiritual reality here of immense proportions. People, sin is a supernatural spiritual force in our world as a tool in the hands of the Devil and is wreaking havoc in human existence. You can define an Adolf Hitler as just a 'bad guy' who didn't obey God's Laws. Evil was in control of his life and that evil was the power of sin. You can't define the two boys who shot up the high school in Colorado several years ago killing several people as 'bad boys.' They were in the grip of sin as an evil force dominating their lives.

Sin's power is seen here in its ability to manipulate the holy Law of God for its own purposes. It takes a righteous, holy commandment of God and turns it into an instrument of death. And sin's power stems from this Law of God: "Apart from the law sin lies dead." It gains its ability to destroy through the divine Law. In Adam prior to the fall, all humanity was alive apart from Law, Paul says in v. 9, but with the Law of God sin revitalized itself and produced death. Tragedy of all tragedies, the Law of God, intended for life, now became an instrument of death in the hands of sin (v. 10).

What can we learn from all this? We must never ever underestimate the power of sin. The Devil wants us to think that sin is only misbehavior. But in such deception we make a tragic mistake. Sin is misbehavior, to be sure. But sin is a spiritual force operating in our world by enslaving people and in the process killing them. We can not -- I repeat -- we cannot ever please God by merely behaving ourselves. Sin's grip on us will never allow us to reach the required level of holy living. And even if this were possible, we would not have addressed the more basic issue of our sinful nature in enslavement to sin.

Millions of people in our world live in deception thinking they're all right with God by merely being reasonably good people. This is spiritual suicide! I pray that no one here today is making that mistake. Please, please, my friend. Come to grips with the awesome and awful reality of sin as not just misbehavior, but as an overwhelming spiritual force present in your life right now.

Also, we must realize that God's Law remains binding on us as believers. God has high standards of expectation. These have not changed nor diminished over the centuries. What God says holds true for all times. To be sure, how to apply all that is contained in the Old Testament to Christian practice is challenging. And differing opinions over just how this should work have surfaced down through the centuries. Since the Protestant Reformation and the struggles of Martin Luther, this issue of Christian faith and the Law has often been expanded to become the question of what is the role of the Old Testament for Christians. Roman

Catholicism has made extensive use of the Old Testament in a variety of ways. Most importantly the sacrificial system for the temple in the legal code has become the basis for the Eucharist tradition. Jesus and the apostles mostly used the OT at two points: (1) the holiness code in the legal system as a basis of affirming moral standards, and (2) the prophetic materials as prophesying the coming of the Messiah. Often these two emphases have been drawn from the Psalms and from the other wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Since Luther the struggle between faith and law, as understood largely from Romans and Galatians, has frequently been framed around whether statements like Rom. 7:6 and Gal. 2:19-21 imply the irrelevancy of the entire Old Testament to Christian life. Most Christian groups will not go so far as to reject the Old Testament itself. But the history of the Christian use of the OT is littered with the junk of a shallow spiritualizing through allegory of large portions of the Old Testament in order to make it appear to be relevant and useful. I have no final answer to this quest. But I do believe the Old Testament stands binding upon Christians and that, in an assumption of progressive revelation, it must be interpreted through the perspectives established by the revelation of God in the New Testament.³

II. Sin's use of the flesh, vv. 13-25

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

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In this second section, Paul continues his emphasis of the enormous power of sin over human life. But the emphasis shifts. Sin took the holy Law of God and made it an instrument of death. That Paul has already stressed. But on the other side, the Law of God responds by exposing the awful sinfulness of sin: “in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” The Law of God uncovers sin for what it is. And makes that clear to us. Particularly as believers. Thus God's Law, although manipulated by sin, ultimately gains the upper hand over sin in exposing its true nature.

Where does the problem lie then with sin's ability to work in such destructive ways? This answer is simple: with us! Sin has the ability to wreak such destruction because its launchpad is our 'flesh.' As Paul asserts in verse 14, “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin” (ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν).

What's the 'flesh'? Paul here introduces another idea that is somewhat new to the New Testament. The Greek word σὰρξ (flesh) or σαρκικός (fleshly) are extensively used in Paul's writings, not to refer to literal human flesh -- as is the case most elsewhere in the New Testament -- but to get at the idea of [corrupt human nature](#). In chapter five Paul linked our corrupt flesh to Adam and his sin in the Garden of Eden. Thus we are corrupt via our connection to Adam. But also we are corrupt through our human actions. Worse still, our cor-

³For some helpful background information on the larger issue of divine revelation, see my article “Revelation” published in the two volume *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* in 1996 and also available on Cranfordville.com under [Articles](#).

rupt nature provides the lodging place for the dynamic of sin in our lives, as Paul declares in v. 14b: “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin” (ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινος εἶμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν.). Through my corrupt flesh sin has taken control of my life.

What is the consequence of this predicament? A battle of wills breaks out within my life to see who will control what I do. What I do often makes no sense to me, Paul declares in 15a. Actions represent not what I desire and want. Rather they often express the very things I despise and hate (v. 15b).

Why is this? Verses 16-20 answer this. First, when my actions don't match my desires, this reflects my positive feeling about the goodness of God's law, since the Law has not only defined what is sinful but also what is good (v.16). My desires are shaped by the goodness of God's law, not by slavery to sin that controls my actions. Thus, my sinful actions are a reflection of the controlling presence of sin in my corrupt nature (v. 17). My corrupt nature (my flesh) is completely bad and sin reigns supremely over my life preventing me from doing the good that I desire (v. 18). The consequence: I don't do good; instead I do the evil that I want to avoid (v. 19). What does that mean? When I do evil, it doesn't represent me desiring to do it; rather it is a reflection of the control that sin has over my life (v. 20).

Thus Paul recognizes two dynamics at work inside him. (1) The desire to do good arouses the inclination to do evil (v. 21). (2) Although in his will (=mind) he delights in the good defined by God's law, sin's power is waging war against his flesh (here described as “his members”). The corrupt human nature is closely identified with the physical aspects of his existence. The warfare here is for dominance over Paul's life. Will he do what he really desires? Or, will he wind up doing what sin dictates? Mostly the latter!

He needs to be rescued from this war? Verses 24-25 bring this out: “[Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!](#)” (ταλαίπωρος ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος· τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; χάρις δὲ τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν.). His plea for deliverance brings a word of praise to God who has delivered him. This, not through the Law. It stands helpless to overpower sin. Instead, sin has skillfully used the Law to deal death to the individual. Rather, deliverance comes through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Verse 24b brings this discussion to a climax: “[So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.](#)” The dilemma is the tension between the inward side (the mind, the will) and the outward physical (the corrupt flesh). Inwardly, Paul, especially as a pre-Christian Jew, was committed to doing God's will as defined in His law. Outwardly, his corrupted flesh enabled sin to take him captive and dictate his actions. Now the deliverance mentioned in 25b anticipates the marvelous discussion in Romans eight, which John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim's Progress* described as “golden stepping stones out of the slough of despondency.”

What can we learn from these verses? For one thing, we need to realize the corruptness of our human nature. The fleshly side of us has been corrupted by our link to Adam. Our evil actions have worsened this situation greatly. We have been weakened so that the powerful dynamic called sin has taken control of our lives. This has created a constant warfare inside us, because our desire is to do God's will but our actions reflect just the opposite. This stands as a serious problem. Apart from solution in Christ, we are dead spiritually. God's Law is helpless to enable us to overcome this problem. Only the more powerful redemption in Christ Jesus can provide victory over sin in our life. In Christ we have been set free from the principle of sin and death ([Rom. 8:2](#)). Praise be to God!

CONCLUSION

My friend, you can't whip sin by yourself. You can't even control it! It's way too powerful. You're enslaved to it. Only Christ Jesus can deliver you from its bondage. Come to Jesus now.