

*Sunday, August 23, 2020*

## **Bible Study / Romans 7:7-25** **The Character of Christ [pt. 9]: SELF-CONTROL**

**Listen to Pastor Maury's sermon for August 23, and then read Romans 7:7-25.**

We have now reached the final aspect, or Character of Christ, in our study of the Fruit of the Spirit. This final aspect of the "Fruit" is 'Self-Control'. One may ask why 'self-control' is so vital and important. After all, the law is there to restrain those who otherwise will not restrain themselves; and if not the law itself, the punishment for violating the law.

However, Paul tells us that not only have we died to sin and are no longer under sin's domain (*Romans 6:1-14*), but we have also died to the law (*Romans 7:4*). We were once "married" (so to speak) to the law, but since we have 'died' with Christ, that "marriage" has ended so that we may be wed to another, namely Christ (*7:1-6*). Paul states, "You have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order **that we may bear fruit for God**" (*7:4*). And that "Fruit" is what Paul describes in *Galatians 5:22-26*.

If Paul's theology seems confusing to you, you're not alone. It was a bit confusing to his original hearers as well. He tells us that the law cannot save, it can only point out where you fail to measure up to God's standards. Not only this, but sin takes advantage of the law in order to "bear fruit for death" (*7:5, 8-11*).

Some might hear Paul saying that the law is evil and that if it weren't for sin I would never have known grace. So therefore, let's do away with the law and sin all the more so that God's grace may abound all the more. Paul had already debunked that theory by stating that we have died to sin and should therefore no longer live in it. That if we have come to God through faith in Jesus then we have crucified our old selves of sin just as surely as Jesus was crucified on the cross. And in turn, just as Jesus was raised to walk in newness of life in a realm where sin has no power, we too have been (and will be) raised to that same new life in that same sinless realm (*6:1-4*).

He concludes his argument in chapter 6 by explaining that we should consider ourselves to no longer be slaves to sin, but slaves to God. Living as slaves to sin only leads to death, whereas living as a slave to God leads to life that is both eternal and abundant (*6:15-23*). Which brings us to chapter 7... and everything he says about how bad the law is.

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Okay, Paul, when you say that where sin increased grace abounded all the more (*Romans 5:20-6:2*), you are saying that God's grace is large enough to cover each and every sin, but that living in sin is not the way to experience God's grace. Got it.

You also say that the law isn't any good for receiving God's grace, because His grace is free and cannot be earned. That in fact the only thing the law is good for is to point out our sins with the taunting reminder that we'll never truly measure up to God's righteous law (*Romans 3:21-25*). Not only this but that "through the law comes knowledge of sin" (*Romans 3:20*).

So...the law is evil...the law itself is sin?

To correct any misunderstanding Paul goes on to say that even though works of the law cannot be counted on to bring about salvation, the law does indeed still point out the way of life. After all, if it weren't for the law we would not even know we were in error. He then states that the law is therefore holy, righteous, and good. Coming from God as it did, it did not bring death (or sin) to me, but sin itself took opportunities in the law to bring death. Therefore, sin is shown to be what it truly is — a force that corrupts and distorts the good that God gives.

Then Paul states, in verse 14, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own action. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

What? Really? Wait a minute Paul, you just got finished telling us that we have been freed from slavery to sin, and now you admit to being sold under sin? You just finished telling us that sin no longer has any power over us, because our old selves have been crucified with Christ and our new selves have been raised to a realm where sin does not dwell, and now you admit that even you are still under sin's influence? Which is it Paul? Are we free or aren't we? Are we slaves of God or are we slaves of sin?

In truth what Paul is saying only serves to strengthen his assertion that sin is a serious, very serious problem that should not be underestimated. Nor should it be given any quarter. What Paul is saying here is that any person, though saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and still holding the law of God to be good and true and right, will find that they are in something of a battle just as Paul himself is.

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One part of him gives assent to the law as God's way of life, but another part of him rebels whole-heartedly against that law. As a result he finds that he is at war with himself.

Jesus instructed us, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The law still stands, but thanks be to God that Jesus has fulfilled its demands on our behalf. He has set us free from the penalty of violating God's law so that we may live in the freedom of God's grace. But the law still directs us along this way of life.

And so Paul describes the inner battle brought about by that freedom. A battle between our former self which has been put to death with the crucified Christ and our new self which has been raised with the risen Lord. That battle requires self-control and all of the other aspects of God's Fruit (*Galatians 5:22-23*). After all, God has set us free in order that we may bear His fruit and keep in step with the Spirit. (*Galatians 5:1*).

### **Questions for Further Reflection**

When Paul says you are "released" from the obligations of the law (*Romans 7:6*), is he discouraging spiritual discipline? What were some of the rules you were taught in your religious upbringing? Do you feel more "married" to the living Christ, or to some religious code?

Is the struggle that Paul describes in verse 18 the struggle before he became a Christian...or the struggle after he became a Christian? If you think he is talking about his pre-Christian life, where did he get his "desire" to do what is good? If you think he is talking about his Christian life, why is he struggling when God is the new owner of his life?

Have you ever come to a place where you cried out like Paul in verse 24? Why do you think God's law was given?

In light of your own struggles with sin, how do you feel about Paul's conflict? What sort of people would have no idea what Paul is talking about — what sort would never feel the conflict? Should a Christian be beyond the kind of inner struggle which Paul describes here? Is there a struggle in your spiritual life right now?