

# Understanding Romans 7

by Zac Poonen

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*This sermon delves into the significance of the 10th commandment in Exodus 20, focusing on the internal struggle of covetousness and unconscious sin that even the most righteous individuals like Paul faced. It emphasizes the need for self-awareness and reliance on Jesus to overcome unconscious sin, drawing parallels to the process of conquering Canaan little by little. The message highlights the distinction between conscious and unconscious sin, urging believers to seek continuous transformation and freedom through Christ despite the ongoing battle with hidden sins.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:17, Mark 10:19, Romans 7:14, 1 John 1:7, Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 4:4, Matthew 25:40

**Topics:** "Covetousness", "Transformation through Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

I mentioned about the 10th commandment God put there, knowing that nobody could keep it. Why didn't he stop with nine commandments? The nine commandments he could keep because it is all external. But in order for God to tell people, that's not the end of the law by the way, you have to deal with the inside, he gave that 10th commandment.

So let me read that 10th commandment to you. First of all, it's in Exodus and chapter 20. All the 10 commandments are listed in Exodus 20, beginning with, you know, I'm the Lord your God and there's no other gods, no worship idols, and don't take the name of the Lord in vain, keep the Sabbath and there were four commandments that are related to God and the remaining six related to man.

And the 10th one, see all the others he could keep, but Exodus 20, 17, you shall not desire your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or his business or his daughter. Every girl who walks down the road is your neighbor's daughter. You shall not desire her or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

And when Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10, and he asked, how can I pray then? The Lord said, look, I have eternal life. The Lord said, keep the commandments. Then Jesus listed the commandments.

Notice in Mark 10 verse 19, Jesus told this rich young ruler, you know the commandments. He didn't mention the first ones because Jews were all God-fearing people and they feared God and they would keep those first four commandments that related to God. There was no problem with that.

But the other commandments, you see here in Mark 10 and verse 19, you notice that he didn't mention the 10th commandment at all. Notice that, it's very significant. He did not mention the 10th commandment.

He just left it out. Why did he do that? Because he knew nobody could keep it and there's no point asking him. But then when he said, I've kept all this, the Lord said, okay, there's one more thing you need to deal with.

You have a covetousness for your money. You shall not, and he said, go and sell all that, then you will have treasure in heaven. And then he went away.

There was a rich young man who failed in the 10th commandment. He could have come to the Lord and said, Lord, I'm sorry, I find a great desire in me for something which you told me not to desire. I should not love money more than I love God.

And the Lord would have helped him. I'll tell you about another rich young ruler who came to Jesus. That's Paul.

Paul came from a very rich family and he was a young man. But when the other rich young ruler missed the bus, Paul did not miss the bus. In Mark chapter, sorry, Romans chapter seven, Paul is the person who said, according to the righteousness of the law, I'm blameless.

It means he kept all those nine commandments right from his childhood. He was a very God-fearing man. He never disobeyed any of those nine commandments.

But here you find he's honest in Romans seven. And he says, I'm a flesh, verse 14, please look at verse 14, Romans seven, verse 14. My flesh is sold into bondage to sin.

I'm not sold, my flesh, I am a flesh which is sold into the bondage to sin. What I'm doing, he says, I don't understand sometimes. He's talking about unconscious sin, where I do something and afterwards I realize, hey, that was wrong.

But I didn't plan to do it, it just came out, which shows that my flesh is in bondage to sin. And I'm sure we all have had that experience. Because I'm doing something which I actually hate, but I ended up doing it.

Now he says, if I do the very thing I don't want to do, I agree with the law that it is good, then it is no longer I doing it, but sin that dwells in me. So in Romans seven, verse 14 to 25, he's talking about two types of sins that he's conscious of, and which he's unconscious of, which suddenly comes out without his permission, as it were. And we all have that experience.

Conscious sin is where you know something is wrong, you know it's wrong to tell a lie, you know it's wrong to cheat, you know it's wrong to lust after a woman, and you still do it. That's not unconscious, that's conscious. But there are so many other things which I do something, and afterwards I realize, oh boy, that

was a very selfish thing for me to do.

I don't want to be selfish, but I ended up doing something very selfish. That's an example. So he says, I know, verse 18, that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh.

Christ was living in Paul's heart. So in my heart, Christ dwells, I'm a new person, born again, but in my flesh, nothing good dwells. And the flesh is the source of all the unconscious sin that comes forth from us.

But he says, the willing is present with me, that I really want to please God, but very often I find I'm not doing it. Because the good that I want to do, I don't do, but I practice the very evil that I don't want. Remember, as you read this, he is dealing with unconscious sin.

It's not that I don't want to steal, but I steal. That's not what he's talking about. He did not steal.

I don't want to tell a lie, but I tell a lie. That's not it. That's conscious.

He's not talking about the first nine commandments. He's talking about the 10th, unconscious sin. And the good that I want to do, I do not do.

The evil that I don't want to do, I do. So it goes on to say in verse 20, that proves that it's not me that's doing it, but the sin that dwells in me. And he talks particularly about lusting here, earlier on in verse 7 onwards, he talks about the same 10th commandment.

The law had said to me, the last part of verse 7, you shall not covet. You shall not desire what is not yours. But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting or lusting of every kind.

And he goes on to say that this covet and lust is the same thing. You shall not covet is you shall not lust. You can paraphrase the 10th commandment as you shall not lust after things that God doesn't want you to have.

But he says that was very alive in me. So he says, what Paul is saying is when I said, I'm righteous according to the law, meant the first nine commandments. I just could not keep the 10th.

Look at the honesty of this man. I want to keep it, but I couldn't keep it. And so the commandment deceived me, verse 11, and killed me.

But he doesn't stop there. He says, I agree, verse 22, with the law of God in the inner man. I know this is right.

I'm just not able to keep it. But because of this other law in the members of my body, in my flesh, which is fighting against the law of my mind and imprisoning me again in the area of unconscious sin. And look what he says.

What a wretched man that I am. How can I be set free from this body which is full of spiritual death? He has a tremendous longing to be completely free, even from unconscious sin. That's the mark of a man of God.

He doesn't sit back and say, oh, well, that was unconscious. It doesn't matter. No, that person is not a man of God.

A man of God is one who says, I want to be free completely. Whenever God gives me light, I want to deal with it. But how will I be free? I can't.

It's too powerful for me. And he says, there is a solution. Thanks be to God.

Who shall set me free? That's the question. From this unconscious sin in my life, who will set me free from this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. He says, the Lord can set me free.

But he doesn't do it in a moment. He does it little by little by giving us more and more light on our unconscious sins. Something like the conquering of Canaan, like the conquest of Canaan.

Little by little, they've killed one giant and then they occupy his land. And then they kill another giant and occupy his land. It's like that that we deal with unconscious sin.

The giants that they could not see, how could they kill him? They could only kill the giants in Canaan that they saw. There were two types of giants in Canaan, those they saw and those they did not see way up in the north. So that's similar to conscious sin and unconscious sin.

But they're giants they could see, they could kill. God would never hold them, ask them, why in the world haven't you killed those giants up in the north? They could say, Lord, we haven't seen them yet. God will not hold you responsible for unconscious sin in your life.

The blood of Jesus takes care of that. I don't know whether you've noticed that. Let me come back to Romans 7, but first turn to 1 John chapter 1. You've got to read the Bible exactly.

In 1 John chapter 1, it says, if we walk in the light, verse 7, 1 John 1 7, so let me tell you, first of all, in verse 9, he's speaking about conscious sin. If we confess our sins, but you cannot confess what you don't know. So we can say, if we confess our conscious sin, he's faithful and just give us in to cleanse us.

We understand that. Now come to verse 7, if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, that's the perfect light of God, we have fellowship with the Father. That means only in our conscious area, I still don't get light in areas of my life where God has not shown me what's wrong in my life, what is un-Christlike, but I'm still walking in the light that I have.

And then it says here, the blood of Jesus cleanses me from all sin. Not from the sin I confess, because I did not confess anything there. Confession is in verse 9. What is all sin, mentioned in verse 7, that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from? Have you ever thought of that? That's not the sin you confess.

That's verse 9. This is the sin that is in you, even when you're walking in the light, there's no darkness. You're not walking in the darkness. You're walking in the perfect light that you have, the measure of light you have, of God, and yet there is sin in you, that's unconscious sin.

But the blood of Jesus takes care of that. That's why we can stand before God. You can't stand before God even with unconscious sin, but he cleanses it away in the blood.

Now we come back to Romans 7, here is a person who is really longing, he's not satisfied that the outside of my cup is clean. He says, Lord, I'm not happy, wretched man that I am, my inside is dirty. How will I ever be free from that? That's what I want to be free from.

And he says, thank God there is a way. Jesus Christ will deliver me. So what is the conclusion then? It's a very important verse, and much misunderstood by most Christians that I've met.

Romans 7, 25. So then, on the one hand, by my mind, I serve the law of God. That means in my conscious area, I seek to obey God completely.

But in my flesh, the unconscious part of me where I don't have light, is doing a whole lot of sinful things that I don't even know are sin. We have to acknowledge that. That is acknowledging that I have not become like Christ in the inner area of my life where I don't have light.

I'm seeking to walk in the light that I have, seeking to walk as Jesus walked, in purity, in the external conscious area of my life. But the unconscious area, I know the law of sin is running my life. But Romans 8.1 is actually the last verse of Romans 7. Don't read it separately.

Read Romans 8.1 as Romans 7.26. It's the law of sin. So Paul, you should be condemned then. No! There is no condemnation, because I'm in Christ and I'm not committing conscious sin.

You understand that? When you read the scripture carefully, you find it's very exact. And that's a great liberation for us. Lord, I realize I'm not like you in many inner areas of my life, which I don't even know.

I acknowledge it. But wherever I know, I confess it, forsake it, and there is no condemnation for me. I live without condemnation.

It's a very important passage of scripture that all of us must enjoy the blessing and benefit of. Because so many Christians, the devil nags them and nags them and nags them, saying, see, you're not perfect. You're not perfect.

Well, not perfect. So what? In my conscious area, I seek to walk with God. Let me show you this verse also in 1 Corinthians, in Chapter 4, where Paul gives his testimony.

It's exactly the same words in a different—it's been true in different words. 1 Corinthians 4.4. 1 Corinthians 4.4. I am conscious of nothing against myself. With my mind, I serve the law of God, like we read in Romans 7.25. I'm conscious of nothing.

My conscience is absolutely clean. Every known sin I've confessed and forsaken, the blood of Jesus has cleansed me. But that doesn't mean I'm declared righteous, acquitted.

No. It doesn't mean I'm righteous in my unknown parts of my life, because the one who examines me in the most part of my life is the Lord. Paul recognizes that there's unconscious sin in him.

That's what keeps us humble, the awareness that in my flesh there is a law of sin working in me. And in our personal relationships, someone who has walked with God more will obviously have more light on the unconscious areas of his life that have come to light. And so he will be able to see in us sins that we don't see ourselves.

It's just like a 10th grade student will know more about mathematics than a first grade student, because he's learned more. So a man who walks with God will have more light on these unconscious areas of sin. He's not perfect yet, but he's got more light on certain unconscious areas of his life that he didn't have light on before.

I'll give you one example in my own life. I've mentioned this before in a number of messages. There was a brother in our church in Bangalore, a young brother.

He was from a Catholic family. He used to come to our church, and he used to sleep often in our church. The meetings were in my house, and so he would sleep in our house at night after the meeting because it was too late for him to go home.

He ate with us, and we took care of him for years. Then he got a good job. He was studying in college.

He finally got a good job and moved away from Bangalore elsewhere. And for years and years, we never heard from him. And I began to think, what type of guy is this? We did so much for him when he was here, and he doesn't seem to have any gratitude for all that we did.

He doesn't even write a thank you note. And the Lord spoke to me saying, you are the one who is guilty. I said, me, Lord? What did I do? We helped him so much.

You are expecting him to say thank you to you. That's a sin. I never knew that until then.

I thought it was totally okay. And the Lord said, haven't you heard my word, which says, in as much as you have done this, Matthew 25, to the least of these my brothers, the Lord says, you have done it unto me. What you do to my brothers, the Lord says, you have done it unto me.

So you did not do it to that brother. You did it for me, says the Lord. And if you did it for me, the Lord said, then who should be thanking you, me or that brother? I got light.

That I must never expect thanks, thank you from anyone on earth. Because even if I do it to the least of God's children, I'm doing it as unto the Lord. That delivered me from expecting gratitude and thank you from people.

Now you ask yourself, whether even though you may not say it, whether inwardly you get a bit disturbed that somebody didn't come and say thank you, even though you did some great work for them. You need to get light. I got that light.

And I pray all of you will get that light. If you've done it to the least of Jesus' brothers, he said, you've done it unto me. Expect your gratitude from him.

And he will express his gratitude to you one day when he comes again. But if you go around expecting gratitude from each other, I don't know what will happen. You'll make your own life miserable.

So that's some of the truth that we get from here, you know, from the passage we were reading about the outside of the cup is clean, but the inside is dirty. The inside should become clean little by little. One last illustration.

To illustrate conscious and unconscious, I've used the example of an ice cube. An ice cube in a dark grape juice or something, a glass, where the lower part of the ice cube is not visible. Only 10% of that ice cube is visible.

90% is invisible under the surface. So what do you do with that? If you could take a knife and slice off that top 10% of that ice cube, what will happen? Something which is hidden will come up. That's how an ice cube is.

There will always be that 10% on the surface. When you slice off that 10%, another bit will come up. That's a picture of how we deal with conscious sin, that 10% of our life.

Something that is unconscious will come up. Then we can deal with that. And when we deal with that and finish with it, something more will come up.

Of course, this is a huge ice cube, what is called our flesh. It will take ages before we finish with it. It's probably not 10%, 90% under the surface, but 99.99% is under the surface.

We see only 0.01% above. But that's the principle. If I deal with what I see, I get light on a thing that is hidden.

It's like in the land of Canaan. If you kill the giants you can see, you can go to other territory and see the new giants, which you never saw before, and occupy that territory too. So Romans 7, 14-25 is a passage much misunderstood.

I hope you understood something today which can apply to your life. Thank you.

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