

The Struggle with Sin (Psalm 32 and Romans 7:1-25)

21-April-2024

Psalm 32

Of David. A *maskil*.

- ¹ Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
- ² Blessed is the one
whose sin the LORD does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- ³ When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night
your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.
- ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD."
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.
- ⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
will not reach them.
- ⁷ You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
- ⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding

but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.

¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD's unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him.

¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Romans 7:1-25

Released From the Law, Bound to Christ

⁷ Do 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? 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.

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.

The Law and Sin

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. 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. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

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.

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.

Sermon: The Struggle with Sin

Please have your Bibles opened at **Romans chapter 7** – that's going to be our focus this morning – and **I'll very briefly refer to Psalm 32**. There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Recap/Intro

Last week we said that as Christians we were – ***not under the law but under grace***

[Slide-law/grace]

<u>THE LAW</u>	<u>GRACE</u>
1. Worship God only	We have Jesus!
2. No idols	Keeps commandments!
3. Don't blaspheme	Died for us!
4. Keep Sabbath	Gives forgiveness!
5. Honour parents	Defeated death!
6. Don't murder	Rose again!
7. No adultery	Offers eternal life!
8. Don't steal	He saves us!
9. Don't lie	
10. Don't covet	
We can't keep it!	
It can't save us!	

We said that – **we can't keep the law** – 10 commandments – **perfectly**

And the **law** in itself can't **save us**

And we said – **God gave us grace** [define] – the gift of **Jesus** – who can keep all the law and commandments perfectly

And so, **we come to Him** – and **He saves us**

And we also said last week – **we are dead to sin**

Dead to sin - does not mean that we don't sin anymore – but that – because we are united to Jesus now – we should not want to sin anymore – because we're in a new life in Jesus

And we concluded – we must ***“remember who we are”*** – we are Christians – **ambassadors for Jesus**

This week – in chapter 7

Paul explains more completely – **how it is that we are no longer under the law** – and what that looks like in a Christian’s life – and it’s going to involve **a struggle with the law and with sin**

Paul makes **3 points** in this chapter as he **deals with this struggle**

[Slide-3 points]

1. ***We are released from the Law*** (vv1-6)
2. ***The Law is holy and righteous and good*** (vv7-13)
3. ***The Law has limitations because of sin*** (vv14-25)

We are released from the Law (vv1-6)

1st then – as Christians - ***we are released from the Law***

[Slide-released heading]

In v1 – Paul gives a **general principle about the law** – the **law only has authority** - and is **only binding** - when a person is alive – not when they’re dead!

It’s not like you can say to a dead person “do you know you stole \$10 from me and I want it back?”

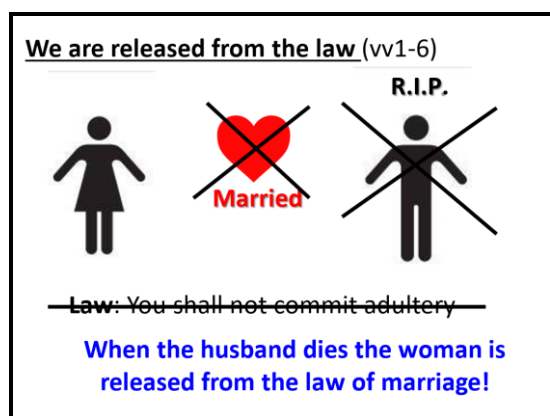
[Slide-Marriage]



And to **illustrate** this general principle – Paul uses the **example of marriage** in v2-3
Marriage is a **binding legal relationship**, but it is only binding if **both the wife and the husband are alive**

If either of them **die** – both are **released from the law of marriage** – and **released from the law of adultery**.

[Slide-Marriage/release]



Look at v2 – in the wife's case, her **husband's death** is what makes the difference between another relationship she has **being adulterous or a legitimate marriage**.
 If she has a relationship with another man whilst her husband is alive – she breaks the law of adultery – but if her husband dies – **she's released from the law that binds them together**.

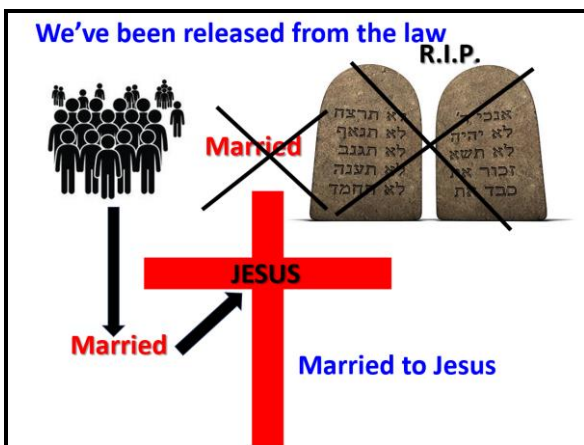
Paul then **applies this marriage example** to us in vv4-6

[Slide-Christian/Law]



Before we became a Christian – we were under the law – like being married to the law

[Slide-died to the law/married to Jesus]



When we became a Christian – we **died to the Law** – and **were released from the Law** – because **we died with Christ**. And **that frees us up to “remarry”**. And the one we “remarry” or “belong to” (v4) is the risen Jesus.

In other words, we’re not married to the law anymore – we’re married to Jesus – and we’ve been released from the law.

To be a Christian is to be married to Jesus and to fall in love with Jesus

Being “married to Jesus” is the answer to the question: “***Can a Christian live as they choose?***” – **No!** Because they now have a loyalty to Jesus!

Being married involves a **loss of freedom and independence**. We **cannot simply live as we choose**. We **have to consider the other person in the marriage**. A single person can make decisions unilaterally – a married person can’t.

On the other hand, being married means we **can experience love, intimacy, acceptance and security** – in ways that are not possible as a single person. So, any loss of freedom we have is a joy – not a burden.

Being now married to Jesus – we now have a purpose - at the **end of verse 4** – and that is **to bear fruit for God**.

In our previous marriage to the law – Paul says in v5 – all that happened was **the law aroused our sinful passions** – and the only fruit we produced was death – and **separation from God!**

But now we have died to that marriage to the law and been released from it – Paul says in v6 – **we can now serve in a new way!**

How? By **serving through the Holy Spirit** – which we receive – when we become Christians – and we are no longer under the old oppressive way of rules and regulations and reading the small print.

Paul will talk more about serving God in the Spirit – in chapter 8.

The Law is holy and righteous and good (vv7-13)

[Slide-law-holy/righteous/good]

Now that we are married to Jesus and not married to the law (vv1-6) – Paul anticipates people might start to think that the law - which we are to be released from – they might start to think that - the law is a **bad thing** – so Paul asks the question in V7 – “*Is the law sinful?*”

[Slide-Question/Answer]

And Paul’s short answer is “*Certainly not!*”

Paul’s longer answer goes from verses 7 to 13

[Slide-Longer Answer]

And his argument is that – the ***law actually is holy and righteous and good!***

Paul says – v7 – the law is not sinful – because “*he would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law*”

And he uses the example of **coveting** [*yearning to possess something someone else has*] – the **10th commandment**.

Paul continues in v7 – that he wouldn’t have known what coveting was unless he had the law “*do not covet*” (Exodus 20:17; Deut 5:21)

Then Paul describes what happened once he knew the law “*do not covet*”

V8 – **sin seized the opportunity given it by the commandment – and produced every kind of coveting in him.**

What **Paul describes is the dynamic** where the warning “*Don’t do something!*” may become a call to action because of **our sinful, rebellious hearts.**

It isn't the **fault of the law** (or the commandments), but it is our **fault**.

*In his book Confessions, the great theologian of the ancient church Augustine [354-430AD] described how this dynamic worked in his life as a young man: "There was a pear tree near our vineyard, loaded with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears — not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed very much. **Our real pleasure was doing something that was not allowed! The desire to steal was awakened simply by the command "do not steal!"***

Paul continues describing this **sin dynamic** in v9

Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

What does Paul mean by "*once I was alive apart from the law*"?

He's referring to his state of innocence or lack of awareness — in not knowing the law and not knowing the full implications of the law. Before Paul knew the law, he might have felt a sense of moral security or self-righteousness, thinking himself blameless.

But once he knew the law - sin sprang to life in him — then the punishment for sin — which is death — followed!

He says – v10 – **the commandment was meant to keep him alive** – but because he broke it – it led to death! Because – v11 – his sinful nature – used the commandment to deceive and tempt him to break it – and put him to death.

If we think about it - **that's what happened in the Garden of Eden** - wasn't it?

God gave a commandment “*do not eat fruit from this tree*”

That commandment was designed **to keep Adam and Eve alive**

But the serpent (Satan) seized the opportunity given by God's command (v8) to produce coveting in Adam and Eve – so that they wanted so much to be wise and to be like God!

And so, the very commandment that was intended **to bring life and keep Adam and Eve alive (v11)** – was used by the serpent (Satan) to deceive them – and bring them death and separation from God.

[Slide-Law is not problem]

So, with Paul's own example of the sin of coveting and with the example of Adam and Eve's sin of breaking God's rule – we can see that the problem is - **not the law (or the commandments)** but the problem is - **Paul** – and **Adam and Eve** – and us – as sons and daughters of Adam!

So, Paul quite rightly concludes in v12

The law is holy – and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

[Just like my speed camera at Kanwal – the law is a good one – it keeps people safe – the problem is not the law – the problem is me or you – the driver]

(pause)

The fact that **the Law is holy and righteous and good** (v12) leads Paul to anticipate another question – in v13

“Did that which is good (i.e. the Law), then, become death to me?”

In other words: *“does the law kill people?”*

Paul’s answer - still in v13 is: *“By no means!”*

It is Paul’s sin that kills him it simply **“uses what is good (the Law)”**

In other words - **Sin is the killer** – and **the Law** (which is good) is its weapon!

[Slide-Law limitations]

And Paul spends the rest of the chapter showing - ***the Law has limitations because of sin*** – that’s in verses 14 to 25 – and here Paul describes the personal struggle with sin

The Law has limitations because of sin (vv14-25)

Paul describes an **inner struggle of a Christian** who has genuinely repented of their sin

- Who is - **United with Christ**
- Who is - **a slave of righteousness** (a slave of God)
- Who is - **not under the law - but under grace**
- And even though **they are now on Jesus’ team - they still struggle with breaking God’s law and struggle with sin**

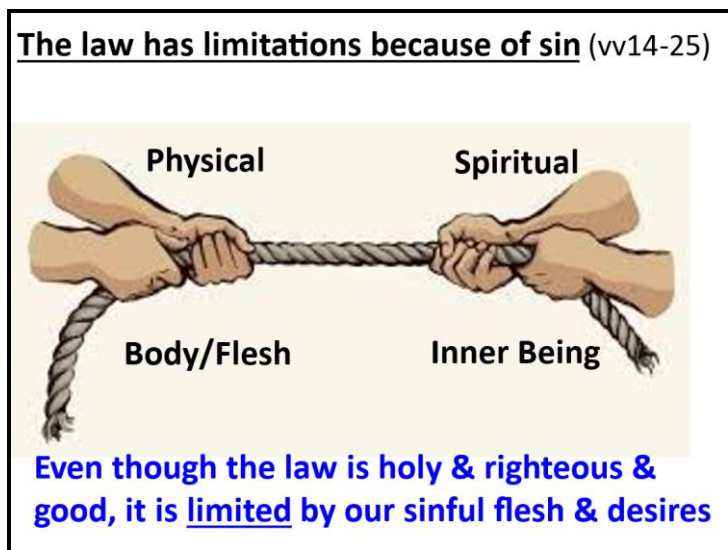
King David in our old testament reading from Psalm 32 **had that same struggle**

And that struggle is - because as we said last week - we have to remember who we are - we're ambassadors of Jesus

When we become a Christian - we receive the Holy Spirit – that is we are born again - but we don't get a new body - until Jesus returns and completes our salvation with a new resurrected body.

In the meantime - the struggle Paul describes is - a battle between our body or flesh and our inner spiritual being

[Slide-Tug of War]



That struggle is like - a tug of war - between physical and spiritual

And it's a struggle because we haven't fully grasped the idea of *not being under the law but under grace*

Paul describes this struggle in vv14-17 and then repeats it in a different way in vv18-20 for emphasis

The **struggle** goes like this:

On the one hand – like Paul – a Christian

- Can see **God's law is spiritual** (v14)
- They can **desire to keep God's law** (v15, v18)
- And they **agree that the law is good** (v16)
- And can even say – as in v22 – **their inner being delights in God's Law**

Yet on the other hand – like Paul – a Christian

- **Still has their flesh** – which is **unspiritual** – v14 – and **incapable of keeping the law** – and is a **slave to sin**
- And so, they **don't even understand what they are doing** and **do what they hate doing** – v15
- They **do what they do not want to do** – v16
- And **its sin living in them that sins** – v17 and v20
- And they **have a sinful nature** – v18
- And so, they **don't do the good they want to do** – but instead - **do the evil they do not want to do** – v19

I'm sure **we can all relate to Paul's struggle** – yes/no/maybe?

Some examples of this struggle:

- We might say – ***“right I’m not going to lose my temper anymore”*** – and then something unfair or unkind or unjust happens – and **we fly off the handle before we know it!**
- Or - someone might tell us something confidential and say – ***“Please keep this to yourself for now – I haven’t made it common knowledge”*** – and then we’re chatting with another friend later the same day – and we say ***“You’re never going to believe what Freda told me!”***
- Or - you hear a sermon about being satisfied with God’s provision and to not be jealous of what other people have. Then a few days later you visit your friend – and **your friend has just had the place renovated and put a new pool in. And suddenly – you’re so jealous of your friend – and think it’s so unfair your friend has so much!**

(pause)

But Paul hasn’t finished describing this struggle

In vv21-24 – he describes it in **4 different ways** – and uses **4 pairs**:

Two egos, two laws, two cries and two slaveries

1st – **there’s two egos** – the **“I” who wants to do good** and the **“I” beside me who is evil** (v21)

2nd – **there’s two laws** – the **law of my inner being** (that is the real saved me) **that delights in the law** (v22) which is also described in v23 as **the law of my mind** – and then there’s **the law of sin (v23) at work within me**

3rd – then there's two cries – the cry in v24 – “*what a wretched [wretched here means literally miserable and exhausted from hard labor] what a wretched man I am*” – and there's the cry of v25 – “*Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*”

4th – the two slaveries – both of at the end of v25 – a slave to God's law and a slave to sin

[Slide-limited]

The bottom line of this struggle is that - **it's not the law that's responsible for our sin** – and - **nor is the law capable of saving us** – because **we can't keep the law perfectly**. And so, even though - **the law is holy and righteous and good** - the law is limited by our sinful flesh and sinful desires.

(pause)

Our Response to the struggle with sin (Galatians 5:16-25)

What should be our response to this struggle?

Do we need to remain in it?

(pause)

[Slide-Response]

Well - **we do have an answer** - in **verse 6**

Paul tells us we don't have to be stuck in the old way of the written code – the Law – end of v6

We have a new way – to serve God in the new way of the Spirit – the Holy Spirit we receive as Christians

Paul hasn't mentioned much about the Spirit yet – in chapter 8 - the Spirit is mentioned 23 times!

We'll look at part of chapter 8 next week

But I can't leave us without a response this morning to this struggle we all have.

The answer to this struggle is - we have is to remember that we have died and risen with Christ - and - are living in the freedom of the indwelling Spirit.

And the Apostle Paul gives the most amazing answer to this conflict in Galatians 5:16-18

[Slide-Galatians 5:16-18]

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

And to walk by the spirit – Paul says - we must bear the fruit of the Spirit which is:

[Slide-Galatians 5:22-25]

²² ... love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

It's walking in the Spirit – **that helps us fall in love with Jesus – more and more – and stops this conflict we have within!**

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you that we have been released from the law because of your grace in sending Jesus. Yet we acknowledge that inner struggle we have – between our flesh and our inner being. Thank you that we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Help us to walk by the Spirit and keep in step with the spirit and not gratify the desires of our flesh. Help us to produce the fruit of the Spirit – so we can be worthy ambassadors of Jesus. In His Name, we pray. Amen.