

Romans 7 - Bitter Tears

by F.J. Huegel

F.J. Huegel's sermon on Romans 7 explores the profound struggle between the law and grace, emphasizing the believer's need for Christ to overcome sin and live a victorious life.

Duration: 42:27

Scripture: Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 7:7, Romans 7:14, Romans 7:24, Romans 8:2, Romans 8:10

Topics: "Law And Grace", "Christian Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the theme of Romans 7, which he refers to as an Everest. He explains that the Apostle Paul presents a moral giant facing the demands of the law and expressing despair at his inability to fulfill them. The speaker emphasizes that many Christians spend their days in this state of fear and legalism, but there is nothing to fear because grace can do more than the law. He concludes by sharing a story from Watchman Nee's book, where a lifeguard hesitates to save a drowning person, highlighting the controversy surrounding Romans 7 and leaving the interpretation to the listeners.

Transcript

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Last evening, you will recall, we opened fire, as it were, along the line of the doctrinal chapters of the Bishops of Rome. Our theme was really Romans 6, which we called an Everest.

We saw why. We took time to trace the Apostles' thought from the beginning of the Epistle, placing, as he does all the world, under conviction of sin. Not that one is righteous, he goes on to say, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And then we saw the Gospel unfold, Paul taking us to the cross and showing us in what manner how the Lord found a way to be righteous, to be just, and yet to justify the sinner. For the demands of his law were fulfilled. His holy law, which could not have been passed over, were fulfilled in the bitter suffering and death of the only begotten of the Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly, not for the good, the good in the sense in which many attribute it to themselves. Of course, we know that they are mistaken, not for the good, for the ungodly.

That is to say, if we would receive, we must be willing to take the place assigned to us in the word. Sinners without hope save, of course, in the crucified, risen Lord Jesus. Then we saw how that the apostle faced up to another problem, the fruit of sin.

We said that sin not only engenders guilt, but it brings with itself slavery, constitutes itself in a governing principle in life, a law. We said that from Romans 6 on, it's no longer our sins. We see how they were taken care of, how the Lord dealt with our sins.

From Romans 6 on, it's no longer our sins, it's sin. It's the sinful nature, it's the old man. I say, in Romans 6, Paul takes us afresh to the cross, and it is revealed to us that the Savior not only bore our sins, put them away forever through the shedding of his most precious blood, but that he bore us.

That according to God's word, the old creation life, in a judicial sense, we know there's much sin still, sin abounds, much pride and wickedness, but in a judicial sense, the old creation life was terminated. If one died for all, all have died. As it is in the second epistle to the Corinthians, the fifth chapter, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Here we were saying last evening is the secret of victorious Christian living, a simple appropriation by faith of what we have here. And amen, a hearty amen on our part to this verdict of God that there on the cross, the old man, the old Adamic nature which has come to all of us, was terminated. We close by reading Paul's word in the 22nd verse of the sixth chapter.

Now being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. Now as we move into Romans 7, a problem presents itself. Exegesis, as the Bible teaches or wants to call it, or in a simpler manner, our mode of interpretation.

There is something very strange here. This is controversial ground. If you go to commentaries, you will find a variety of opinions regarding Romans 7. Well, I hope to enter, trusting that the Lord may guide, and I'm going to leave the judgment with you.

You may draw your own conclusion. As we were saying last evening, there are those who feel that this cannot be the voice of Paul the Apostle, for the one who speaks here descends from that peak, high peak in redemption, descends from that peak down into the sluice of despondency. How very strange.

What's the meaning of it? This one sheds bitter tears in the confession of his utter impotence, his utter inability to respond, to fulfill the demands of the law. He speaks of the law of avarice, thou shalt not covet. And in the Hebrew, it's indeed a very heart-searching word, for we're not to have desires other than the glory of God, that he might be glorified.

Now, that is indeed a very, very high standard in the face of human frailty. Thou shalt not covet. I see the one who speaks here coming face to face with the demands of this law, after a tremendous struggle, finally gives up.

We see this one in the depths of an abyss of utter despair, crying out and saying, O wretched man, who will deliver me from Yes, I delight in the law of God, but oh, how high it is! I delight in the law of God, thou shalt have no desires save that God be glorified. Why? I delight in the law of God, but I find in my members another law warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. Here we have it, the law of sin, which is in my members, and then that cry of despair.

I see there are many who feel that this just cannot be the voice of Paul, that it's just not possible to reconcile such a confession, such a state, with a great apostle, with a Gentile. I remember preaching on this some years ago down in Buenos Aires, and as you will discover shortly, it's my conviction that it's really Paul, and I made the statement at the close, there was a gentleman there beckoning, he wished to speak to me. Had I known for what purpose I would have let him go, but I didn't know, and so I beckoned to him to remain.

Greeting friends, and he remained. Ah. I have dishonored Paul! Well, there it is present.

No, I have not dishonored Paul. How could this be the voice of Saul of Tarsus? The voice of that Pharisee who, as it is here in Philippians, Philippians 3, goes on to say that that Pharisee, as touching the righteousness which is in the law, was blameless. Can't you just see that Pharisee all swelled up with pride? Ah, how scrupulous they were.

Of course we know in a very superficial way these Pharisees had never looked deep as Paul was able to do after becoming a Christian into the implications of God's law. Can't you just see that Pharisee blameless? Ah, yes. How blameless they were at touching the righteousness which is in the law.

And then, too, if this is the voice of Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, how are you going to explain the closing words of the chapter where this one cries out and says, Thank God for Jesus Christ, brethren. No. This is the voice of a Christian.

This is the voice of Paul, the Apostle. And there's a great lesson here. The Apostle in a mistaken position.

Ah, he learned through bitter tears. He himself states the doctrine in the early verses, the first verses of the chapter. He states the doctrine, but it's one thing to hold the doctrine and another to come clear through by actual experience.

What's the doctrine? Know ye not, brethren, for I speak to them that know the law, how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth. But if the husband be dead, she is free from the law of her husband. An analogy.

So then if while her husband liveth she is married to another, she shall be called an adulteress. But if her husband be dead, she is free from that law so that she is no adulteress though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ that ye should be married to another, even him who is raised from the dead, that ye should bring forth fruit unto God.

Some years ago, I forget, was it in the days of President Truman? I forget. It must have been an earlier period after World War II. There appeared there in Washington, the capital, a list of names, men, who there in the Korean War were missing.

For many months, the names of missing soldiers leaving wives not only with their grief but in a position altogether incongruous. They didn't know whether they were widows or not. The day came when by an edict these men were declared dead freeing in a legal way so many semi-widows from the position in which they found themselves.

Well, according to Paul's word here, an edict has gone forth from heaven. Had you thought of that? Declaring you dead, that is to say in relation to the law. Oh, you know, friends, we must think of what that

meant, especially to Jewish believers.

And Paul was a Jewish believer. Oh, the majesty, the glory, the power, utterly enthralled and subjected. Let's say an edict went forth from heaven declaring all believers dead in the body of Christ to the law that they might be married to another, to Jesus, the Lord, the risen Christ, that they might bring forth fruit unto God.

Now, the kind of fruit to which the apostle refers here is just not possible under the law. It's a very different form of service. You must! And then the apostle, to illustrate what happens to the Christian who fails to enter in fully into the meaning of this decree appropriating its significance, well, Paul says, here's my experience under the law.

And how we should praise the Lord for this confession. So very painful for the apostle. For there is a strong tendency in all of us as Christians to overlook this decree, forget this decree, to fail to appropriate its significance turning to law.

I say there's a strong tendency because in a way, law is more favorable in this sense. So long as I'm on this ground, legal ground, there is room for vanity, I can glory in my own efforts. I have achieved! Praise God! I... No, I first say you have achieved.

I congratulate you. Paul didn't. But you have, have you? Perhaps Abraham has something to glory in, but not before God.

Do you remember the word? Oh, you've achieved, have you? Well, you're one in ten million. So long as you're on this legal ground, well, flesh. Hmm? I... And that's what we have here, Romans 7. You have a great big... Oh my, how inflated it is! Swirled up to such dimensions.

Well, Christ hardly appears, just at the close. It's Paul under law struggling to attain. Yeah, but the law is weak.

Paul goes on to say so. And he's very careful to protect because, of course, the law was given by divine intervention. He says it's good, it's spiritual, it's just, it's holy.

I'm not saying that it's not. But, and here's the amazing thing, brethren, I'm going to read it. Was then that which is good made death unto me, God forbid, but sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sin.

He says the law is good. The law, of course, is righteous, just, holy. But it's impotent, weak.

All that it really does, Paul goes on to say, is to aggravate the disease Perhaps you don't like this. It takes considerable training to come into this, brethren. I was for years before I could really enter into this.

The law really aggravates. Now, you don't wonder that the Jews, we spoke last night about how they hated Paul. Now they haven't reason to hate him yet more.

Paul, do you know what you're saying? Yeah. No remedy in the law. On the contrary, things get worse.

And they do. Under law, the law worketh wrath, the apostle goes on to say. And writing to the Corinthians in the second chapter, toward the close, you will recall how he says, it's the strength of sin.

Where is it? Has it ever occurred to you? He says it's in the law. Think of it. Think of the revolutionary mood of the apostles thought of Jews.

The strength of sin is in the law. But Paul, do you know what you're saying? Now parents understand. Oh, how careful they have to be with their children.

How careful they have to be. Law is impotent. To get around that somehow.

Because, you know, often you aggravate. Oh, I remember our boy, praise God, he outgrew it all. He's preaching the gospel now.

But when he was a little one, if you said no, he'd throw himself on the floor and pound the floor with his head. You didn't dare say no. Oh, you know, some years ago we were just going to solve the great problem worldwide, the curse of liquor.

Ah, yes, the law. Even more, an article in the Constitution. Ah, the end of saloons and breweries and drunkenness and the like.

The end. The end. Well, later on we concluded it was worse.

For the reason that now we had not only a drunkard, but he was a criminal breaking the law along with his drunkenness. Ah, yes, brethren. The law aggravates.

You know, there are diseases which physicians, in order to cure, have to aggravate. So that the disease might come fully to a head. Now the cure.

Well, that's all due really of the law. Provoking. The law working right.

That sin might become exceedingly sinful. The commandment. Do you know what you're saying? By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Please turn the tape over at this time. I say in Romans 7 we have the very giant, moral giant, face to face with the demands of the law, thou shalt not pass. And oh, how he struggles.

He throws in all that he's got. And he hath a plenty. But he finally gives up.

With that cruel, wretched man. Man. Brethren, I fear how many of our dear fellow Christians spend their days in Romans 7. Spend their days.

They're afraid to come out of a legal system. Cut loose. They fear that, well, what might happen? But, friend, there's nothing to fear.

Grace can do infinitely more than the law. Look what grace does. It unites you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He becomes your life. And now it's no longer legal injunctions. With Christ is your life.

Well. As John says, he that saith he is in him ought to walk as he walked. But now.

Now it's a walk in the spirit. My friend. The best commentary I've ever found on Romans 7. It's in one of Watchman Nee's books, I think, The Normal Christian Life.

He tells this great Chinese pastor in prison because of communism. How he was at a camp with young people, the late. They were out, many of them swimming.

And then came a cry for help. This one was going down. On the shore stood the lifeguard, rigid.

Never moved. And this one crying for help. And when he was going down for the last time, they go down.

And shortly brought this dear one to the shore. Watchman Nee says that he approached the lifeguard to reprimand him. He said you should have plunged him at once.

This one might have lost his life. No. You do not understand.

I had to let him exhaust himself. And then how easy it was. And Watchman Nee goes on to say that I've just been reading Romans 6. The Lord Jesus standing there all the time.

All the time. Waiting for just the moment. And when Paul comes to the end of himself and it's no longer Paul.

And he's willing to let the Lord Jesus be his all in all. Then he cries out saying. Thank God for Jesus Christ.

The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Now it's a different law. Please observe.

The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That set me free from the law of sin and death. And now we may enter upon Romans 8. Like I said last night.

It's a thousand hallelujahs. And indeed. And just note how different.

In Romans 7 it's just a great inflated self. I'm going to lick this thing. Let's see.

Well in Romans 8. It's no longer Paul. He says. I am crucified together with Christ.

Nevertheless I live. Dancing all over the place. And coming to that great final hallelujah.

Saying we are more than counselors to him who loves us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come. Nor height nor depth.

Nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God. Which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So you see the doctrine Paul had.

He had to come through. On the ground of actual experience. Of all.

What bitter deeds. So friends. Romans 6 and Romans 7. Are one in the sense.

He already announces Romans. 7 in Romans 6. And that was Paul's custom. We read in Romans 6.14. We are not under the law.

But that had to be expounded. And it had to. Be wrought into the very fabric of Paul's being.

Yes. According to the decree. Of heaven.

In the body of Christ we have all died to the law. We might be married to another. Think of it.

Being married to the Lord Jesus Christ. What befalls a humble maid. Poor.

Humble maid. Who marries some millionaire prince. Well at one blow.
She steps right into all. His wealth. And glory.
So that's what happened to us. Oh how we hate to give up law. Because you know.
So long as you're there. There's room for old self to just. Fight it out.
And see if. Old self. The long long road.
To the end of self. The long road. Yes.
That's why so many never come out. Because really. You not only die to sin.
Oh it's a double death isn't it. There's just nothing. No room.
No ground left for you. It's an utter and an absolute. Liquidation.
Oh but it's wonderful. Because. Now you're married to another.
Let the prince step in. And carry the load. Let the prince carry the load.
Let him go before. Just accept his. Verdict.
There where he says without me you can do nothing. OK Lord. I accept it.
Now it's up to you. Now it's up to you. You say it.
I accept it. Look where that places you. Now it's up to you Lord.
Oh it's still Paul. It's still Paul. It's an even greater Paul.
Of course. This Paul who goes on to say it is no longer I but Christ. Ah.
It's a greater Paul. Ah it's the Paul that achieved. He shook.
History and no other man. Of course we do not make comparisons with the Son of Man. It's still Paul.
Ah but it's Paul with a new center. Now it's. Christ filling the entire horizon.
First and the last day. Beginning at the end. Now you rest.
He that hath entered into his rest. Hath ceased from his own works even as he did from his. What does that mean? Why it's up to him.
Let him work out his plan. You cease from your own works. Hmm.
He's going to work out his. Isn't that great? You rest. The rivers of living water flow.
Now I leave it up to you to judge. Not only that but oh friends. Let's move in.
Let's accept it. Let's accept it. If not bitter tears.
If not friends. All right. Work it out on the basis of self.

Throw in all you've got. See how far you get. You'll be.
Ten years from now right where you are right now. No you'll be. Oh my.
You'll be all bloody and worn out. Hmm. You will have thrown up the sponge a hundred times.
Down the road. Ah it's wonderful. You just rest.
And you can say with Paul. I can do all things now. He goes home before.
Gracious Father. How we thank thee. How we thank thee.
For that full Lord. Victory. How that the Savior not only.
Took us out of self as to sin. But took us out of law. Out of self as to law.
That he might be our all and in all. Our very life. The fountainhead of our being.
We resting in him as days. And he going on before. He getting all the glory.
And all the praise. We being nothing. Bring us to that Father.
We humbly ask to our Lord.

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