

A Proper 9 or 10 Could be adapted also to fit A Proper 8.	Holiness: Romance in the Christian Life Romans 7, 8	First preached at New Life, 7/7/02. Revised and preached in Monterey Living Hope, 7/10/11.
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Thesis: It is impossible to live a holy life by administering the Law to ourselves. It is only possible as a by-product of a passionate love affair with Jesus.

Charlie Waters / Frank Thomas story

Charlie Waters, a former player for the Dallas Cowboys, tells this story about Frank Howard, his college coach at Clemson.

They went to practice on the Monday before a big game with the 1st and 3rd string Quarterbacks out with injuries. In the first 5 minutes of practice, the 2nd stringer blew out his knee. That elevated the 4th stringer to 1st string. About 10 minutes later he hurt his knee, leaving Coach Thomas with only his 5th-string quarterback for the big game.

Coach Howard blew his whistle and gathered all the players around him. He took the 5th stringer and put his arm around him and said in his gruff voice, "Son, do you believe in magic?" The quarterback said halfheartedly, "Well, sort of." Coach Howard looked at him, pointed his 5 fingers at him like a magician, and said, "Poof! You are now a 1st string quarterback."

Many people expect the Christian life to work like that. But before long the new Christian finds himself living right in the middle of our Romans 7 text for this morning.

Now, I love the Book of Romans

Paul wrote this letter to a church he'd never visited, a mix of Christians with Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. So it doesn't have much pastoral advice; it's mostly theology.

I use it with investigators who read highly (such as...). But some parts are very challenging! Here's an example of "challenging:"

The "troublesome passage," read [Romans 7:15-24](#)

Are we to understand that this is the way life is for Paul and by implication the way life is for mature Christ-followers today?

If so, this is pretty discouraging.

But context is critical, especially when reading scripture.

So before we think we understand this, let's read its context. *(for an anecdote to drive this home, check out "Old man in Deep South walking w/ dog & mule...". You can find it at the end of these sermon notes; it's the first entry in the Boneyard.)*

Just before the troublesome passage, Paul wrote this: read [Rom 7.4-14](#)

Just after that troublesome passage, Paul wrote this: read [Rom 7.25 – 8.4](#)

Sounds better, doesn't it? Despite the struggle going on inside the Christian, it is okay because of Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived a holy life; never giving in to the tug of sin Paul describes, then Jesus offers himself as a sin-offering for the rest of us.

This is good news, even though it seems to leave us Christ-followers to struggle and fall back to sin. Each time, we can access forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death by confessing our sins.

But did you notice a hint of something more? Is v3b & 4 saying there is something beyond forgiveness?

[God] sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body, God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Yes, Paul is saying there is something more. Listen to excerpts from the next few verses!

Read excerpts from [Rom 8.5 – 8.16](#)

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace...

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do... If through the power of the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

This means the Good News is better than many Christians realize. Not only is there forgiveness for sins, but God also offers us the Spirit of Jesus to lift us from the frustrating struggle between wanting to do right and inevitably wrong.

Okay, let's make some sense from Romans 7 & 8.

Out of his moral purity, God gives us a Good Law

God's Law has 3 purposes:

1. To order our lives according to what God knows is best for us in the long run.
2. To show us the holiness God requires of all moral beings.
3. To bring us into a relationship with Christ.

As I decide to follow Christ I become aware of God's Law and I try to administer it in my own life.

I have a friend, an investigator, who is now discovering the Law and seeing its value for the first time. He has the best of intentions, but he lives in Romans 7.

When he becomes a Christian; he'll have even better intentions. But he'll still live in Romans 7.

You see, there are some things the Law cannot do:

1. It cannot keep us from the next sin – it just brings guilt when we next sin.
2. It does not provide an effective sacrifice to erase our guilt.
3. Sometimes just knowing a law tempts us to break it.

For example: Make up Tim's Law: "Thou shall not look at the drums (piano, whatever)."

Some (at least) in the congregation will look.

Why? Our desire for self-sovereignty makes us resist someone telling us how to live. We may try to control our self-will, but our self-sovereignty comes through anyway. We can't erase this impulse from our own hearts.

Paul's point in Romans: there is a life beyond the Law

When I see my sin and choose to receive forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus, God forgives me for past sins AND ALSO OFFERS the Spirit of Jesus living within me to administer the Law.

My only hope to escape the life of Romans 7 is to transfer the administration of the Law from myself to this new Spirit of Jesus living in me.

... I need to provide a bit more theological depth. (Primary source for this block is from a seminar I attended in 1992 by Dr. William Greathouse)

When God gave the Law to Israel in Ex 20, it was a gift of grace.

He intended Israel to live transparently as an illustration of God's grace for the whole world to see. Now all Christ-followers share this assignment.

God gave Israel 10 Commandments. The first 4: Love God like this. The last 6: Love others like this.

Centuries later, Jeremiah 31.31 anticipated a new law, not a law written in stone but written inside human hearts. It's a peek ahead to the presence of the Spirit administering the Law in the believer's life.

More centuries later, God fulfilled Jeremiah's promise at Pentecost. In Romans 8, Paul describes the implications of this new life, administered by the Spirit of Jesus living in the heart of each person who trusts and is confident in him. It's what Paul writes about in Romans 8.1-4.

The Law is what God demands; forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

& the Spirit of Jesus coming to live within us is what God offers.

God does not expect us to love him and others out of a vacuum. What God requires of us, he gives to us. His gift of first loving us makes it possible for us to love him deeply in return.

The troublesome passage does not describe a normal Christian life.

It describes the war between the administrators of the Law.

The real work of Christian holiness is this: The Spirit of Jesus within us – reproducing the character of Christ in us – as we give more and more of the administration of the Law to the Spirit of Jesus.

The “good” that God works to accomplish in us is not primarily our earthly happiness; it is our holiness. This primarily happens through our relationships, especially our closest ones. The “good” is that our life will ultimately conform to the image of Christ, as his Spirit lives the life of Christ through us.

Yielded-ness is key

At justification, we receive all of the Spirit of Jesus, but the Spirit only fills the parts we yield to him.

It is one thing to “have” the Spirit; it is quite another for the Spirit to have us.

But when we respond to the Spirit’s prompts, we open more and more of “our kingdom” to his control.

The areas of sin remaining in our lives are the areas where we hold onto self-sovereignty and where we still rule “our kingdom.”

Eventually, we must yield even our ability to yield.

This is not just Nazarene theology; folks of every Christian tradition who yield themselves completely to the Spirit of Jesus experience the holiness of Romans 8 – whether or not they have a vocabulary for it.

We never reach a point of a permanent state of holiness; we experience holiness only to the extent that we are yielded to Christ moment by moment.

John Wesley says this: “We have no stock of holiness in us; at any moment whatever holiness is in us is there only by his indwelling presence.”

The degree of indwelling is always dependent on our degree of yieldedness.

We are filled with the Spirit as we empty ourselves.. (*Quench Not the Spirit* by Myron Augsburger).

There are degrees of holiness. The ultimate is when the Spirit of Jesus occupies the space in our being where the “self” once ruled.

When we sin, contamination occurs quickly, and spiritual slippage follows if we don’t soon respond to the Spirit’s conviction.

How about you?

Is the Spirit of Jesus prompting you about some area of un-yielded-ness? An area where you are still trying to administer the Law yourself?

Sexuality? Money? A fear? A habit? A spiritual conversation you need to start? An unhealthy relationship you need to end? Something you keep trying to fix on your own but that really you need to confess and receive God's forgiveness?

Don't wait any longer. This is the key to a passionate romance with Jesus – yielding our sovereignty to the prompting of the Spirit of Jesus.

Holiness is as complete as it can be when we've dealt with self-sovereignty. Then the Spirit of Jesus lives in the space once occupied by self. (Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*)

First-fruit

The objective basis of our Christian hope is the resurrection of Jesus. The subjective basis is "the first fruits of the Spirit" we experience. (see [Galatians 5.22-23](#))

When we yield one area after another to the Spirit of Jesus, God gives us the "first fruits" of his Kingdom. Someday we'll be fully glorified. The analogy is the spies bringing back the first fruits of Canaan, telling folks, "Look what we'll have over there." Eventually, they lived in the Promise Land.

All Christ came to do for us, the Spirit of Christ now does in us.

Okay, but how do we enter into this experience of heart holiness?

Trust the whole Good News: God offers forgiveness AND the Spirit of Jesus to change us from the inside out.

Trust this regardless of whether we've experienced it yet or not.

Trust it because scripture teaches it AND the because of the testimony of many people through history.

Expect the Spirit to show us areas where self-sovereignty still reigns; each time we need to yield it.

This keeps our hearts tender.

Spend enough quality time with God in prayer and Scripture for our love affair with Jesus to grow deep.

Not just the leftover time when we're tired. Holiness will take some (not all) of our best relational time.

Design-in some reflection time for the Spirit of Jesus to prompt/lead us. Then do the work and have the courage to follow his prompt.

Especially spend time reflecting on Jesus' incarnation (voluntary submission to living in this sinful world to bring us the good news of a new life beyond it) and on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (voluntary submission to the penalty for our sin to free us from this

sentence).

Once we grasp these at our core, we realize how magnificent and undeserved the gift of salvation and the presence of God is! How in the world are we to respond to such initiative from the heart of God? Paul tells us in [Romans 12.1-2](#). As we do, we discover this is precisely what God wanted all along!

We can trust the faithfulness of God to make his word come true in our life.

Spend quality time with a Fellowship of Believers where people hunger for holiness and in whom you see holiness lived out at least by some of its people.

Every time we feel our hearts grow cool and self or the Law begins to reassert itself, humbly invite Jesus back into our center.

There is such a thing as sin, even after being filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

Despite our adoption as sons/daughters and our level of Spirit filling, we still live in bodies that carry the DNA of Adam's race. Paul calls it our "sinful nature." We have the treasure of the first fruits of the Spirit, but they are in earthen vessels. This weakness keeps us on our knees throughout life.

It is simply a fact that when our love affair with God cools, we drift. Only the real-time work of the Spirit of Jesus can keep us from slipping back to trying to administer the Law ourselves.

Human nature being as it is, we're bound to have some of our once-holy teachers slip from the fullness of the Spirit to life back in the law.

The last-ditch position of man/woman is not rebellion; it is self-reliance. It started in the Garden and is deep in our DNA. It's the biggest threat to holy living.

Holiness is unbroken communion with God through the Spirit. It is fragile – so long as we are in this life – but it is always possible to return to the experience. The necessary ingredient is falling back in love with Jesus. We do this by staring closely at his love for us and how he demonstrated it and humbly responding to it.

A story to help us hold onto these holiness concepts.

(Greathouse story: Wife whose legalistic first-husband dies ...)

A lady was married to a very harsh, demanding husband. He gave her a list of rules specifying all the duties she was to obey daily. Every evening he held an inspection to point out her shortcomings of that day. Over time her love for him grew cold and died. She was a slave, not a wife; she lived daily in the bitter fulfillment of duties.

Perhaps providentially, her husband died. After some years, she remarried to a new husband who was just the opposite. He was kind and tender. His primary interest in their relationship was bringing joy and fulfillment to her. Quickly she responded in a similar fashion. One day while cleaning out some old files, she ran upon the list of rules from her first husband. To her amazement, she was now fulfilling every rule, and more, for her

new husband.

The problem was not in the duties or rules. The problem was with the administrator of the rules. Under her new husband, the rules had become written on her heart. In fact, she was free from the rules. The bondage was gone; the rules were simply part of a whole life expressing love to her husband.

The Spirit-administered law does not set us free from God's Law. Rather, the law's righteous requirements are simply small parts of a whole life of love dedicated to the Lord we love.

Benediction

Father, we acknowledge that we depend on the Holy Spirit as our only spiritual power, just as we depend on Christ our only righteousness.

So we love you, Lord, and rejoice in the work of the Spirit of Jesus.

And may the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and abide in you all week.

Other resources:
Click on the link to get the Google Presentation file for this sermon.
Subsequent to preaching this sermon, I revisited this topic several more times. Probably the two most concise treatments are in Beyond Conversion 1 (the Redemptive Loop) and The Romance .

Boneyard (good, but unused material)

An old man in Deep South walking w/ dog & mule...

Pickup truck comes around the corner too fast and knocks all three into a ditch. Sometime later there was a court case where the man claimed damages from the driver. The defense attorney cross-examining the old man says, "Answer yes or no to this question. Did you tell the defendant that you were okay?"

Old man, "My dog and my mule and me were coming ... "

Defense, "Answer yes or no ... "

OM, "Me and my dog and my mule ... "

DA, "Answer yes or no ... "

OM, "Me and my ... "

DA turns to judge, "Your honor, would you instruct him to answer the question yes or no?"

J, "Let the man say what he is trying to say."

OM, "Me and my dog and my mule were coming 'round the bend, and this truck came around too fast and knocked us all into the ditch. And this man here jumped out of the truck. He had a gun, and he went to my dog. It was injured, so he shot it. And he went to the mule and saw that it had a broken leg, so he shot it. And he came and stood over me and said, 'How are you?' and I said, 'I never felt better in my life.'"

Context makes all the difference.

How God's Children Change

When I was a child, my minister father brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose. There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they'd raise him as if he were one of their own sons.

At first, it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home—an environment free of heroin-addicted adults! Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger:

"No, no. That's not how we behave in this family."

"No, no. You don't have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want."

"No, no, Roger, we expect you to show respect in this family." And in time Roger began to change.

Now, did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family? No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father. But did he then have to do a lot of hard work because he was in the family? You bet he did. It was tough for him to change, and he had to work at it. But he was motivated by gratitude for the

incredible love he had received.

Do you have a lot of hard work to do now that the Spirit has adopted you into God's family? Certainly. But not in order to become a son or a daughter of the heavenly Father. No, you make those changes because you are a son or daughter. And every time you start to revert back to the old addictions to sin, the Holy Spirit will say to you, "No, no. That's not how we act in this family."

We must keep Romans 7 in context, or we'll come to some bogus conclusions.

Charles Finney:

You see some people who are encouraged by the 7th chapter of Romans, supposing it to describe a Christian's experience. But if they have gone no further than that, they are still under the law. I have been amazed how professors of religion will cling to a legal experience, and justify it by a reference to using this chapter.

I am fully convinced that interpreting [verses 14 to 24] as a Christian experience, has done incalculable evil and has led thousands of souls to stop there and go no further, imagining that they are already as deeply versed in Christian experience as Paul was when he wrote that epistle. And there they have stayed and hugged their delusion...