

Romans Chapter 7 - John Karmelich

Title "How do I do that?"

I warned my regulars a few weeks back that Romans 5-7 is a tough "uphill climb". We're on the last of those lessons. Romans asks some tough questions Christians should wrestle with: Since faith in Jesus for what He did and who He is, is all we need for salvation, how does God's laws fit into that scenario? If His laws are a good thing, but they're not necessary for salvation, why bother with them at all? If we want to please God with our lives, why do we still battle our old sinful nature? Why don't we just give into our sinful desires and why bother trying to please God? These are tough questions to wrestle with and I'm still on the first paragraph! The good news is Paul wrestled with them and provides answers!

That's why I titled this lesson, "How do I do that?" In effect, Paul struggled with these same questions. He realized he wasn't perfect, and He had a strong desire to please God. Paul points here that His laws, (those written in the first five books of the bible) are good things and they're the best way to live, if one was able to do it perfectly. To state the classic joke, "There are two ways to get into heaven, we accept Jesus' full payment of every sin we ever did or will commit; or live a perfect life and tell Jesus to move over!" The related question is if we are only saved by God's grace, why do we still desire to sin, if it is our desire to please God? It's a known fact that if there were no "keep off the grass" signs, most people would not walk on the grass! His laws are still His standard for how we're to live, but we can't live how He desires based on willpower. Our sinful nature's still part of us and it makes us rebel and the fact we know it's wrong increases that desire! That's the type of stuff Romans 7 wrestles with! Unfortunately, we won't get answers to those questions until Chapter 8. Chapter 7 presents us with the problem!

Paul talks about human existence! He uses marital laws as a rough example of how our relationship to the law works. He begins by saying in effect when we were little children, we don't know how to obey, and we need to be taught how to be good! In fact, the Jewish ritual of a "Bar Mitzvah" (and the female equivalent) were not designed as a big party. The purpose was, in effect, a notification that parents are no longer responsible for the sins of their children! So, it's a ritual of growing up! Paul in effect makes a statement that as children we're not responsible for our actions, then when children reach a point they can take responsibility for their actions, at that age, they become "married" to the law. That's why Paul compares the Christian relationship to the law like marriage. If our spouse dies, we are no longer under any marital obligation so that relationship is over! Same with our relationship with Jesus! In that sense we are released from the law. That's Romans 4-6 in a nutshell. Now comes the next issue, what do we do NOW THAT we're not obligated to keep that law?

If one's confused at this point, just remember that we as Christians believe God's laws are a good thing, but they are not a requirement for salvation. It doesn't mean when Christians sin that pleases God! It is the opposite. Sin, which just means to "miss the mark" draws us away from Him! The purpose of life as a Christian is to use our lives to honor God. That means obeying as much as possible. When we get an issue the law's silent on, we're to make the best decisions we can. The issue Paul raises in Chapter 7 is how do we do that? Willpower will eventually fail! Even if we say things like "Heavenly Father I'm not able to resist this sin by myself, help me!" The problem is the temptation is still there! We can use a set of "things" that can help us with temptation or have people we're accountable to! The problem we all face is we each have our sinful nature that makes us "want to step on the grass when a sign says that we are not allowed to!"

So why does God have these rules when we have free will and our old "sinful nature" inside of us? We can argue it's unfair or "the devil made me do it" or "that's just the way I am I can't help myself!" What this chapter is getting at is no matter what excuse we give, we're still accountable to God! But John we are saved by grace, why should we care? Because as Christians we freely choose to give our lives over to Christ, so we belong to Him and want to please Him! Like I always argue living the Christian life is not about obligation, it's about gratitude! Because we're grateful for what God did for us, it's our desire to please Him! But John, you just argued how impossible obedience to God is! Why should we try?

As I argued in the last lesson, living the Christian life is like trying to push a car up a hill. We realize it has a motor and we don't have to push! My point is with the Holy Spirit guiding us we can live as God desires we live. But you just said it's impossible! That's true, without the power of God working inside of us, that alone makes it possible to obey Him! Does that mean I can jump off a cliff and God's going to rescue me? He can if He wants, and that was one of Satan's temptations to Jesus. He wants us to do the will of God the Father! That's why we pray for guidance. That's why God will often lead us down the path He desires. Often God goes quiet. Those are the times when God's saying to us in effect, "Do you trust Me now, even through all this?" Living the Christian life has nothing to do with becoming a wealthy person or living a long life. It's all about doing His will. Since He's in charge of our lives, He decides how long we live and what happens to us! Does that mean we shouldn't try to earn a living? I would never argue that! There are some wealthy Christians. The issue is strictly about doing what we believe is His will for us at this moment. Will we be perfect? Of course not! That doesn't mean we're not obligated to try because again it is our desire to please Him with our lives! That is what Christians are called to do once we get saved!

That leads me back to my original question, "How do I do that?" As most of us already know the first step is admitting Jesus is God and He died for every sin we ever have or will commit. When we mess up for the 1,000th time on the same thing, realize we can't lose our salvation. (Some people argue we can, but if we believe Jesus is God and died for our sins, we can't lose it!) Then comes what I call that "Impossible Part": Living as God desires. The ONLY way to do that is to ask the Holy Spirit to guide our lives, trust He can guide us to turn from sin. Just remember every time we sin, it's a moment where we're displeasing to God! Even if we committed a sin a lot, all we must do is confess it's displeasing to God. He's not counting every sin, as a mark against us! I view sin as a moment where when I'm aware of it, I state it's wrong and turn from it! Yes, I'd argue we could still suffer the consequences of sin, but God doesn't hold it against us AT ALL!

To quote a movie line about several people who escaped from prison and got baptized, "God may have forgiven you of our sins, but that has no bearing on the state of Mississippi!" (A rough translation from the movie, "O Brother Where Art Thou?") My point is God has forgiven us, but we must still deal with any consequences from those sins and how it affects our lives or others around us!

Since the law is a good thing and we can't obey it by willpower and even when we sight the Holy Spirit we still mess up? That leads to the final line of Chapter 7: "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." (ESV Translation). This is Paul saying that he is stuck on this problem! It is his realization that he will never be good enough to please God no matter how hard he tries. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us but still fall to temptation. What do we do, given all that? The answer is Chapter 8 (one of my favorites in the bible)! I encourage you to return for the next lesson or just study Chapters 7 and 8 yourself. As my regulars know there are no breaks in the original text.

In the meantime, I do ask to develop a regular habit of prayer for His guidance and daily Bible reading if you're not doing that already! Remember God will NEVER leave or forsake us!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading!

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