



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 8 – What the Law Can and Can't Do | Romans Chapter 7

How do we wrap our minds around grace? If facts were enough, Romans 6 and 7 would only need to be two short sentences: *Sin can't control you. The Law won't save you.* But Paul isn't dispensing facts—he is relating to real life. And living by grace is more caught than taught.

Put yourself in with the Christians hearing Paul's letter for the first time. The room is crowded and you're lucky to get a spot on the floor near a corner. You've been sitting, cross-legged and leaning against the wall, intently listening for a few hours. You could read it faster by yourself, without interruption—but this letter is for *everyone*. Besides, these people feel like family.

You're tracking with Paul's train of thought (mostly) and wishing you could write this stuff down. You would've brought a journal or your smart phone but they aren't invented yet. So a few take turns reading aloud. Occasionally they stop and discuss what Paul wrote, then spend some time praying together. Turns out, this first-century small group is a lot like yours back home!

Icebreaker

You're in class and the teacher is explaining a complex equation or subject. What are you doing?

Taking notes Being Politely Attentive Texting Daydreaming Nodding off

Goals for this Session:

- Discover the distinctions between grace, law, and legalism.
- Consider how a new life in Christ is possible and what it produces.
- Pray for grit and grace to live out the gospel in your sphere of influence.

Grace, Law, and Legalism

Romans 7:1–13

The Bible conveys truth in simple ways we can understand. In chapter 6, Paul’s analogy of a slave emphasized his point that sin is not your Master. In this chapter, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to emphasize his point that the law is not your Master.

1. Since Paul is focused on explaining our relationship with Christ, he does not sidetrack into a detailed discussion of marital law.* He’s still talking about grace.

- a. **A simple illustration** (verses 1–6). Paul knew how difficult it was to unlearn deeply held convictions, particularly when it came to the Law. Even though he was frequently accused of teaching against the Law (Romans 3:8) it was *legalism* he preached against.

Paul did *not* say that the Law died—it still lives! What purpose does it serve? Use the following verses for help with your answer.

Matthew 5:17–18

Hebrews 4:12–13

2 Timothy 3:16–17

- b. **A new life** (verses 4–6). Paul uses marriage to illustrate how a new life in Christ is possible and what an intimate relationship with Him produces. If someone who is unfamiliar with Bible language asked, would you be able to explain what Paul was talking about? Do your best to explain (or find out for yourself) what this means.

- c. **Old habits die hard.** When it comes to doing the same things, we’re prone to do them the same way. What parts, if any, of Paul’s teaching are new to you, or different in some way? What parts, if any, are “fuzzy”?

How did Paul say essentially the same thing to a different church on another occasion? (Try reading it in a different version, like the New Living Translation or *The Message*.)

Galatians 3:2–6

Good to Know

Legalism is excessive or improper use of the Law. It’s thinking that obeying the Law is what saves you, or keeps you saved. It is a flawed system of gauging God’s acceptance of you based on how good you are at following the rules.

* The topic of marriage and divorce is covered in Matthew 5, Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 7, and Ephesians 5.

2. Even from 600 miles away in Corinth, Paul could still see the elephant in the room! “I know what you’re thinking,” says Paul, “and the answer is no. The Law is certainly not sin.”

- a. Read verses 7–13 a few times to catch the drift of what Paul says about the function of the Law. If possible, read it in a few different versions. Consider the following statements.

The Law is good and exposes sin. In what way?

Sin is a parasite, using the Law to produce death. In what way?

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

covet (*epithuméo*) Inner desire so strong that it dominates your thoughts and actions.

flesh (*sarkós*) Unsaved; sinful nature; the “natural” man.

newness (*kainótes*) of Spirit; the “spiritual” man; saved.

carnal (*sarkikós*) Weak; human nature is still subject to fleshly desires.

inward man (*anthropos*) Mind, soul and spirit which is being renewed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

- b. Paul chose the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet” (Deuteronomy 5:21) for his example. When you think about it, coveting is a *gateway sin* to the other sins. How so?

- c. In a way, the Law is God’s diagnostic tool. God’s Word reveals all that is in our heart, good and bad (Hebrews 4:12). It gives us insight into our own life—what’s broken, what needs to change, and what absolutely must go.

Do you have a particular Bible verse or section of Scripture that has been like a diagnostic tool for you? In what way? Note it here.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

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.

Romans 7:6 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

The Conflict of Two Natures

Romans 7:14–25

Some people stir up trouble and make our lives difficult. We would do anything to please them, but they always take advantage. We go along with their schemes—and to our dismay, we end up being used and confused. What came over us? *Never again*, we say. But we can't seem to get away from that troublemaker. Why? (You guessed it.) They are us.

1. Paul explained that the Law exposes sin and draws it out of us like a magnet. Our trouble is not with the Law, which is holy and good. Our trouble is with our own sinful nature.

- a. When Paul said he was “of the flesh” (verse 14), what did he mean?

- b. How does Paul describe the conflict we experience (verses 15–17)?

“Satan’s only real hope to control my life is me. We labor under the misguided notion that Satan wants us to do his will. Satan has no will in our lives. He only wants us to do *our* will. We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

Mark Rutland

Holiness: The Perfect Word to Imperfect People

- c. How does Paul describe our sin nature (verses 18–23)?

2. Describing our sin nature, Paul said, “I find this principle at work: although I want to do good, evil is *right there with me*” (verse 21 NIV).

The Greek word for “evil” described what is rotten, decomposing, or corrupt. In military lingo, it was the term for a soldier who falls back and cowardly retreats in battle. In what way does this fit the kind of battle that Paul had in mind?

Ephesians 6:10–11, 13

2 Timothy 2:4

3. *How the gospel changes everything.* Paul's self-portrait demonstrates what every Christian must come to terms with. God saved us by grace. God grows us by grace. When we remember that God will be faithful to complete His good work in us (Philippians 1:6), the gospel is good news all over again.

a. **The gospel is incentive to walk in the Spirit** (verse 24). God did not save us by grace and send us back to the Law. But sometimes we behave like it. When the enemy spots a chance to confuse our understanding of grace, he is faster than ants on a picnic.

Consider all the years Paul lived by the Law. Who tried harder than Paul? He could remember as a young man how hard he tried, and how vile he became (Acts 26:5–11).

Even as a mature Christian and chosen apostle, the drive to succeed was ingrained in Paul—strong traits used mightily by God, that he consistently needed to yield to the Holy Spirit's control.

“The desire to sin and to violate the loving, wise commandments of God is just our nature—the combustible, evil, sinful nature inside of us. No exceptions.

We daily, even hourly, need the Holy Spirit's help to effectively live the Christian life.”

Greg Laurie

Does any of this resonate with your experience? In what way?

Walking in the Spirit will keep us vigilant—but walking in the flesh can make us vigilantes. Explain the difference between trying to live for God in our own strength and letting God's Spirit live through you.

Ephesians 5:15–17

Galatians 5:16–18

b. **The gospel is incentive to rejoice!** (verse 25). Paul gave us plenty of food for thought and prayer in this chapter. As the church, we are the Bride of Christ. How does the image of belonging to Christ in marriage motivate you to live to please Him?

Ephesians 5:25–27

Revelation 19:6–9



Gospel at a Glance: The Law Cannot Save from Sin | “Paul bemoaned his inability to help himself. Remember how he said it? “I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15 NASB). If it were possible to do better on our own, we wouldn’t need God. We would simply follow the golden rule and all would be fine. The problem is that we are fallen and bent towards sinful choices. There are none who seek God; no, not one (Romans 3:10–12). If this weren’t the case, God never would have sent His Son to die for us; instead, he could have just told us to be good. As a matter of fact, that was what the whole *Moses on Mt. Sinai* thing was about. The Ten Commandments were essentially God telling us to help ourselves. It didn’t even last ten minutes, and then there was a drunken orgy and a golden calf followed by complete and total anarchy. Paul didn’t finish his outburst by saying, “I guess I’ll just try harder . . .” Instead he said, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25 NASB).

The message of the gospel isn’t try; it’s *trust*.”¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another Scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Levi Lusko, *I Declare War: Four Keys to Winning the Battle with Yourself*, (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson) ©2018 Levi Lusko

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