

Anglican Church Noosa
From Grace to Glory – The Struggle Within
Romans 7:1-25
Rev'd Chris Johnson - July 26, 2026

The Police Officer pulled a man over for speeding. He said, "You were doing 65 km an hour in a 60 km zone. Here is your ticket." The man feeling rather miffed replied, "And just what do you do when you catch a real criminal?" "I don't know." replied the police officer, "all I ever seem to catch are the innocent ones."

I hope you would've picked up by now one of the key arguments in the book of Romans, is that we have all broken the law, no one lives up to the standards of God's law. Paul has been at pains to show that we are all criminals in God's eyes, no matter how innocent we might think we are.

- Jews have God's written law through Moses, but don't keep it.
- Gentiles have God's law written on their hearts and consciences but don't live up to that either.

Jews and Gentiles together don't give God his due. We don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength like we should. So Paul's point is that we are all outlaws, we are all law breakers.

So we come to Chapter 7 which is all about the Christian's relationship with the law, not the civil law but the law of God, the law given to Moses. The 10 Commandments are the summary of that law.

Paul's argument is that if we are incessant lawbreakers, then we have to be saved apart from keeping the law.

So Paul proclaims in Chapter 3 verse 21, "*God's righteousness has now been revealed apart from the law.*" And it is revealed at the cross, through the "*sacrifice of atonement, the shedding of his blood.*" 3:25

Chapter 7 continues this theme of us having to be saved apart from the law. So let us look at this chapter and what it says about the Christian's relationship with the Law.

I looked at verses 1 to 6 in Enews this week so let's go to paragraph, versus 7 to 12.

I think there are three things we can say about the Law and Sin from this paragraph.

1. The law reveals sin v7
2. The law provokes sin v8,9
3. The law condemns sin v9-11

1. The Law REVEALS Sin

In v7 Paul says, "*I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.*" And it is interesting that he uses the 10th Commandment, "*You shall not covet*" as an example. Before Paul became a Christian, he was a good Pharisees who thought he was meticulously keeping the law – but of course he was only thinking about his external behaviour. He had no understanding

of the 'open heart surgery' approach of Jesus. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount the commandment to not covet is a command which requires internal obedience. There is no other way to look at it. To covet is to have a desire or drive for something that is not yours. It is a form of idolatry – your desire for some thing is greater than your desire for God.

It would seem this command is the one that opened Paul's eyes to the real nature of sin and the seriousness of sin. Without this law Paul might have thought that coveting was okay. Do not murder, do not steal are good commandments to keep because if you break them they hurt another person. But there is no harm done to anyone in a little bit of coveting.

The law reveals that coveting is wrong and Paul came to see that he too was a lawbreaker, and needed to find a way to be saved apart from the law. So I hope you can see how the law reveals sin. This is what Paul is saying in v7.

It was Martin Luther who said, "The law is like a schoolmaster meant to lead us to Christ." The law reveals our sin and makes us aware of our need for Christ.

2. The Law PROVOKES Sin

The second point Paul is making here is that the law provokes sin. VV8,9

"But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died."

I think this is the old problem of forbidden fruit. If we are told we can't have something, we want it. Sinful human nature is weird; it twists the law into provoking sin.

The law is not the problem – sin is.

So if we see a file sitting on the bosses desk marked private and confidential, but we know it is about something which will affect us, we long to open it and have a little look.

OR the young joy rider who is spotted by the police. He doesn't pull over and accept the consequences. Rather he sets off at high speed, inviting a police chase, flouting the law and enjoying the thrill of it all.

Paul says in v9, *"When the commandment came, sin sprang to life."* In a twisted way the law provoked sin but this is not the fault of the law. The problem is sinful people.

3. The Law CONDEMNS Sin

The third point Paul makes here is that the law condemns sin vv 9-11.

Three times Paul says that the condemnation for sin is death.

V9b *"when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died."*

V10 *"the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."*

V11 *"for sin, seizing an opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death."*

So the law holds the promise of something really good, but because of sin has become a death sentence.

It's a bit like the moral crusader who preaches fidelity in marriage and wants to bring in laws that make adultery a criminal offence. He thinks that tough new laws will save marriages and be the way to happy marriages. But then he finds himself tempted and gives in to the sin of adultery and falls from grace.

The law which he thought would give life proves to be death to him.

And the point is that we have all broken the law and we all stand condemned.

The way to life is not through the law but by God's promise, by God's grace and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we will find in the next chapter.

The law

1. Reveals sin
2. Provokes sin
3. Condemns sin

So is the law bad?

Not a bit of it Paul says.

Look at v12 *"The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."*

Problem is sin, not the law. If a person is arrested for breaking the law, found guilty, and sentenced to prison; he cannot blame the law for his imprisonment. The law convicts and sentences him, but he has no one to blame but himself and his own bad behaviour.

In the same way, Paul is saying don't blame the law. The problem is human sin.

Look at v13, *"Did that which is good, then, become death to me?"*

By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

So from all of that we should realise sin is a tough nut to crack. And for the non-Christian, content with external obedience, there is usually no great problem. For the Christian however who understands the full weight of God's law there can be a considerable dilemma. Paul goes on to talk about this in vv 14–25.

Vv 14-25 The Struggle with Sin

These verses speak of a great struggle for the Christian between sin and the law.

There is a major theological question surrounding these verses which will determine how you interpret them. The question is whether this is Paul before he was a Christian, or Paul after he was converted. Is this passage showing us the unregenerate human heart, or is this the experience of someone who has a new heart, is regenerate, is a Christian?

There are some significant commentators who think it makes more sense to interpret this as Paul before he became a Christian. They would argue that Chapter 7 is Paul struggling with sin before he became a Christian, and Chapter 8 Paul the Christian with victory over sin.

It seems to me, however that the passage makes far more sense if we interpret it as Paul, the on fire Christian, wrestling with the fact that sin is still knocking at his door. This interprets the

passage in a way that is consistent with what's come before about the law and how it is good and holy, but we are sinners.

But more importantly, Vv14-25 are written in the present tense. The natural way to read them is that this is Paul's current experience not his past experience pre-conversion.

When he says in v22 *"For in my inner being I delight in God's law"*; these are the words of a regenerate believer. He then goes on to explain the dilemma of still being subject to sin, *"but I see another law working me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin..."* This passage has all the hallmarks of Paul's current Christian experience.

I think belonging to Christ actually heightens the struggle against sin. The Christian is not meant to just go with the flow, with whatever popular opinion says is reasonable at the time. The Christian has a different measure – the word of Christ. We make it our aim to please him. That is a much higher standard and I would suggest the struggle will be quite intense at times. The problem is that we have a new identity in Christ but the old sinful nature doesn't want to lie down and die.

This is certainly my experience. And I very much relate to what Paul is saying here in v15, *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do."*

So there is a struggle in the Christian life but what I want you to know is that it is not an even struggle. Some commentators depict the old nature of sin struggling with the new nature of Christ, as an even handed battle. Well, I don't think it is like that at all. In the three chapters six, seven and eight the predominant theme and the true Paul is the new person in Christ and this is the case even in Chapter 7 which depicts the struggle so passionately. The essential Paul is the Christian Paul that wants to put Christ first in all things. V22 *"in my inner being I delight in God's law"*. This is his born again regenerate self. Paul delights in God's law, Paul delights in God.

Let me conclude with this little illustration. I think you will all be familiar with lighting a campfire or maybe a good old-fashioned wooden barbecue. The rule is you should never leave a fire unattended. The problem is when you want to leave the fire, it can be very hard to get it to go out. The trick is to spread out the glowing coals and they go out more quickly. But so often just when you think one is dying, it flares up again. A log that looked like it was under control suddenly has a flame bouncing along it.

The sinful nature is a bit like that burning log. It keeps flaring up when you wish it would just die. Paul knew the power of sin to keep flaring up.

How did he deal with it? Well look at the first two verses of Chapter 8. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."*

He is saying look again at the Gospel. The Gospel in Chapters 1 to 7,
-the gospel of justification by faith,
-the gospel of being buried with Christ in baptism,
-the gospel of being married to Christ and giving your exclusive allegiance to him.
And in the Gospel know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And know also that the Holy Spirit is here to help. Paul will go on in Chapter 8 to explain the power of the Holy Spirit for Christian living.

So look out for that over the next two weeks. This is where we see the glory. Our series has been entitled “From grace to glory”. Over the next two weeks we’re going to see more of the glory. Yes, we can get a taste of it now in this life and Paul shares much about it. You are allowed to read ahead and be encouraged.

Let me pray.

Loving Father sometimes we get very discouraged; not just with all the sin we see in our world but also the sin that remains within, and the battle we have to fight against it. Thank you, Lord that in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the victory; there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and we have a new life in the Holy Spirit taking us from glory into glory.

Lord help us to grasp the power of the Gospel to change us, and grant us your Holy Spirit to faithfully live in union with Christ and bring glory to him.

Amen