

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Theology Bites—Man & Sin, Pt 2

Selected Passages

PowerPoint Presentation: None

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Sound Doctrine, Sin, Total Depravity Guilt, Romans 7

SermonAudio blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. Turn to Romans 7:13-25 (Read).
- B. Last week I spoke about as bluntly as I could about the reality of sin in this world and in us. We are sinners by nature and no part of us is untouched by sin.
 1. The challenge for us is that we don't like to really believe that, though we might affirm it with our mouths.
 2. We are reluctant to admit sin, we are quick to see it clearly in others and yet we act like Eve when it is our turn to consider sin.
 3. As I was writing last week's sermon I thought repeatedly of this passage and how it might help us understand the fullness of sin and its incredible power and authority in this age.
- C. The passage is a hard one to follow.
 1. The challenge is who is the "I" that Paul keeps referring to starting in vs 14?
 2. Of course if you are thinking that "I" refers to Paul you are correct. But which Paul? And depending on how you answer that you are then going to go in one direction or another with the rest of this passage.
 3. It has two main ways that people view it:
 - a. The first view was that this was Paul describing himself as a Christian.
 - b. The second view was that it was Paul before he was a Christian.
 - c. Both view are very easily taken because they both have tremendous strengths to their arguments. In fact I think it is impossible to land solidly on one of the positions over the other. **And I believe that this was done on purpose by the Apostle Paul.**
 4. Why?

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- a. This is because the struggle with sin is not the focus actual. Paul is dealing with a very different issue—the ability of the Law to change lives.
- b. And the resounding answer is that the law cannot accomplish this—it cannot change the heart of man.
- c. But the reason the Law of God cannot do this is because of sin. So we need to be convinced of this or we will not have a proper, orthodox view of sin.

D. Structure:

1. There is a distinct flow to this passage. (Slide 2)
2. In verse 13 Paul makes the central point that sin in his heart is what brought death to him, not the Law.
 - a. Our problem is not with God’s Law, but our sin.
 - b. Sin is what kills us, not the Law of God.
 - c. The Law is very good, but I am very sinful.
3. (Slide 3) This leads to three explanations that show that the problem is not in the Law of God but in the heart of man. They are developed by “For we know” in vs 14; “For I know” in vs 18 and “I find then” in vs 21
 - a. 14-17—the law is spiritual but I am of the flesh.
 - b. 18-20—no good thing dwells in my flesh.
 - c. 21-25—my mind delights in the Law of God but my flesh is still serving the Law of sin.

II. The Thesis: Our problem is not with God’s Law, but our sin (13).

- A. As I just said, this is Paul’s thesis.
1. A thesis is nothing more than a proposition or statement and what Paul then does is goes about proving it.
 2. This whole thing is set in the very personal experience of Paul himself. He had a great desire to keep the law and found that sin always won in the end.
 3. He considers the whole of his life, before Christ, after Christ, it does not matter the problem is not the Law of God, it is himself and his sin.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- B. When you think about what Paul has said about the Law you could easily begin to conclude that the Law was bad.
1. 7:10-11 shows that it is through the Law he died. It proved to be the death of him.
 2. But this is simply showing that the Law is an instrument in the hands of sin. And that sin is found in the heart of Paul.
- (Slide 4)
3. Don't shift the blame on the cause of death from sin to the Law of God.
 4. This is key, it is similar to the bumper sticker that says, "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." Don't blame the gun for a person's death.
 5. In the same way, don't blame the law just because the sin that is in your hearts takes it and uses it to kill. Put the blame where it belongs, on you and your sin.
- C. And all of this could lead you to think that God has not planned for this. That somehow His law was a failure and sin triumphed over it and therefore over God.
1. I mean, if the Law is good and yet it can't control sin, rather sin controls it, then apparently God, who gave the Law, failed. Right? Wrong.
 2. Notice the second half of verse 13.
 - a. What is it that became death for Paul? [sin].
 - b. But notice the next words after that, "in order that. . ." Do you see it? It states the purpose behind all of this stuff about law and sin and sinfulness.
 - c. And in doing so Paul shows that God is not shocked, dismayed nor surprised by the way that sin uses His holy law. Rather it is all according to His perfect purpose.
 3. When you see an evil person kill another evil person there is little reaction except perhaps the horror of the violence itself. When you hear of a gang member who kills another gang member you may easily say, "Good riddance." It is hard to feel a lot of sympathy for a drug dealer who complains that another drug dealer cheated him and stole all his money.
 4. But when you see an evil person take a poor, helpless person and kill them there is a gut reaction that says, "That is wrong!" To watch a man grab a old lady and beat her and rob her brings out a very strong reaction in our hearts? Why, because they abused something that is good.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. And that is exactly what Paul says happens with the Law and sin.
 - a. Sin takes the Law, which is good, and uses it to kill us.
 - b. It is like someone choking you to death by shoving your pet rabbit down your throat. Don't blame the poor bunny!
 - c. God uses the goodness of the Law as a backdrop to reveal the sinfulness of sin. (Slide 5)
 - (1) There is not good thing in sin.
 - (2) It simply corrupts all that it touches. It uses and abuses even good things—like the law.
 - (3) But we fail to see this so often, for we are led astray by the deceitfulness of sin. It promises us life and pleasure, and we are lovers of pleasure and so we blindly follow it to our destruction.
 - (4) This is the purpose of the simple illustration up on the screen. We can see the black circle on both pictures, but on only one is it stark and obvious.
 - (5) In the same way the Law of God, being spiritual and good and holy becomes that stark background that reveals the depth of evil that is built into the very nature of sin.
6. (Slide 6) Here is a reasonable principle to draw from this thesis of Paul's:
 - a. Sin cannot leave unaffected anything it touches.
 - b. Sin will always twist that thing, even if it is good and holy, to produce more sin.
 - c. We must learn this every day beloved, that there is no good thing in sin. We must therefore hate it, revile it, and fight it with everything we possess in Christ Jesus.
 - d. We also must understand that even the Law of God cannot destroy this great enemy. Holy and good though it is, it shall only become an instrument for greater sin.
 - e. Therefore, whether a person is a Christian or a non-Christian the answer regarding sin must be found somewhere else other than the Law. And the answer is, of course, it is found only in Jesus Christ.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- D. Now Paul begins to develop this argument and in doing so we see him give three explanations that show that the law is good and the problem is our sin.

III. The law is spiritual but I am of the flesh (14-17). (Slide 7)

- A. The Law is “spiritual.”

1. Simply a reference to the fact that the Spirit is the one who gave the Law.
2. The Spirit is “Holy” and therefore that which He gives is “spiritual” and therefore holy (cf. Vs 12).
3. It does not belong to this world, this age, or this realm that is fallen and passing away. **But**, it also does not possess the power to take us out of this world and age—it is impotent in the face of Sin.
4. When I say that it does not belong to this age, I am speaking again of that very important concept that there are two ages or realms that exist: One that is fallen and is passing away and one that is new and is ever-increasing. One that is temporary and one that is eternal. One that is fleshly/earthly and one that is spiritual/heavenly.
5. The law is pure and holy, it shall not pass away with this sinful age.
6. Having again established that the Law is pure, holy, righteous, and spiritual he now begins to show the contrast of the Law’s goodness and his sinfulness.
7. And in doing so, he writes in such a way that it can apply both to the believer and unbeliever at any given time.

- B. (Slide 8) Paul gives three contrasting qualities about himself that shows that sin is the problem, not the law:

1. He is “of flesh” (14).
 - a. So you see the contrast?
 - b. One is spiritual and one is fleshly.
 - (1) We cannot identify the "flesh" with the "body" nor does it refer to the physical desires of the body. Sin does not arise out of the physical body, but out of the heart of man. Just as the heart of man is metaphorically speaking of man's nature, so too is "flesh."

M i s s i o D e i F e l l o w s h i p

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We can subtly fall into error when we use the word flesh, or body in a way that implies that our physical bodies are evil. We look forward to the day we go to heaven and leave this body. The fact that our body rots into dust means nothing. It will be resurrected and changed into the likeness of our Lord. Our Lord had a physical body on earth and yet had no sin. Yet the body He had once resurrected was the same yet different. We too have a body, and it is not evil in itself. But when we are resurrected it will be similar yet different.

- (2) Working definition: When the word "flesh" is being used in an ethical sense it is referring to that aspect of the nature of man that is influenced and directed toward sin. It is unredeemed and will perish.
- (3) The instrumentality of the flesh with sin.
 - (a) This is the fact that the bible also shows at times a close relationship between sin and the physical body.
 - (b) Because it is so intimately connected to sin the body plays a significant role in the commission of sin.
 - (c) The tongue lies, but it is not the physical tongue that is evil.
 - (d) The hand strikes and steals, but it is not what is evil.
- c. 1 Corinthians 15:35ff for a helpful cross-reference.
- d. Transition: because Paul is still of the flesh there are natural consequences that arise. . .
- 2. He does not practice what he desires, rather what he hates (15).
 - a. Every believer understands this, but in a different way so do unbelievers.
 - b. Go to any AA meeting and you will hear people who desire to be free from drunkenness who freely confess the desire and failure.
 - c. Go to any weight loss meeting and people will talk about how much they hate their weight gain and confess their failures.
 - d. And the list goes on. People desiring one thing and doing another, the very thing that they hate.
 - e. And Paul says that the reason is simply our sin, we cannot and will not obey in ourselves.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- f. Now, as a believer we can see this much more clearly than when we were not saved.
 - (1) Back then we knew we could “fix” things and but as a believer we see that sin is truly evil and the more we grow in Christ we see the power of sin all the more.
 - (2) Ask a non-believer if they fail in keeping the law and they will say yes, but then follow it up with “I just need to try harder” or “It is unfair!” thus blaming the Law rather than their sin.
- g. And so in verse 16 Paul shows how this internal failing struggle with sin proves his central point, the law is good—it is our sin that is the problem.
 - (1) The harsh reality is that in the heart of every human is a sense of what is right.
 - (2) The Law of Moses merely defines it very clearly.
 - (3) But humans lives according to this sense of law and it condemns them.
 - (4) And in doing so it shows that God’s demands in His Law are true and right.
- 3. The final contrast to the law that Paul gives is that he has sin working and flowing within his being (17).
 - a. Paul is saying that the “I” is not what is doing this evil, but rather it is sin.
 - b. Here we again can apply it to both believer and unbeliever alike.
 - c. The bible, especially in Romans 5 and 6 make it clear that all mankind are sinners and sold into slavery to sin.
 - (1) As I have repeatedly said, sin is seen as a ruling power, a slave owner, exerting its power and presence in the life of every human.
 - (2) And certainly this is true in the fullest sense of the word for the non-believer.
 - (3) It does not excuse the unbeliever, but it does explain what is happening, there is a foreign power, sin, that dwell and works in his heart.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- d. In the same way a believer understands this as well.
 - (1) There is that struggle against the flesh and sin that every Christian understands.
 - (2) There is that constant presence and influence of sin that Paul warns us about in chapter 6.
 - (3) We are no longer slaves to sin like the unbeliever is.
 - (4) But we are not free from its presence either. Which is why Paul commands us in chapter 6 not to present ourselves, our bodies and minds to sin to obey it. Rather we are to present ourselves to God to obey him.
- C. And so Paul shows that the Law is very good, but he is very sinful and all in this room can say the same.

These last two points are enlargement on what I have just said and therefore they shall go very quickly.

IV. Second explanation: There is no good thing that dwells in my flesh (verses 18-20).

(Slide 9)

- A. Now Paul builds on what he has just said and drives it home all the more powerfully.
- B. Again, he is showing that the problem is in us, not in the Law of God.
- C. This is done in a progressive explanation that leads to another conclusion.
 - 1. Note “for” in 18, “for” in 19, and then the conclusion “but if” and the implied “then” in 20.
- D. First explanation is that though there is a desire to carry out good works, the reality is that it doesn’t happen.
- E. Second explanation is that he practices the very evil that he doesn’t desire.
- F. And the conclusion is the same as verse 17, sin is the problem with him. And again we must concur, for our lives prove it out time and time again.

V. (Slide 10) Third explanation: My mind delights in the Law of God but my flesh still serves the Law of sin (verses 21-25).

- A. The confession: evil is what drives him regardless of what he desires (21).
 - 1. Sin is a binding force that cripples us.

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Every time we seek to do good evil is lurking within us to twist it and turn it toward evil.
 3. We are all like Cain, when God warned him that sin was crouching and seeking to destroy him.
 4. In verses 22-23 Paul then develops this, vs 23 relates to 21a and vs 22 relates to 21b.
- B. The development of the confession: The flesh contradicts and fights against the mind which is seeking to do right and good.
- C. The conclusion: it is “I” not the “Law” that is wretched, for the sin within still is exerting its power upon me.

VI. Conclusion.

- A. Verse 25 is the true and proper cry of a person who truly considers their weakness in the flesh. The greater you understand the sin in you and the struggle that you fight because of it the greater your own wretchedness becomes apparent.
- B. It is here finally that we see the name of our beloved Lord again.
1. When Paul looks at himself there is no hope. Every desire to do good falls under the power and presence of sin.
 2. But here he begins to give us a glimpse of what chapter eight is going to be all about—salvation is not found in us and our ability to do righteousness, it is found in Christ alone and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit
- C. Beloved, the answer to sin can only be found in Jesus Christ.
1. Only He is the Law-keeper.
 2. Only in His death and shedding of blood is there forgiveness.
 3. Try to approach God through Christ and the Law and you shall be rejected, for the Law shall condemn you.
 4. Approach God through His Son alone and you shall be saved, for in Christ alone is eternal life found.