

Good Morning, McBIC. We are about halfway through our summer series on Romans. It's been a great series, hasn't it?!

Just to recap for a minute in case you haven't been with us along the journey. Paul the author of this letter wrote it to the church in Rome which was predominantly Gentile. The whole theme of this letter is the basic gospel message, God's plan of salvation and righteousness for all humankind, Jew and Gentile alike. And honestly it reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter and today's chapter, chapter 7, is no different.

As I read Romans 7:1-6 from the New Living Translation I want you to hear how Paul is tackling the relationship between the law and human sinfulness.

Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only while a person is living? <sup>2</sup>For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. <sup>3</sup>So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

<sup>4</sup>So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. <sup>5</sup>When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. <sup>6</sup>But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.

Friends, as believers, we are no longer bound to the law. Paul uses the law of marriage as an analogy to help us understand this better. A woman whose husband dies is no longer obligated to remain faithful to him. She is free to marry another man. In a similar way, our death to sin and new life in Christ, as Layne preached last Sunday, freed us from our obligation to the law and allows us to serve God in what Paul calls the new way of the Spirit.

The Spirit of God living in you. And as Romans 8:9 says, it is the hope of present victory, as it is the hope of future glory.

It's beautiful, isn't it?! But wait, a minute does this mean the law of God is sinful? Let's keep reading. I am going to pick up at verse 7.

<sup>7</sup>Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet." <sup>8</sup>But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. <sup>9</sup>At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, <sup>10</sup>and I died. So I discovered that the law's commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. <sup>11</sup>Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me. <sup>12</sup>But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.

<sup>13</sup> But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes.

So someone must have thought that Paul's teaching about freedom from the law meant that he believed the law itself to be sinful. Paul isn't saying that. What he is saying though is that the law reveals his own sinfulness.

The purpose of the law was to identify and reveal sins against God and then to lead Jews and Gentiles alike to a Savior in Jesus Christ. This did not suggest that the law itself was sin, but rather that it clarified what sin was so that we could recognize it and the need for release from our sinning nature.

Our rebellious nature often chooses to break rules just for the sake of breaking rules. Does this resonate with anyone? It does for me.

My friends and family will tell you this Maya Angelou quote is totally me, "You want me to do something... tell me I can't do it."

Now sure, this can be a good thing and I know for sure they use it to their advantage. Like trying to lift a heavy piece of furniture from one room to another. Or getting me up on a ladder to clean out the gutters. But it can also be bad.

Like one time my friend and I wanted to see this gorgeous MD sunset in a nearby farm. So, we did it. We were maybe there 10 minutes when the owner of the property came out and angrily asked us if we just ignored the private property signs, we quickly apologized and left.

In our minds we weren't hurting anything. We just wanted to enjoy a sunset on this beautiful property. The owner of course didn't agree with us. The newspaper headlines would've been great though, "Two local pastors charged with trespassing."

Our rebellious nature often chooses to break rules for the sake of breaking rules.

Does this remind you of something? Maybe Adam and Eve in the garden? You can eat from any tree in the garden except for this one. What do they do? Eat from that one tree they shouldn't have.

The law of God is good, righteous, and holy. The law helps us see how very sinful our sin really is. Without the law we could convince ourselves that our sin was really not that bad. Like my friend and I did. Especially when we compare our sin to others. We can always find someone whose sin we think is worse than ours. However, what we learn from the Bible is that all of us are equally judged by the law of God and none of us can keep it.

The law promised Paul life if he could keep it, but he discovered he could not do it. The law doomed him to death.

As I read the last part of chapter 7 beginning with verse 14, I want you to hear it in the context of Paul's inner soul. There is a tension—a wrestling here.

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. 15 I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. 16 But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows

that I agree that the law is good. 17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. 19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. 20 But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

21 I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God's law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. 24 Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

Did you hear the tension? The war?

Our kids are going to help us make these words come to life with a good, ol fashion game of tug of war.

Tug of war is a game which is played between two teams to see which team has the most strength. An equal number of players are chosen for two teams. Both teams grab opposite ends of a sturdy rope and a line is drawn on the ground at the middle point of the rope. Then, the two teams pull in an opposite direction from each other. The team that has the most strength and pulls the other team over the line is the winner.

In this part of Romans 7, Paul describes a problem he has and it sounds as if he is having a tug of war with himself. He says in verse 15, "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate."

I think we have all felt that way. Have you ever wanted to do the right thing, because you knew it was right, but instead you did something that you knew was wrong?

You're playing with your brother or with a friend, and you're trying to share and play nicely, but then suddenly he has something you want, or he does something you don't like and some very angry words jump right out of your mouth before you can stop them. Or your hand shoots out and you find that you've just hit somebody.

This is not what you had in mind when you first started playing. You don't invite someone over to yell at him or hit him, you invite him over to play and have fun.

Or perhaps we want to do something because our friends are doing it and we are pulled over the line to do something we shouldn't do. We could think of ourselves as being in a tug of war between good and bad choices.

God gave us His rules so that we would know what He wants us to do and what He wants us to not do. But in our scripture for today Romans 7 Paul tells us it's not always easy to follow God's rules, even after we become one of God's people.

Paul is saying God has changed his heart so he wants to follow God's rules, but his sinful nature still makes him want to do bad things. He has a war going on inside between his heart and his sinful nature. You might experience this too- when you want to follow the rules but you also want to break the rules?

We all have that war inside of us, and part of following God is to keep fighting our sinful nature. But we can't do that alone.

I left off reading Romans 7 with a question. Paul asks in verse 24, "Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" His answer:

25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

We need Jesus.

Paul tells us that we don't have power in ourselves to always make good choices, but we can look to God through Jesus for strength.

That's why God gave us armor. Ephesians 6:10-18 says

"10 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. 12 For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. 14 Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. 15 For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. 16 In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. 17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

I love the song Katy chose and that some of you will be singing in a little bit to close our morning, "Jesus Strong and Kind." One of the verses says, "Jesus said, if I am weak. I should come to Him. No one else can be my strength. I should come to Him. For the Lord is good and faithful. He will keep us day and night. We can always run to Jesus. Jesus, strong and kind"

Friends, we can always run to Jesus, for He is both strong and kind. So yes we will sometimes feel like we are playing this game of tug of war between doing good and our sinful nature but thanks be to God for Jesus! He saves us. He is strong and kind. Don't ever forget that!

Paul is experiencing a devastating experience of wanting to do what is good and finding himself doing what is sinful instead. If we are honest, Paul is describing the ongoing struggle of a believer, every believer against sin.

When we become Christians and Jesus comes to live in us, our sin is still in us too. Now some of you may be thinking about cartoons that would portray an angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other. While they are funny, that's not what Paul is trying to show us. We have one identity and that is children of God. Period. We don't have a split personality. Our identity is perfect in Christ. Yes I am responsible if I let sin take control but the sin is not truly me but just sin in me. I am a child of God! You are a child of God.

As a believer in Jesus, the difference is that sin is no longer our boss. Jesus is. So now we have Jesus to help us fight sin and to help us not sin. When before we were Christians, we had no power over sin. We may not even have recognized that some things were a sin. But now as Christians, we have a struggle with this flesh of ours that still wants to do bad things sometimes, and our hearts that want us to do the good and right things that please God.

I love Paul's vulnerability, realness at the end of chapter 7. The struggle is real. Do you feel too in verse 24?

Paul cries out in frustration, in desperation, "Oh, what a miserable (the NIV uses wretched) person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?"

Why did Paul call himself a wretched or miserable man? Paul is completely worn out, he is exhausted from the hard labor of his unsuccessful effort to please God under the principle of law. Paul realized the harder he tries to keep God's law on his own, the more he realized he can't. Paul is caught in the desperate powerlessness of trying to battle sin in the power of self.

Paul referred to himself some 40 times, since verse 13 alone. Paul was entirely self-focused and self-obsessed. Griffith Thomas, who was an Anglican cleric says this about Romans 7, "The one point of the passage is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of the indwelling sin."

Until this moment of desperation, of his need for deliverance. This plea goes beyond a vague hope to be better. It is a plea against himself and a cry out unto God.

Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Who? Paul doesn't say I. He doesn't say what? He says who? He tried to fight sin on his own and he didn't succeed. The Scripture doesn't tell us but Paul is human so I am sure he tried some epic coping mechanisms like watching tv, social media, alcohol, food, sex, the list could go on and on.

But he finally looks outside of himself, outside of worldly things, and unto Jesus. Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

How many times have you gotten to the point Paul did? How many times have I? For me, it's countless times. This is one of my biggest struggles. I think I can solve a problem, sin or otherwise, in my own strength, in my own power and yes sure sometimes I can but many times I get to the end of myself, the end of my rope, and I have my own desperate plea of who will free me?

Nine days ago in fact I came to that place. There were so many things happening personally and professionally and it just became too much. Some members of my family were making some hard, life altering decisions, August is quickly coming and there is a lot to do to get ready for kids ministry and the new things we have planned. So I found myself watching a lot of tv to distract me. Until finally I came to a point where I just had to stop. I had to be still. I had to feel grounded in Christ and in Christ alone.

It took me weeks to get to that place though. But no matter how long it takes God delighted in me. He blessed me. He gave me what I needed and more. Friends, He will give the same thing to you too.

Do you feel like you are at the end of your rope? The weight of sin, the weight of life is just too much. Run to Jesus. It's never too late. Crawl up on His lap and lean back. And just be. For when you are there

you don't need to do anything. You are His son, His daughter. Surrender to Him. Let Him delight in you and sing songs over you like Zephaniah 3:17 says.

When we set out to do good but carry out our attempts without the discipline of attending to what lies beneath and opening it up in God's presence, evil is always close at hand. We cannot be a force for good if it's not being refined by the rigors of true solitude, that place where God is at work beyond what we are able to do for ourselves or would even know how to do for ourselves. We must find a way to take our whole self into God's presence and wait.

Katy and team along with some of our kids are going to sing Jesus, Strong and Kind this song I keep referring to. My hope, my prayer is that those words would just wash over you. That they would bring you peace.

Friends, deliverance is found "the answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord". The light which shines in Romans chapter 8 that we will talk about next week, illuminates the darkness of chapter 7. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ."

The struggle between wanting to do good and our sinful nature is real. Paul didn't pretend that looking to Jesus takes away the struggle. The struggle will be there and will always be there. But the good news for today and for tomorrow is that Jesus works through us not instead of us in the battle against sin. The message of the gospel is victory over sin, hate, death, and all evil as we run to Jesus strong and kind, as we surrender our lives to Him and let Jesus live out victory through us.