

June 13, 2021 - Kent Stiles

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Preacher: Kent Stiles

[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Good week to be together. I do thank the Lord for safety for all those that were at camp, my family included.

And I think it was always neat to see the word go out and to see souls saved. And just think about the position that those campers were in when they came to camp and where they're at. Positioning with God when they left. And think about that with what Nikki had shared. And it's just a really exciting thing to see someone who places their trust in the Lord.

So if you have your Bibles this morning, I would invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 7. We're approaching the middle of the book that we've been studying here for several months. And Romans chapter 7, verses 13 and following.

And let me tell you what this text is about. This, many people will consider this to be one of the more problematic or difficult or, you know, I don't want to use the word controversy.

[1 : 05] I don't like that word. But you do study on this and you'll see many different interpretations or viewpoints from this. And so it can be a difficult text or problematic text for some.

And I think I'll tell you why that is. Let me ask you the question this morning. How many times have you seen this scenario? That you have a man or a woman who becomes converted.

They learn. They learn to the truth of God within the people of God. They sing praises to God. They begin to serve in the body of Christ. Their heart is overjoyed at the new life that they have found.

And then, what, does it stop there? No, they slowly, as they go through that, and surely they find out about their sin. And they find out that their sin is back.

And that you can still become lustful or greedy or angry. That you can still find yourself maybe saying curse words.

[2 : 06] Maybe you find yourself on the interstate and you're still using some of the hand gestures that were supposed to be put to death. Do we see that happen? You know, maybe it doesn't happen as often.

Maybe we feel worse about it. Maybe we find ourselves maybe being a little more quick to repent. But what we see is that even though you have a new heart, you have an old body that has never been converted.

Have any of you discovered that? Do you see that true in your life? You know, that your sin is still present? I know I do. You know, well, Romans 7, it is the narrative of that experience from the Apostle Paul.

And he's going to tell us about that in the first person. And the context of Romans 7 is that in Romans chapter 6, Paul shows us of the grace of God that saves us.

That it does not open us up to a life of sin and an abuse of the grace of God. And that our conversion brings us into a new obedience. That we're not just saved by grace, but that we are under grace.

[3 : 18] Last week, Jeffrey shared, and he had a great analogy with Amir, and he did a really good job with the text. And we saw that Paul, if we look at it, he goes into the past tense, to his unbelieving days when referencing the law, and he showed that all the law did was to make him aware of his sin or to stir up sin.

It was not something that made him submit. It was something that he rebelled against. The law showed him his sin and his drive to Christ, his need for Christ.

And so this week, Paul is going to speak to us in the present tense. The I and the me, the pronoun, they're there, but they're in the present tense. And Paul is going to say that we had better be under the grace of God because we can't keep the law.

As unbelievers, we can't keep the law. As believers, we can't keep the law. We still cannot keep the law. We can't keep it. And Paul's going to show this conflict.

And we're going to see his outpouring of this inward struggle that I think all believers, I know that all believers have within themselves. You see, Paul is every believer.

[4 : 36] And that's what we're going to look at this morning. So before we get in the verses, let's go ahead and pray this morning. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to come together, Lord. We thank you for bringing us together as a body to look at your word, Lord, to look at the book here of Romans and to ask, Lord, that our eyes would be open, ears would be open, Lord, that we would see this for what you have for us, Lord.

Just pray that the message would be clear, that it would be accurate, Lord. And just ask that you would watch over us here for the next 25 or so minutes. We ask this in your name. Amen.

Well, in verse 13, Paul's going to ask a question. He's going to ask the question, does the law make me sin? Does the law itself make me sin? And he made this statement in chapter 7, verse 7 and 8, that the law of God was not something that he could obey, that it was a standard against which he rebelled.

And so now the question is asked, and he anticipates or assumes the rebuttal. You're saying to me then, Paul, that the law of God makes you sin?

Is that what you're saying? Are you saying that the law of God makes you do evil? That sounds like that's what you're saying. Well, he says this in verse 13. He says, therefore, did that which is good become a cause of death for me?

[5 : 54] May it never be. Rather, it was sin. In order that it might be shown to be sin, by affecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment, sin would become utterly sinful.

I will tell you here that you're going to really have to look at the words as we look at this passage because it goes back and forth. There's a lot of metaphysical images that we're going to see in the next eight or nine verses.

Okay? And Paul's going to repeat things multiple times. I think in part that's because he knows, the Lord knows, that we are a dense people, that we need to be told multiple times. And so we'll see Paul even in case of repeat verses.

But here's what Paul tells us, I think, two things in this verse here. First, Paul's telling us that the law of God is not the cause of his death.

Sin was the cause of his death. Paul is telling us that not just because he wants us to know something autobiographical, he doesn't want us to see some human interest story.

[7 : 00] He's not speaking specifically so that we would take interest in him, but because that is the case for everyone. What we're looking at here, this writing that Paul gives us, this is here looking at the Christian.

And it's the Christian in his or her own strength because what we're going to see at the end of this text in verse 25 is that Paul will say, Wretched man that I am, who will set me free from the body in this death?

Thanks be to God for his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, looking forward in chapter 8, we're going to see in chapter 8 of Romans, he's going to mention 13 times the work of the Holy Spirit and that it gives us victory.

This is the normal experience of the Christian life. This is what every Christian has to recognize about him or herself, that in my own converted nature, I may know what is right to do, and I may even long to do for what is right, but I continue to rebel against what I know is right and what is resolved to be true.

That I as a believer, I know that I'm a sinner and that without the grace of God aiding me, enabling me, without me praying and watching, what does scripture say?

[8 : 23] For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. I'm going to sin. So the law is not the cause of death here, Paul says.

Sin is the cause of his death. Well, secondly, he wants us to see that the very sinfulness of sin is seen by the fact that it uses something so good, that being the law of God as a weapon against us. We see the sinfulness of sin, the insidiousness of sin, and it takes something good and holy and honorable and pure like the law and uses it against us.

You know, isn't it interesting that Satan and the flesh will take the good law of God and use it as a weapon against us? You know, it might seem as it were to overthrow God's plan, but think of this. God shows his sovereignty in overruling even sin and using that for the good of his people. Think of it.

[9 : 32] The most wicked deed ever performed in history, humanity, was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and yet it was God's plan for using that for the conquering of sin.

So if Satan uses the law to thwart the purposes of the law that is life in order to promote sin and death, God trumps him by using even evil for ends that are ultimately for his glory and for the good of his people.

Well, let's look and see verse 14. Paul's gonna continue. And Paul's gonna now explain what this term means in verse 13, that I am utterly sinful.

There are some people who will take the position on this text that this is Paul speaking in an unregenerate state, and I would reject that that's the case. And they'll oftentimes use verse 14 to say this, that how could Paul be in such a situation and be a believer?

How can you say that you're a Christian and have exceeding sin? Well, he explains, he says, we know that the law is spiritual, capital S.

[10 : 48] That simply means that the law is a divine thing. The law is a good thing. The law tells me of the holiness of God. The law originates from Sinai, from the very character of God.

It is not a fallen document. It is spiritual. The law itself is good. But in verse 14, but even though the law is spiritual, I, Paul, I am flesh.

What he says is that I am a flesh. Not that he's just looking at the physical concept of he is a body, a physical nature of the body, but flesh in the sense of a moral term.

Paul says in Galatians 5, the spirit sets the desire against the flesh. We see it says, abstain from the fleshly desires that wage war against your soul.

So there is this battle with the flesh. Flesh in this sense, again, not an identification of the body, but it's a moral term, a fleshiness of carnality.

[11 : 51] The law is spiritual. I, on the other hand, am flesh. Let me ask you as a believer, have you ever discovered that your body, and I mentioned this earlier, was not converted at salvation?

You know, that your body still feels like at times a tuning fork, that it still picks up on the vibrations that it shouldn't, even though you know that the scripture, that the scriptures, and you have a resolve to do what is right, and you're surrounded by a fellowship of believers, even though you have been through hard times where you have seen sin, and you have seen that it leads to a bad place, your body doesn't care.

It rebels against that which is good. I see that in my life. You know, we know the law is spiritual, he says, but I am of flesh.

Again, Paul's telling you two things in this passage. First, he's telling you that the law of God is spiritual. In other words, it's of the Holy Spirit. It's of, it is the product of God. It is not derived of man. It comes from God himself. It is the reflection of his character. But secondly, however, this is how he characterizes himself.

[13 : 15] Look at what Paul says. I am of the flesh. He says, I want you to know two things about me. He's not saying here, incidentally, that I'm fleshly and immature.

There's a phrase similar to that that he uses in the book of 1 Corinthians. What Paul is saying here is that he still has a human nature, a sinful human nature.

And when he says, I am of the flesh, I am sold into the bondage of sin. He is saying, you need to know two things about me. The first of which I previously told you. And that was in Romans 6, that I have died to sin.

He said in Romans 6, I have been raised to newness of Christ. But he follows that up here in verse, in chapter 7. He says, I've been raised with Christ, but I still have a sinful nature.

I still have my flesh. I'm not entirely sanctified. I'm not completely perfected. I am not without sin. I still struggle with sin.

[14 : 18] And so the law of God is spiritual. And Paul still has a sinful human nature. And that's what he tells us in verse 14. Well, then in 15, he goes on to say this.

It's a difficult concept to think of. He says here, for what I am doing, and remember, this is Paul talking here. This isn't just some guy who's just off doing whatever he wants.

This is Paul talking here. He says, for what I am doing, I do not understand. For I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing that I hate.

That's pretty strong, isn't it? I'm not doing what I want to do. In my flesh, I typically do what I want to do. He says here, I don't do what I want to do.

I do what I hate. How many of you do what you hate? Well, there's two things we notice here in verse 15. Number one, Paul is complaining here first that his actions are not in accord with the new heart, that new mind, that new spirit that God had given him.

[15:34] We have died to sin in Christ. We have all, we have been raised to newness in life, but Paul is saying here, my actions are not consistent with my new creation.

I am not doing what I want to do. I am doing what I hate. They are not in accord with it. And that's why he even goes as far as to say, I don't understand this.

It doesn't make sense to me. Why am I doing this? Well, secondly, he says, these sinful deeds are out of the accord with what he really desires to do in his heart of hearts.

The things that he really wants to do and the things that he really doesn't want to do don't necessarily reflect themselves in what he ends up doing and that which he ends up not doing.

In other words, Paul is showing you that he is a new man from the fact that he has a desire to do what is right and he has a desire to not do what is wrong, but he is showing you here again experientially that he has a sinful nature because he doesn't always do what he wills to do or not do what he wills not to do.

[16:55] It's an inward struggle and he shares that with us. Well, in verse 16, he expands on this and he says this, but if I do the very thing that I do not want to do, I agree with the law, confessing that the law is good.

Now, you may be looking at that verse and you may be asking yourself the question and say, you know what, help me understand this. Help me understand how I am confessing the law to be good by sinning.

That seems counterintuitive in a way, right? By me doing the opposite, I'm showing that this is good. Well, here's his argument. First of all, it's crystal clear here that Paul is saying here that the law is good.

If Paul wanted to argue that the law was a problem or was the problem, this would be his chance right here in chapter seven. In this verse here, he could have said, you know, you see, the whole problem was, you see, I have to go about the law and if I would just forget about the law and I would go on just having a good personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then, you know, everything would be good, would be solved.

Everything would be good. But Paul doesn't say that here. No, the law is good. There is nothing wrong with the law. The law is right when it says what it's right and when it says what's wrong.

[18:18] And I have to deal with that, Paul says. But look at how he gets that. He indicates that his conscious actually bears witness to the fact that the law is, in fact, good.

by reminding him of the difference between what he knows that is, he ought to do and what he really wants to do on the other hand. And on the other hand, what he actually ends up doing.

In other words, Paul says, every time I don't do what I ought to do and really what I want to do in my heart of hearts, I am being reminded again that God's law is good and I am the problem.

My flesh is the problem. Well, in verse 17 through 20, he expands on this and Paul's going to work the same theme over and over again.

And so I don't want you to get confused because we see him again drill it into us. In fact, we see verse 20. It's going to be a repeat of verse 17. But these are very critical, very important verses because every heretic for the last 2,000 years has hopped on verse 17 and verse 20 to come up with some crazy doctrine.

[19:36] So I want you to see this and I want you to listen closely. Verse 17. So now, no longer, after going through this exposition about the two natures, about having the flesh, about having the law, he says, so now, no longer am I the one doing it, but it is the sin that dwells in me.

Now when I read this verse here, as a parent, I can picture my kids coming to me and the excuses that they give, right?

Dad, it wasn't me. No, my brother told me to do this. You know, look in scripture, what do we see? Lord, it wasn't me, it was the woman that you gave me.

Lord, it was the serpent. Lord, it was again and again. Well, what we have to understand here is Paul is not trying to get himself off the hook here. He is not making excuses.

It is not someone that has come to Paul and said, Paul, you have sinned and he says, no, no, the devil made me do it. He's not saying, oh, that wasn't me, that was someone else.

[20 : 41] That was the old man who is still in me. You know, sort of as if there was some autonomous being within him creating a split personality. That is not what Paul is saying.

His point is not to get himself off the hook. So the question is, why is he telling this? What is he saying? Well, there's three reasons I think he lets us know this.

And look at the three things that he asserts in that verse. First, he is asserting the new creation, which he has already said that every believer is a new creation in Jesus Christ, that we are raised to newness of life.

Romans chapter six, he says that the sin which is still in him is not the product of that new creation. So he is not attributing that sin to that which has been placed in him in the Holy Spirit and that of being raised with Christ.

He says, when you look at me and when you still see me sinning and you will still see me sinning, you need to understand this. That sin does not come from the work of the Holy Spirit in me in which I came to the saving union of Jesus Christ.

[21 : 52] that is not where this sin comes from. And that's the first thing I think he wants us to see. Secondly, however, he wants us to understand that there continues to be that war within him because there continues to be a sinful nature within himself.

He doesn't dispute, he continues to go on sinning and the presence of that new man does not mean that he does not sin. but rather that there is a sin that indwells in him.

And third and finally, he wants us to understand where that sin comes from. It is the continuing product of the sinful nature. That nature does not represent his truest self.

His identity now is in Christ. He has been raised to Christ. It doesn't represent the deepest part of his being which has been impacted by the new man but nonetheless it is still there.

And so Paul affirms all these things in verse 17. Well then in verse 18 he says this, for I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh for the willing is present in me but the doing of the good is not.

[23 : 15] So Paul again here he makes it clear that his still sinful nature leads him to affirm that there is nothing good that dwells in him meaning in his flesh.

He says, Lord, the good that you've done in me you did. The rest of it it's all my fault. It's all me. It's my sin. He's affirming that nothing good dwells in the flesh but again he's not characterizing his deepest self.

his new creation his position in Christ because he says there is nothing good that dwells in me and he specifies in my flesh. There is nothing good in my flesh.

There is not one thing. Anything good in me anything good in you if you are a believer today is not from you is not from your flesh but rather it is from the creation it is from the creator it is from the Lord Jesus Christ who's made you new.

And Paul understood that and he shares that with us and he shares it again and again because we struggle with that. You know Paul doesn't say well there's good in me in the inner man because he knows that God in his grace is the one who has wrought good to him.

[24 : 30] So then in verse 19 he goes on to say this for the good that I want I do not do but I practice the very evil that I do not want. In other words he says you can see you can see in my life the lack of goodness in two ways through the sins of omission and through the sins of commission.

I don't do the things that God tells me to do. I do do the things that God tells me not to do. And so both in my not doing the things that I ought and doing the things that I ought not do I show you I present myself as having a lack of goodness in the flesh.

Well then in verse 20 he says but if I am doing the very thing that I do not want I am no longer the one doing it but sin which dwells in me. Now again he's going right back to verse 17 again and he's elaborating on it.

And what is he telling you? Well there's two things. First the very fact of the presence of sin in his life is proof that there are two principles at work in the believer.

His deepest self is the product of God and the grace and the union with Christ and is characterized by Christ and the spirit and the law of God.

[25 : 54] But on the other hand the flesh the sinful nature is characterized by sin. And this is the first thing that Paul makes clear. Secondly notice how he refers to sin here.

It's almost like he references almost like an alien force. And he again here he is not doing that in order to try to get himself off the hook.

He is doing it to indicate that it doesn't make sense to him. It doesn't match up with what he understands. It doesn't go with it. It's not produced by the new creation that Jesus Christ has wrought in us.

And so he goes on then beyond that to elaborate more in verse 21 through 23 which we're not going to look at this morning for the sake of time. You know the problem that we see here when we read this text and the reason I think so many people have a problem with this text in the sense of how can a believer be doing these things when they're a believer?

They struggle with that. The problem is that some believers think that that happens now, that we don't sin any longer that we're perfect but it doesn't happen until glory.

[27 : 08] And so the apostle Paul cries out wretched man that I am. And I want you to see that in crying this he once again proves that the law cannot give you salvation.

It cannot bring about assurance. Think of it. What is the big struggle that Paul is having? If the musicians want to make their way up? What is the big struggle that Paul is having?

His struggle is this. He knows what he ought to do but he is not doing it. Now help me here. How can the law help with that?

How can the law help with that? You know if Paul comes to you and he comes to your office and he sits down and he says you got to give me some counsel.

I am really at my wits in here. I am frustrated here. I know what I ought to do but I can't do it. And if your answer to him is Paul it's right there just obey the law.

[28 : 19] Paul says to you no no I don't think you understand. That's my problem. I know the law. I know the law forward and backwards. I know what the law says and I know I am not doing it.

Well just obey the law Paul. If you obey the law then you can be assured of your salvation. Just obey it. Paul says that can't be the answer. That cannot be the answer.

And notice what his answer is in verse 25. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In other words the answer to my salvation the answer to my assurance is not my law keeping.

It is God's grace that comes through his son Jesus Christ. The same grace that made him a new creation in chapter 6 is the same grace here that Paul walks in.

So Paul even in reminding you of the ongoing struggle of the believer with sin is also reminding you again that your salvation has to be by grace.

[29 : 29] And so does your assurance. Because our law keeping will never ever I don't care how hard you try I don't care how well you do never ever will it measure up to what we know the law demands.

And so in this passage again Paul summarizes for us two great principles. Number one first believers even mature believers still struggle with sin.

And you will continue to struggle until the time that the Lord calls you home or until he comes back.

And secondly the law isn't the answer to the problem in fact it's part of the problem when we are apart from Christ it is part of the weaponry of sin against us so there must be some other answer and what is that answer?

It is Jesus Christ. I pull back one final time remember the big topic of what Paul has been speaking about here freedom from the law.

Paul is telling us if your freedom and your salvation and your assurance depended upon the law look where even I would be a wretched man but thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ I am saved by grace.

[30 : 54] And so Paul even in this present experience as a believer shows us that the grace of God brings freedom from the law. And next week incidentally we're going to see what that freedom looks like for the believer both positionally and practically.

Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Heavenly Father this morning as we look at your word Lord we read this text and we just realize how unworthy we are.

Lord we realize that in our own state in our own sinful flesh Lord that we could never do what is required to fulfill and pay for that penalty of sin yet Lord even after the death of your son on the cross and the ultimate price that he paid Lord as Paul said I still do what I do not want to do and I

don't do what I ought to do and Lord it's difficult for us to understand but Lord what we need to understand is that it is by your grace daily that we walk in that grace Lord that we depend upon you not upon our works Lord not upon the law but upon you Lord we thank you oh wretched man that I am Lord we thank you that I am saved by grace thank you for that unspeakable gift Lord we thank you for all this Lord in your son's name amen your time to help you you how toople toang and in your son's name and the you