

## Fullness of Time: Now What?

07.18.2021

ROMANS 7

### INTRODUCTION

A. Have you ever said, "What have I gotten myself into?"

1. Maybe you accepted, what you thought, was a great job opportunity. It was a perfect fit. But two weeks in, you started seeing warning signs everywhere; maybe your boss wasn't as nice as she was during the interview process – and before you're saying, "What have I gotten myself into?"

2. Or maybe you started dating this person who, at first, seemed charming, sweet and funny. But after a while, you saw a totally different side of them emerge? You find out all he eats for breakfast is Fruity Pebbles, likes watching reruns of Gilligan's Island on his days off, and spends a lot of his paycheck on his Pez dispenser collection. And you find yourself saying, "What have I gotten myself into?"

3. Or you decide to buy this thing, something that's a big investment. At first, it seemed perfect. Sure, it was a little more than you would have preferred to spend, but you just knew that it was going to be great! But then, additional costs started adding up and the payments still needed to be made – month after month after month. And you found yourself saying, "What have I gotten myself into?"

4. Maybe you didn't know that you were marrying the wicked witch of the North.

5. Maybe you didn't know that he was going to suck his teeth.

6. Maybe you thought that degree in Nordic Basket-weaving was going to be the path to riches.

7. "What have I gotten myself into?"

8. If you've ever found yourself saying that, you're not alone. At one time or another, we've all said it.

9. Wouldn't it be nice, if there was a disclosure statement for everything?

10. It's Brene Brown who said, "Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind."

B. We are in the middle of a sermon series titled, “The Fullness of Time” because Christ came and Christianity emerged at the perfect time in human history. And for this series, we are focusing in on a letter Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome around 20-25 years after Jesus and the establishment of the church.

And in this letter, Paul is clear. He is direct. At times...raw. Why? Because clear is kind. He’s not arrogant. He’s not saying, “I have it all together” (and I don’t either, by the way). But Paul is clear. And we may not like it. But if God’s truth hurts our feelings, the problem isn’t with God’s truth.

Romans 7 is about clarity. It’s a disclosure statement. Paul is going to tell us what we’ve gotten ourselves into when we become followers of Jesus.

Transition: But before we get into chapter 7, let’s look and see how he gets there.

## I. ROMANS 1

- After the greetings, Paul gets into the focus of Romans in verses 16-17...
- “I’m not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.”\_Romans 1:16
- The gospel is the “good news” of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The fact that Jesus conquered death is good news for all of us. And it has the power to change lives. All lives.
- Romans 1:17: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith...”
- Did you know that Romans 1:17 changed the course of religious history?
- In the 1500’s, there was a Catholic monk, named Martin Luther, who was reading Romans 1:17 and it stopped him dead in his tracks. And he began to think more and more about what this verse was saying. And he thought, “The church doesn’t teach a righteousness by faith. Instead it teaches a righteousness by works.” In other words, the church is teaching it’s what I do for God that matters, but this verse says that what I do for God isn’t important. What’s important is faith.

And Luther began studying more and more and ended up writing a paper and listed 95 disagreements he had with the church's teaches and he nailed it on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. And the church leaders called him in and said, "Martin Luther, what you must recant - take it back." And Luther said, "Here I stand. I can do no other." And they kicked him out of the church.

But Luther began teaching just what the Bible taught. He believed that the Bible had authority over the church, not the other way around. And Luther's protests were the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Luther's understanding of Romans 1:17 changed the course of church history.

- And what did Luther see? What should we see in Romans 1:17? "There is a righteousness that is by faith." Righteousness is the ability to stand before God without guilt. And that isn't possible because of what we've done. It's only possible because of our faith in Jesus.

- And then in Romans 1:18, Paul segues into an ominous truth: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men."

- God is a God of love. Because He's also a God of justice. And His wrath is equal to His love. Sin is spiritual disobedience and God hates spiritual disobedience. And one day it will be punished.

- Romans 1:20 thru the end of the chapter describes the downward spiral of sin.

a. First, sin begins with the neglect of God. People say, "I believe there is a God, but I don't care. I just want him to leave me alone."

b. Which, second, leads to the worship of other things. If God isn't first in our lives, something else will be.

c. And finally, the neglect of God and the worship of other things leads to total depravity. When someone says, "I know there is a God, but I just want him to leave me alone and I'm going to do what I want to do with my life," God says, "Okay, I'm not going to stop you. I'm not going to get in your way."

d. And left unchecked? Godlessness and wickedness.

e. God allows us to face the consequences of our sin, not because He doesn't care about us, but because He does care. He wants us to get to the point where we say, "What have I gotten myself into? What's the answer?"

## II. ROMANS 2-3

- Paul establishes that everyone, because of our sin, have put ourselves at odds with God.

- Romans 3:10 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one..."

- No one can stand before God without sin or guilt.

- You might be thinking: "But you don't know my grandfather, he is/was a good man." Or, "You don't know my friend Gladys – she's a good woman." Or you might even be thinking, "But what about Pastor Andy? He's a good man, isn't he?" Well sure, comparatively speaking.

- Romans 3:23 reminds us: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

- In other words, no one is good enough. No one is going to be saved from God's wrath because of his or her goodness. Not your grandfather. Not Gladys. Not Andy. Not you. Not me. "All have sinned and fallen short."

- Let's take a test. The 10 Commandments, the 10 laws God gave to the Israelites recorded in Exodus 20, have always been the standard for what is right and what is wrong. The 10 Commandments identify what sin is. So let's see how we do.

(1) *"You shall have no gods before me."* Have we ever made anything in life more important than God? Uh...I have. And you might be thinking, "Well, nothing super evil!" Yeah, but anything? Has your family ever been more important than God? Money? Your career? Even for just 30 minutes? Anything? "Well, yeah."

(2) *"You shall not make for yourself an idol."* Well, I've not done that. You probably haven't either. So we're 1 for 2.

(3) *"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."* In other words, you have never said God's name in vain. It drives me crazy when I hear Christians say, "Oh my God." We are using the only name God ever said, "Don't say that name!" When we hit our thumb with a hammer, why don't we say, "Bob Vila!" Or when we get angry on the road say, "Mario Andretti!" Instead, we say the one name we are told not to misuse. But...I've done it, it's been a while, but I've done it. That's 2 for 3.

(4) *“Remember the Sabbath.”* Well, that’s an Old Testament command and not New Testament. And we celebrate on Sundays because of the resurrection instead of Saturdays. So all of us get a break on this one.

(5) *“Honor your father and mother.”* Didn’t always do that. Three.

(6) *“You shall no murder.”* Never done that. But I John 3:15 says that hating someone is like murder. Four.

(7) *“Shall not commit adultery.”* Never done that either. But Jesus said if we’ve looked at a woman (or man) lustfully we done that. Five.

(8) *“You shall not steal.”* I can’t remember taking something that didn’t belong to me. But surely I did at one time or another. Or kept something someone loaned me. So, six.

(9) *“You should not lie.”* Seven. And if you’ve say, “I’ve never lied,” well you just did. So count that one too.

(10) And finally, *“You shall not covet.”* In other words, we shouldn’t ever want what someone else has. And I’ve done that – eight.

(11) I don’t know about you, but me? I’ve been an unfaithful, foul-mouthed, disrespectful to my parents, murderer, adulterer, who lies and has wanted things that other people have that don’t belong to me. And I’m preaching today!

(12) Because of our sin, we all deserve God’s wrath. Me included.

- **God has never been our problem. God never will be the problem. Sin is the problem.** Sin is what’s wrong with this world. My sin is the problem. My sin is what’s wrong with this world. Greed is. Lust is. Anger is. Fear is. Not God. Our greatest problem has always been sin.

### III. ROMANS 3-6

- Paul describes how faith in Jesus is the only answer to the problem of sin.

- The solution for sin is not renaming it, or getting everyone to agree that it’s okay, to say, “I’m just doing what I want to do” or “I’m just being me.”

The solution isn’t just being better, because, on our own, we just aren’t. The solution isn’t to compromise with it. **The only solution to sin has always been Jesus.**

- And we live in a culture that thinks we are crazy and ridiculous for feeling sorrow for our sin and that the only answer is Jesus.

- But that's okay. Jesus said in Matthew 10:22, "The world will hate you because of me." If the world hates me because I agree with Jesus, I'm okay with that.
- Why should we put our faith in Jesus? Because Jesus died on the cross for to pay for our sin. He is the Savior.
- Romans 5:6-8 says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- And Romans 5:9 says that since we have been made right with God because of Christ's blood, "we will be saved from God's wrath!"
- And in chapter six, Paul writes that Jesus isn't only Savior (the one who saves us from sin), He's also Lord – when we become Christians, He also becomes our Leader.
- And Romans 6:23 wraps up with these powerful words, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Transition: So...sin is our greatest problem. And Jesus is the only answer to the problem of sin – making Jesus my Savior and making Jesus my Lord. And then Paul writes Romans 7. And in Romans 7, Paul says, "So, if you are going to follow Jesus, here's what you've gotten yourself into." There are two things. What can you expect first?

#### IV. **A NEW LIFE – BECAUSE OF JESUS WE NOW HAVE A NEW LIFE.**

A. Romans 7:5-6 says, "For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

B. Paul wrote this letter to were Jewish and had converted to Christianity. People who had tried to follow the Ten Commandments. But just like you and me, they had failed miserably. The Ten Commandments don't keep anyone

from sinning – they only reveal what sin is. But because of Jesus, it's not about keep a set of rules and laws; it's about a relationship with Him.

C. The Golden Gate Bridge in S.F. was completed in 1933. During the first half of construction, a couple dozen people died – fell to their deaths. The contractors overseeing the project decided to add a net underneath the bridge to catch anyone who slipped. During the second half of construction, the net saved everyone who fell. There were no deaths. But the most interesting thing is that fewer people fell. Because they were confident they would be caught if they did fall.

The Ten Commandments never caught anyone from falling into sin. But now, when we put our faith in Jesus and are living with grace as our net, people will be able to live more confidently in their faith. Because grace is going to catch us when we fall.

Transition: In Christ we have a new life. Not like the old life where we were judged based on rules and regulations, but one built around a relationship with Christ. And because of Jesus, here's another thing we are getting into...

## **V. BECAUSE OF JESUS, WE NOW HAVE A NEW FIGHT...WHICH SEEMS A LOT LIKE THE OLD FIGHT.**

A. This new fight centers around sin. "Wait, I thought that fight was over? That Jesus is the answer to the problem of sin?" The truth is, even as followers of Jesus, we won't be ever sinless, but we should sin less.

B. I love Paul's personal honesty in Romans 7:15-23 because it speaks to this new fight we all have.

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if

I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

C. Have you ever disobeyed God, ever sinned, and said, “I never want to do that ever again,” and then...later on...you did it again? Why?

Paul said, “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.”

We are all in the same boat. The battle against sin never truly ends.

D. Verse 21: “So I find this law at work; When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prison of the law of sin at work within my members.”

E. The story of Ravi Zacharias is a sad one, but a real one. For years, Ravi Zacharias, an Indian man who had become a Christian, was an effective defender of Christianity. He was able to answer some of the most difficult questions and respond to the most difficult challenges to Christianity in the most hostile of settings. But after he died in May of last year, a number of women came forward claiming to be victims of sexual abuse from Ravi. Evidently, Ravi had taken advantage of them and manipulated them because of his position.

I’m not here to defend or justify his actions, but my question is: how could a man who seemed to be a devoted follower of Jesus, who knew God’s Word as well as anyone else, struggle so much with sin?

Even when you become a follower of Christ, there is this fight – and it seems a lot like the old fight – with sin.

F. Even when we make the decision to become followers of Jesus, we are still stuck inside these bodies. I would gladly give up sin and this sinful body in



order to follow Jesus. But I can't do that. That's not my decision. I'm going to be in this body until the day God decides that my time is up. I'm stuck, we're stuck in this body of flesh, until the day we enter heaven and eternity. One day, in heaven, we won't struggle with over-eating, or lust, or won't get angry – we won't struggle with temptation.

One day. But that day isn't today. For now, as long as I'm here on this earth, I'm stuck, we're stuck with this.

F. In verse 24 writes, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Our problem is sin, my sin, this sinful body. Who's going to rescue me from all that? God knew exactly what we needed. So He sent His one and only Son – Jesus – to die on the cross for my sin, your sin, our sin.

## CONCLUSION

A. Before we wrap up, here are two challenges...

1. We need to admit and deal with our sin. By refusing to admit and deal with our sin, we are only making our life more complicated. It always has been and always will be our greatest problem. It might seem like it's fun, but that's only always temporary. **We need to admit and deal with our sin.** Maybe you feel like there isn't any use to fight against it. It's been part of you for so long and you've tried to give it up, but you just can't. Don't get complacent. Don't accept it. Admit it and deal with it.

That leads me to the second challenge...

2. **Will we turn to Jesus for help?** Jesus is good news for all of us. He is the answer to our problem with sin. Not because He makes takes away our desire to sin, but because on the cross, He paid for the punishment I deserve for my sin. I deserve to face God's wrath, but I won't. Not because of anything I've done, but because of what Jesus has done. He gave His body and blood on the cross so I can be forgiven. And the blood of Jesus is sufficient to

cover any and every sin we've ever committed, but it only does cover our sin when we make Jesus our Savior and Lord.

B. Years ago, I met with a young man in his mid-20's who expressed interest in becoming a Christian. But he had a hard time understanding grace. You see, he had been in combat in Iraq. What he was feeling was this: "What I've done is unforgivable." In other words, "I'm not good enough for Jesus.

There is no way He could ever love me." I had to explain two things: (1) That none of us are good and that we all have sin. But (2) I explained that **God's grace is greater than our sin.** I explained that in Christ, we have new life – the old me is gone and a new me, with Jesus, becomes our identity. And he gave his life to Christ and was baptized.

Look, I don't know what you've done. But what I do know is that God's grace is greater than your sin too. And that's only possible because Jesus' death on the cross, the greatest sacrifice ever made, is the solution to our greatest problem – sin.

"I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

C. So what do you need to do if you want to become a follower of Jesus – a Christian?

1. Believe
2. Repent
3. Confess
4. Be baptized