That's Gospel!
Study 7: The Law and Indwelling Sin[1]

Chapters 6-8 of Romans largely cover the topic of sanctification, the ongoing process of becoming like Christ. In Romans 7, Paul is still answering the objection of Romans 6:15, "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Why doesn't freedom from the law result in lawless people? Why don't justified people sin more and not less?

He begins with a detailed comparison between the function of the law for a married couple and the function of the law for the Christian. The gist of it is that when a death happens in a marriage, the law that makes marriage to another person wrong is not binding anymore. So he argues that, similarly, when the Christian dies with Christ, the law is not binding on the Christian anymore the way it was. That's why we are not "under law." His answer is that when you died to the law you were joined to Christ. You weren't freed from the law just to float around in no relationship at all. You were freed from the law and united to Christ. Christ is your new "husband." And notice what it says about this Christ – "who was raised from the dead." This person we are joined to is alive. This is no list of commandments. This is no external slate of duties. This is a spiritual union with an all-glorious, all-providing, all-satisfying, ever-living Person. More real than the person sitting next to you. AND the aim of this joining (this "marriage"), he says, is that you "bear fruit for God."

[1] This Article was adapted from pastor, John Piper's, Sermon Series on Romans 7. www.desireingod.org

There it is. You don't go on sinning. If you are in Christ, justified, and married to your Savior, Jesus, you bear fruit for God. That means that new desires and attitudes and choices and actions grow like fruit from this all-satisfying relationship between you and your living "husband," Jesus Christ. So being set free from the law does not mean freedom from love and justice; it means freedom to marry the one who *is* love – the one who produces love in us from the inside out – like fruit on a vine, not tinsel on a tree.

Furthermore, the Law reveals sin and stirs up more sin. Therefore, the holy, just, and good Law of God is not the decisive means of justification or sanctification. It is not the first and decisive way to get right with God, and it is not the first and decisive way to bear fruit for God. Instead, Paul says – shockingly – that, if we are going to bear fruit for God, we must die to the Law. Romans 7:4 "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." If you are going to bear fruit for God, you must die to the Law and be united to the living Christ. In other words, Paul is saying that getting right with God in the first place as an undeserving sinner, and then learning to serve him and bear fruit for him as a justified sinner, must be pursued in an entirely new way having to do with the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ, not in the old way, having to do with the letter – the writings, the Law written on stone. Becoming a Christian and becoming Christ-like (justification and sanctification – declaration and transformation) must be pursued in a way that does not make Law the decisive means or agent.

So When Paul is done with Romans 1-7 he has accomplished two great things: on the one hand, he has shown that we must die to the law to be accepted by God (justification, 3:28) and we must die to the law to bear fruit for God (sanctification, 7:4-6). And on the other hand, this necessity to die to the law to be justified and sanctified is *not* because the law is sin or poison. It's because in our dreadfully sinful condition we must have Christ for the ground of our justification, and Christ for the power of our sanctification. The law cannot do what only Christ can do.

Paul's main point is the same: Justification by faith apart from works of the Law (3:28) stands, because it does not imply that the Law is sin or poison. And sanctification by faith through death to the Law (7:4) stands, because it does not imply that the Law is sin or poison. You need not fear that receiving the gift of justification by faith alone will tarnish the Law of God. You need not fear that bearing fruit for God by dying to the Law will tarnish the Law of God. On the contrary when you turn to Christ for justification and when you turn to Christ for sanctification you will *honor* the Law of God. Because the goal of that Law is "Christ for righteousness for all who believe" (10:4). And the fruit of love inspired by Christ (7:4) is a fulfillment of the Law (13:10).

Lastly, Paul goes on to further tackle the objections raised in Romans six, by dealing with the Christian experience. And we can see the essence of his answer in four pairs of statements. One half of each pair says that Christians love the Law and delight in the Law, and the other half says that our failures are not owing to disrespect for the Law but to the power of indwelling sin. So his answer is twofold: esteem for the Law and acknowledgement of indwelling sin.

Pair #1
· *Esteem for Law: Romans 7:14a*, "For we know that the Law is spiritual."
· *Acknowledgement of indwelling sin: Romans 7:14b,* "But I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."

Pair #2
· *Esteem for Law:* Romans 7:16, "But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good."
· *Acknowledgement of indwelling sin: Romans 7:17*, "So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Here is where the term "indwelling sin" comes from. And you can see it again in 7:20: "But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which *dwells* in me.

Pair #3
· *Esteem for Law: Romans 7:22*, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man."
· *Acknowledgement of indwelling sin: Romans 7:23*, "But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Pair #4
· *Esteem for Law: Romans 7:25b*, "So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God."

· *Acknowledgement of indwelling sin: Romans 7:25c*, "But on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

Paul's answer is that the Christian loves the Law of God, esteems the Law of God, delights in the Law of God, concurs with it, regards it as good, and does not blame the Law for his own failures. Instead the Christian admits – and here is a crucial and practical teaching that I will close with - that there is in all of us Christians, as long as this fallen age lasts and we live on the earth, the reality of "indwelling sin" (7:17, 20).
In other words, ***the Law does not cause our defeats, the Law defines our victories. Indwelling sin causes our defeats***. And Paul is very jealous in chapters 6-8 that we not overstate or understate the measure of holiness possible in this fallen age where Christians are delivered from the dominion of sin and yet groan awaiting the full redemption of our bodies, Romans 8:23, and the "law of sin" connected with them.

Scripture Reading: Romans 7, ESV
Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? [2] For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. [3] Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.
[4] Likewise, my brothers, you also 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. [5] For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. [6] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. [7] What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." [8] But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. [9] I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. [10] The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. [11] For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. [12] So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. [13] Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. [14] For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. [15] For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. [16] Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [18] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. [19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. [20] Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. [21] So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. [22] For I delight in the law of

God, in my inner being, [23] but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. [24] Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? [25] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Scripture Meditation: Romans 7:14-15

[14] For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. [15] For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Partner Assignment:  **V** [2]

Meet with your Prayer Partner This week and Discuss the following: *Paul also talks about the struggle of progressive sanctification for believers quite plainly in Romans 7, "So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." Upon salvation in Christ, we are given a new nature that we are to actively engage in war with against our old, sinful nature, bringing it into subjugation and mortification daily. This war will not be over, with its highs and lows, daily victories, and sometimes, daily defeats, until we pass from this life to eternity. The new, sanctified, Spirit nature within us, and the old, sinful nature are opposites. One pastor puts it this way, "It's like the difference between sheep and pigs. Sheep and pigs get muddy and dirty. However, they view and experience it much differently. Sheep get muddy and dirty, but I don't think they like to. Their nature is different from the pig. The pig loves to get dirty and loves the mud. The pig is occasionally clean but prefers to be muddy. The sheep is occasionally muddy but wants to be clean. A pig will be happy to stay perpetually in mud. A sheep won't. A sheep won't stay in the mud. It's not his nature to do so."*[3] *When I sin, it doesn't feel the same, and I have this voice or conscious guiding me and convicting me. This is a beautiful thing. Christians may and will sin but it's no longer our nature to do so.*

1. How does this illustration help you to understand progressive sanctification?
2. Which animal can you relate with the most right now and why?
3. How do you know that you are saved? What are the "fruits" of salvation in your life? How are your desires, will, comfort with sin, and your conscience different than before you came to know Christ?
4. Read the following verses on the indwelling Spirit: Ezekiel 36:27, 2 Timothy 1:14, Romans 8:9, 11, 1 Corinthians 6:19, and Galatians 4:6. How has the indwelling Spirit, the Holy Spirit, made a difference in your life and helped you to be assured of your salvation?

Questions for Discussion: Romans 7: The Law and Indwelling Sin

Pre-Article Questions:

[2] Images taken from google.com, *Google Images*

[3] Dewitt, Steve. *What Does it Mean That a Christian "Cannot Keep on Sinning."* April 28, 2013, www.stevedewitt.org

1. If you were able to meet with your prayer partner last week, how did God use that time to speak to you and bless you all?
2. Would you call yourself a perfectionist? Why or why not? What do perfectionist tend to struggle with the most, or what is really driving their perfectionism?
3. Have you ever heard of the Biblical term, "sanctification?" What does this term mean to you?

Post-Article Questions:

1. What was really sticking out to you about the article this week?
2. What does this article mean when it talks about the word, "Law?" What is it referring too?
3. How does the "Law" actually benefit us even though we are no longer slaves to it? (e*xamples: reveals and qualifies sin(transgressions), reveals victory, makes it impossible to get to God in our own strength…)*
4. Christ says in Matthew 5:17-20, He came to fulfill the law! Read this scripture and discuss how is He the fulfillment of the Law?

Post-Scripture Questions:

1. In Romans 1-6, what do we have to die to in order to enter a covenantal relationship with Christ?
2. How have you given up striving in your own strength to keep the "law," and how have you come to trust in your union, your "marriage," to Christ to change you? Can you give an example of this from your own life recently?
3. How does receiving Christ grace for us, living by grace, instead of "law," actually produce good fruit, greater love in our hearts for God, ourselves, and others, and true freedom? How have you noticed this in your life?
4. From verses 7-13, how does sin use the law against people? How does sin deceive us and our understanding about God? What thoughts about yourself and God are you struggling with that are coming from a place of struggle with sin? What truths about, faith, grace, and the cross can help you combat these lies?
5. From verses 14-20, how is the "law" good, spiritual, holy, and right? Why is the law not the culprit for the Christian stumbling's, but rather, our sin, indwelling sin nature?
6. What is Paul's answer to verse 24, the problem and exhaustion of indwelling sin for believers?
7. How can you relate to the feeling Paul is expressing about indwelling sin personally, and how have you not allowed it to keep you frozen, make excuses to stay in sin and not repent, be bitter, or retreat? Have you learned to love and serve the law from the heart and mind this semester as Paul says is the answer to our problem of sin? How so?

In Closing:

Close Life Group in worship, reading verses, 24-25 of Romans a few more times out loud, and praying for one another to be encouraged in our fight against indwelling sin.