

# (Romans) the Best the Law Could Do

by Brian Brodersen

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*The law cannot save anyone because of human nature's inability to live up to its standard, and the solution is the gospel, which empowers us to live according to the standard of the law.*

**Duration:** 35:52

**Topics:** "Law And Salvation", "Christian Freedom"

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## Description

In this sermon on Romans chapter 7, the speaker addresses the important questions surrounding the role of the law in salvation, particularly for the Jewish audience. The speaker emphasizes that salvation cannot be achieved through the law, as stated in previous chapters. The speaker then proceeds to illustrate this point by sharing his own personal experience with the law. He highlights that under the law, it was impossible to produce the desired fruit and that the law only brought condemnation and disapproval. The speaker concludes that through the death of Christ, believers are no longer under the dominion of the law, emphasizing the impossibility of salvation through the law.

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## Transcript

Romans chapter 7, we are going to look at the 7th chapter tonight and we're going to come back to it next week. I realize that we need a couple of weeks here and so tonight we will look at it and then we'll come back next week and look at it from just a slightly different perspective. So let me read to you verses 1 through 4. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law so that she is no adulteress though she has married another man.

Therefore my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ that you may be married to another to him who was raised from the dead that we should bear fruit to God. So as we look at the 7th chapter, I want to have us discover just exactly what Paul is saying and to whom he's speaking. I think it's critical to understand who Paul is talking about, who he's talking to in this particular chapter.

Now there have been three main views concerning the person Paul is describing. As we go on, he's going to describe a situation here and there have been three views regarding the person that he is describing. Some say that Paul is describing an immature Christian, a person who's saved but a person who hasn't grown, a person who's maybe not filled with the Spirit, a person who hasn't learned to walk in the Spirit.

Others say that Paul is describing the Christian life itself and he's describing the Christian at the pinnacle of his spirituality and that Paul is even actually describing himself at this moment in his life when he's

writing. And then there are those who say that Paul is actually referring to a man who is unregenerate, a man who has come to an understanding of spiritual things but hasn't yet made that crossover into the realm of the Spirit, hasn't yet been born again. Now from the onset, I want to say that although some of the experiences Paul describes are experiences that we might have as a believer, there's some similarities definitely.

I do not believe that Paul is describing a regenerate man. I do not believe that Paul is really referring to a Christian here at all because as we look closely at what Romans 7 is saying in light of what we've studied in Romans 6, it's not really possible that Paul is describing a Christian because if he's doing so then we will find that he is now contradicting many of the things that he has plainly stated in the sixth chapter. I believe that the seventh chapter is Paul's final effort in bringing a total and complete understanding of the inability of the law to have any part in our salvation.

Back in the sixth chapter, we read this verse. Verse 14, he said, For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace. I think that the seventh chapter is really an exposition of that statement that here in this seventh chapter, Paul is showing once and for all the utter impossibility of salvation by the law.

That's what I think the apostle is doing here. Now, remember, Paul is building a case. He kind of keeps going back over the same things, but he just goes over them from a different angle.

And what he's wanting to do is he's wanting to answer these questions. These are important questions. These were monumental questions, especially in the mind of the Jew.

And notice, Paul, he's speaking here in the seventh chapter to those who know the law. So his target audience in this chapter are Jews. He's talking to the people that are versed in the law.

Now, all the way through, he's been making these kinds of statements regarding the law. Chapter 3, verse 20 said, Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Then in verse 28, he said, Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Now, in this seventh chapter, he's going to set forth his final argument against salvation by the law. And I believe that what Paul is going to do is he's going to illustrate it by his own experience in the past. And so as Paul starts giving these descriptions of these different scenarios that we find ourselves in, he's actually talking about an experience that he himself had had.

And so he addresses this to those who know the law, and he reminds them that the law has dominion over you as long as you're alive, according to Judaism. But when a person died, of course, they were then released from the law. It no longer had that authority or that dominion over them.

So now he says through Christ, that's what's happened. Through the death of Christ, we having died with Christ, the law no longer plays a role. The law no longer has that kind of dominion.

So in the first six verses, this is what Paul is showing. He's showing that under the law, it was impossible really to bring forth the fruit that God was looking for. No matter how hard one might try to do what was right, the law was a continual voice of condemnation and disapproval.

See, that's what the law was. Now, remember, the Jews, they didn't get that. They kept thinking that somehow this law plays into our salvation.

And they just, every time Paul would imply something contrary to that, they just, oh, Paul, what are you saying? The law, this is God's law. But he's showing them that the law could never do anything but perpetually condemn us. Now, in verse five, this is what he says.

He says, for when we were in the flesh, now that's a key to understanding the chapter. When we were in the flesh, and we have to understand what he means by in the flesh. But listen to what he said, for when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

So, what does he mean by in the flesh? Paul is going to use this term several times over. He does not mean what we commonly think of when we use the term. Now, we use the term in a way that Paul doesn't use it.

And I don't know just exactly how we picked it up or who coined the phrase, but we all use it to some degree or another on occasion to describe our bad behavior. We say things like, man, I was so in the flesh today. You know, I was so, I was so mean to my wife.

I was in the flesh. Or I, you know, I just reacted in the flesh when that guy said that to me or whatever. You know, we're describing behavior that is inconsistent with a Christian's behavior.

So, what we're doing is we're saying we're in the flesh. We've reverted back to our old habits is really what we're saying. And fair enough, that's, that is what we're doing.

But we have to understand when Paul says in the flesh, that's not what he's talking about. When Paul uses this phrase in the flesh, he is actually referring to a person who is not in the spirit. He's referring to a person who's not saved.

Now, let me read to you from the eighth chapter, and you can get a clear understanding of what he means by just looking at these statements from chapter eight. He says, for those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh. But those who live according to the spirit, the things of the spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. Listen, so those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Now, listen to what he says. But you, believer, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you.

Now, if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. So you see here, Paul makes it clear when he uses this phrase in the flesh, he's talking about being an unregenerate person. He says to the believers, he says, you're not in the flesh, you're in the spirit, because the spirit of God dwells in you.

So having that understanding now, listen to what he says. For when we were in the flesh, he's describing his life before he was in the spirit. He's describing himself before he was born again, basically.

And this is the state, before we were born again, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. Now, this is an amazing thing. He says the sinful passions are actually aroused by the law.

Here's how twisted human nature is. We totally, as I mentioned in the past, but I want to reiterate it again, we totally underestimate our own depravity. We do not think that we are as bad as we really are.

None of us do. But we are so twisted, our nature is so twisted that the very laws that God gives to us that were not to violate provoke in us a desire to break them. That's how twisted human nature is.

That's what Paul is talking about here. The sinful passions are aroused by the law. The law says you shall not do it.

And your flesh says, oh, I'd like to do that. That's what happens. I can relate to this as a young man.

You know, I was just about as rebellious as you could get. If I saw something that told me not to do it, you could be absolutely certain that I would do exactly what I was told not to do. That was just the way I was.

If I was walking along the road and something said keep out or do not touch, you could be sure that's where you'd find me. Touching that thing, you know, crossing over the boundary line or whatever. The very command to not do it provoked in me the desire to do it.

That's human nature. Now he says, but now we have been delivered from the law having died to what we were held by so that we should serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Now, see, Paul says these are heavy things.

Remember, especially to the Jewish years, Paul is saying that the law actually provokes us to sin. Well, what is, what is Paul saying? Is the law sin? Paul responds. Do you think that's what I'm saying? He says, no, I'm not saying that.

He says on the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law for I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said you shall not covet. But sin taking opportunity by the commandment produced in me all manner of evil desire for apart from the law, sin was dead. You see what Paul is saying here is simply this.

I didn't know certain things were sin until I read the commandment not to do it. I didn't think I was even sinning. Then I saw the commandment not to covet.

And I realized, my goodness, I am full of covetousness. I'm overflowing with covetousness. And that's what he means when he says that sin by the commandment produced in me all manner of evil desire.

It wasn't that the law made the desire come. The law just brought out what was actually there. Now he says, for apart from the law, sin was dead.

You see, unless I know what I'm not to do, I'm not aware that this is a violation, that this is a transgression. So the law comes along and says, you shall not do this. Then all of a sudden we realize, oh my goodness, I've been doing a lot of things that are displeasing to God.

He says, I was alive once without the law. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment which I found, or the commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. I was alive once without the law.

What does Paul mean? Well, if you read Paul's testimony in Philippians chapter 3, he tells us an interesting thing there. He tells us about his background. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

He was a Pharisee. He was zealous for the law. And he said in regard to the law, he said that he was blameless in regard to the law, that he had blamelessly kept the law.

Now, Paul said that because like a good Pharisee, he mistakenly thought that the law only served to govern the outward actions. He didn't realize it was meant to govern the inward desire as well. If you were to take the time and research rabbinic literature, the Jews themselves, the rabbis themselves, they go out of their way to point out that sin is what you do, not what you desire to do or what you think to do.

They say the very opposite of what the New Testament says. So this is a place that Paul is in. He's in this place where he's alive.

Without the law, Paul was never without the law. He was a Jew. He was always under the law, but he was without a true understanding of it.

And once the true understanding was brought to him, the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Once Paul realized that, wait a second, this is to govern not just my outward activity. This is to govern my behavior, my desire as well.

He said, sin revived. What happened? Sin came to life. Oh my goodness, there's so much sin in me.

And it slew him. Sin revived and I died. The commandment, which was to bring life or which was ordained to life.

You remember, God had said in Leviticus 18.5, you shall keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them. And so the Jew thought this commandment is ordained to life. If you do it, you'll live.

But Paul says, that was true until I understood the extent of the law. And then when I understood it, the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And that which I thought was going to give me life, the law, it proved to actually bring about my death.

Now he reiterates in verse 12, the law is holy. The commandment is holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Is that what he's saying? This good law, is that the, again, is that the problem? Paul says no, but sin, that it might appear sin was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

The law just, as Paul had said earlier, you remember he said by the law is the knowledge of sin. That's what the law does. It brings to us the knowledge of sin.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. See, that's the problem. That's the reason that the law could never save anybody.

It wasn't because the law wasn't a good law. Paul says, please don't misunderstand me, fellow Jews, fellow Israelites. He says, no, the law, the problem is not the law.

The problem is with human nature. The law is spiritual, but I'm carnal. I'm sold under sin.

And because I'm carnal and sold under sin, I cannot live up to the standard that the law requires. And then he goes on and listen to what he says. For what I am doing, I do not understand.

For what I will to do that I do not practice, but what I hate that I do. If then I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

For I know that in me that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do.

But the evil I will not to do that I practice. Now, if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. What Paul is describing here is not what we normally think he's describing. We normally, reading this, think that he's describing the Christian's battle between the flesh and the spirit.

There's a definite similarity, and we have had similar experiences, but that's not really what he's describing here. You see, what Paul is describing here is the experience of a man under the conviction of sin. The experience of a man who comes to an awareness of the spiritual nature of the law, who's trying in his own power to keep those commandments.

Not everybody would necessarily have this kind of experience, but anyone who has been under any sort of a legal system and tried to approach God through that would probably have an experience very similar to what Paul is describing here. It's that place that you come to where you start to realize that you're not living up to the standard, and when you start to realize you're not living up to the standard, then you start to put forth more effort to do it, and then you find the harder you try, the worse it gets. You just keep failing over and over again.

That's what he's describing. How many of you guys came out of Roman Catholicism? There's a perfect example right there, because the Roman Catholic system is a system of works. Now, most Catholics don't even take the whole thing all that seriously.

They're just trusting the priest, and the pope, and everybody else. They're taking care of it for them, and the candles are being lit, and the Hail Marys are being said, and it'll all work out in the end, but occasionally you find a serious Catholic, devout Catholic, who starts to look at the reality of doing the right thing, and then is really beginning to put forth an effort to do it, but then anybody who's honest will tell you that this is what happens. The good that I want to do, I do not do.

The evil that I don't want to do, I do. What is happening? I had this experience myself. This is exactly what I went through.

I came out of my drugs, and teenage rebellion, and all the stuff I was doing. I came out of that back into Catholicism. I just got to a point where I knew that this is a dead-end street, what I'm doing, and the only thing I really knew as an alternative, and the only thing I really knew about God was Roman Catholicism, so I went back to the church, and for three years I tried to be a good Catholic boy, and I'll tell you what, I just about drove myself crazy.

I was right here with Paul. I would do the things I didn't want to do. I would swear I am never going to do that again, and I would find that there was always a point where something would break, and I would end up doing that same thing.

This is where Paul's at. He comes to an understanding that, wait, the law is spiritual. It's not, I'm not okay.

I've got a problem. I've got to do this. I've got to keep this, and then he starts putting forth the effort to do it, and he finds that the harder he tries, the more helpless and hopeless the case seems to be, because there is this law.

I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good, but he says, even though I delight in the law of God, according to the inward man, I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and listen carefully, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. Now, understand this. You see, verse 23 is the reason why we cannot accept this as a Christian testimony, because you have a man who has taught us already that we are liberated from captivity.

You have a man saying that he is in captivity. This cannot be Paul's experience as a believer. He's describing himself in that place, transitioning out of Phariseeism into being a true believer, but he's in that middle place.

There is, in the Bible, there is the spiritual mind and the carnal mind that we read about here in the eighth chapter, but there's a middle place, and I would refer to it as the convicted mind. Here is a mind that is under the conviction, but yet there's that inability to live up to the standard of the conviction. You see, there has to be something that happens to me.

There has to be something from the outside that comes in and empowers me, liberates me, that empowers me to live according to the standard, and that, of course, is where the gospel comes in, but let me remind you of what he said in the sixth chapter. He said in the sixth verse of the sixth chapter, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be the slaves of sin. You cannot reconcile that with verse 23, bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.

Captivity and slavery are the same thing. Verse 14 of chapter 6, for the law shall not have dominion over you, for you, or for sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace. Paul, in verse 23, he's describing a man under the dominion of sin.

Verses 17 and 18, but God bethink that though you were the slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered, and having been set free from sin, you became the slaves of righteousness. And then in verse 22, but now having been set free from sin and having become the slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness and the end everlasting life. So you see, in the sixth chapter, his whole point in the sixth chapter is that we were in slavery to sin, we're now set free.

But here in the seventh chapter, he's back in slavery to sin. How does that happen? It only happens if he is indeed describing his experience before his conversion, and I think clearly that's what he is describing. But he tells us the solution.

Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus is the answer. My deepest desire to do the right thing doesn't give me the power to do it.

I can't do it. And you know, there are people out there today who are serious about their religion. They might be Jews, they might be Muslims, they might be Catholics, they might be Hindus, they might be Buddhists, whatever.

They're serious about the religion, and they're trying to do their best. But if they're honest, everyone will admit that, no, I don't live up to the standard. I was talking to a Muslim guy a while back over at his work, one of these computer places.

He was working in there, and I struck up a conversation with him, and he was telling me that he was a Muslim, but his mother would be very disappointed in him because he's not a very good Muslim. And he just hasn't been able to live up to the standard. And he just expressed to me kind of what Paul is talking about here.

He just expressed his constant falling short of that standard. And it gave me a great opportunity to share the gospel with him because I just said to him, I said, you know what? Even if you could live up to that standard perfectly, that still isn't adequate. You need something beyond that.

You need a righteousness that God provides, and I was able to share Christ with him. But you see, it brings us once again back to the absolute necessity of the gospel, Jesus. I've got to have that outward or outside power come into my life.

I don't have it in myself. I'm carnal, sold under sin, but Jesus comes. Now listen to what Paul ends this chapter with, and this is another evidence that he's not describing himself as a Christian.

So then, so what's the sum total of what I'm telling you? That's what he's saying. This is what I'm telling you. He says, under the law, this is the best that you could possibly do with my mind, I serve the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.

You see, if this is a Christian, we're in big trouble, because as a Christian, then the best thing I can do is just want to serve God, want to please God in my mind, but I can't actually do it in my flesh, because in my flesh, I'm serving the law of sin. That's not a Christian. That's not Christianity.

That's legalism. That's law. You see, that's Paul's point.

The seventh chapter is his final statement on the inability of the law to contribute to a man's justification. All you could do under the law, the best you could do, the best you could ever hope for, is that in your mind, you could want to do it, but in your actual experience, you could never work it out, because of the sin issue. That's why we need the power of God from outside.

That's why we need the grace of God. That's where the gospel comes in, and that's where Christ enters our life, and he sets us free. Now, of course, the eighth chapter then goes on to speak now of another law.

We've been talking about this law of sin, this law of death, but then there's the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That's the law that we have now come under, and it's that law that frees me. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

So it's not any longer that the best I can hope for is just serving God with my mind, wanting to do the right thing. I can actually do it now. I can do it through the power of the Holy Spirit, and we will get to that when we get to the eighth chapter.

But we're going to come back to chapter seven, like I said, next week, because as I was looking over this today, I want to talk next week about legalism. Legalism is a deadly thing. We don't realize that about legalism.

A lot of times, you know, you'll see people in the body who are legalistic, and we'll point out, oh, that guy's so legalistic. Legalism is a very dangerous thing spiritually. Paul spent as much time or more fighting legalism as he did fighting license or, you know, people just living sinful lives.

He fought legalism just as tenaciously as he fought against the other things, because legalism is just another manifestation of the flesh, and legalism will keep you out of the experience of God's power and God's victory. And so I think it's important that we look more closely at legalism, and so we'll come back to chapter seven, and we'll look at it again, but from just a slightly different point of view. But know this, and rejoice in this, that we have been delivered, verse six, we have been delivered from the law.

We've died to what we were held by, so that we should live in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. You know, guys, the life in the Spirit is a beautiful life. It's a beautiful thing to live, and it's a beautiful thing to observe.

It's just a, it's like a flowing river. It's just, it's just the life of God carrying you away, and there's, there's not this strife, and there's not this heaviness, and there's not this legalistic thing, and this bondage, and all of this stuff. That's not what Jesus came to provide for us.

He came to bring us a new life in the Spirit. The law served its purpose. Its ultimate purpose was to lead people to Christ, and that's where it ends.

We come to Christ, He fills us with the Spirit, and we walk in victory through yielding to the Spirit, through sowing to the Spirit. And so, practically speaking, make that your, your goal. Sow to the Spirit.

We've talked about that before. Walk in the Spirit, because when you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. You won't do it, because you're in the Spirit, and the Spirit of God is leading you, and filling you, and empowering you, and enabling you to do those things that God desires for you to do.

Lord, we thank you for the life of the Spirit. We thank you that we're not under the law, and Lord, we see the, the utter futility of trying to be right through the efforts of the law, and we thank you that Jesus Christ, our Lord, has given us the Spirit of life, and that set us free from the law of sin and death. Lord, burn these things into our hearts.

Help us to understand the implications and the significance of these things, that we might truly be men walking in the Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

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