

**The Gospel as it Really Is:
Romans simply Explained
Sanctification (4) What is the role of law?
Romans 7:1-25
July 20th 2025
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Making our way through Paul's letter to the Romans, we have been introduced to some beautiful Bible words: Justification & Sanctification.

Justification means "declared righteous in God's eyes" and we have learnt that justification to us faith: not by religious deeds or good works but merely by trusting in what Jesus Christ has done for us.

This is the Gospel we are privileged to share with the world! "Repent, and Believe the Gospel" and you will be declared righteous in God's eyes.

Yesterday I was privileged to speak at the wedding of Jonathan and Katie Harris. Unusual wedding request—they asked me to preach the gospel to their guests, rather than speak to them! I managed to do both. May the Lord give us all the desire and the courage to share this Gospel with our families and friends and neighbours and work colleagues:

*We've a story to tell to the nations
that the Lord who reigns above
hath sent us His Son to save us
and show us that God is love.*

The other beautiful word we've been introduced to is "Sanctification." Sanctification is the process of taking someone whose life was filled with sins of all kinds and making them more and more holy, more like Jesus, more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled, as the years roll by. A saint in the making is a beautiful thing to behold!

We're now in the "sanctification" part of the letter, chapters 6,7 & 8, Paul has a lot to say . This is the fourth sermon on sanctification and there are more to come.

But should anyone thinks we're going slowly through this letter, Martin Lloyd-Jones a London pastor, preached through Romans on Friday evenings between 1955 and 1968, 13 years, 366 sermons! By his standard, we're racing through the letter! It's essential we progress thoroughly through this life-giving letter!

The bottom line, in Romans 6,7 & 8, is that God wants his people to be sanctified:

*"Shall we go on sinning? By no means?" 6:1-2
"Shall we sin? By no means!" verse 15*

Are we all on the same page on this truth? God wants his people to live in newness of life, by the truth and power he supplies.

So far Paul has given us two great helps on our sanctification journey:

Number 1: We've been united to Christ in his death, his death to sin and for sin, and raised with Christ to new life! So we've died to our old life; we've begun a new one!

Number 2: We're no longer slaves to sin, God has supernaturally broken the power of cancelled sin, he's set the sinner free! We have a new master, Righteousness! How can we go back to serving old master sin—especially when we think of the terrible harvest we reaped when we obeyed his evil voice!?

In today's reading, chapter 7:1-6, Paul is going to share another help, but before I explain this third help, may I ask you;

Where are you on your sanctification journey? You've made a profession of faith, you're a follower of Jesus, you've been baptised, where are you on the pathway to holiness?

Are we convinced that the Lord wants us to change, commands us to change, expects us to change, gives us the power to change? That is where holiness begins, with the conviction that God wants us to be holy. And then the practice of holiness begins, exemplified, in Colossians 3, this:

*"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self (**now the positives**), which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*

Are we making progress? By the grace of God we are.

In Paul's third sanctification help he explains the role of the 10 commandments, the law. Is sanctification all about obeying the ten commandments? Should we have said to the three young people who were baptised last week, "Here's a copy of the ten commandments, memorise them and when you wake up each day recite them and obey them at school and in the home;

- Don't worship idols
- Don't take God's name in vain
- Honour mom and dad
- Don't steal
- Don't lie
- Don't covet
- And so on."

Some of us may be shocked at what Paul is going to say:

"my brothers and sisters, you died to the law." (v.4)

"we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not the old way of the written code." (v. 6)

We don't, we cannot, become sanctified by slavishly obeying the ten commandments!

Let's think for a moment about the Law

Let's think for a moment about the 10 commandments. And it will become clear why holiness can't come about through the law.

1. The law is good!

Again and again, Paul insists that the Ten Commandments are good in and of themselves:

"The law is holy and the commandment is holy righteous and good." (verse 12)

God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. They summarise what a godly life looks like. For that reason they are good for us to know and even to preach on. Jesus obeyed them fully. You will find that many Anglican church buildings have a copy of the 10 commandments posted up on one of the walls, along with the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed.

2. No-one can be saved by obeying the ten commandments. If you want to think of them as a ladder to heaven with ten rungs, you and I keep falling off one rung or another! Every Day! We might manage three rungs one day but then we slip off the fourth!

"Therefore—because we are all sinners - no-one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin." (3:20)

The law is hopeless when it comes to salvation. The problem is not with the law but with us!

I'm reading through Ezekiel in my daily Bible readings. I write all over my daily reading Bible—and

because I've used the same bible for decades I come across things I've written years ago. This week I came across these words:

"So deep is human wickedness that the most privileged and blessed people in the world (the Jewish nation) failed: we need a NEW way!"

No-one can be saved by obeying the commandments, because we are sinners who keep disobeying! Here's the third thing we need to know about The Law, and it should not surprise us,

3. No-one can be sanctified by obeying the Law (because of indwelling sin)

Although our lives are transformed by the Gospel, we change, we're not the same people, until our dying day, we remain sinners, "Simul iustus et peccator" who will not be able to obey the law fully.

As in Justification, so in Sanctification, a new way apart from the law must be found!

Let me tell you a story which will unlock what Paul is saying in this chapter.

The Batchelor and his Housekeeper

One day a wealthy Batchelor employed a housekeeper. He put up detailed instructions on the kitchen wall:

1. Meals are served at 8.00, 1.00 and 6.00
2. Washing up to be done immediately after every meal
3. No tea leaves down the sink!, so on

Two things happened whenever the Housekeeper saw the list. The first was this, she always felt a complete failure, because she could never quite keep them. She'd be a minute late with breakfast one day, on another day, other duties would prevent her from washing up straight after each meal. But secondly—and this surprised her—she found herself resenting and **even rebelling** against the rules!

"I've never thought of putting tea leaves down the sink! Fancy him telling me what to do." And while he was not looking she found herself **deliberately** washing tea leaves down the kitchen sink!

Long story short, one day the Batchelor and the Housekeeper fell in love. And guess what, he took the rules down! She was not his housekeeper anymore, she was his beloved wife!

But because she loved him, since she remembered what pleased him, she wanted to obey those rules! No longer because she "had to" but because she wanted to! Because she loved him!

That's what Paul is teaching in Romans 7!

If you live your day to day Christian life by trying to obey “ten commandments”, you’ll feel like that housekeeper. 1) full of failure and condemnation every day, 2) even discovering that indwelling sin uses the good law to make you sin *even more*:

*“I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me **every kind of coveting**. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.”*

You'll never be sanctified by obeying the law!

Instead, you and I must realise that we have died to the law and we're now in a loving relationship with Christ:

*“You died to the law through the body of Christ, That you might **belong to another**, to him who was raised from the dead (look at the power he has) in order that we might bear fruit to God.”*

Everything changes! We move from rules to relationship, from servitude to love! Your motive for sanctification is love, and we'll discover in chapter 8, the power to change does not come from self-will but the Holy Spirit.

“By dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” (verse 6)

Working it all out

But today, two simple lessons about sanctification for today; one negative, one positive.

We cannot be sanctified by obeying the ten commandments

The law has no power to sanctify. In fact, our sinful old nature may twist the good law and make us want to sin *even more*! (“Let’s put more tea leaves down the sink!”)

We are sanctified by responding in love to someone who first loved us

Instead, we are sanctified by responding in love to someone who first loved us. I want live a life that pleases the Lord Jesus because he loves me! Love is the new motive for sanctification, not cold obedience to the written code!

And we must all work this out. In our own lives.

May the Lord increase our knowledge of his great love for us, so that in joyful response, in the power he supplies, we might all live a life that pleases him.