UNASHAMED: A STUDY OF ROMANS

Sin Came Alive

ROMANS 7:7–13 · PASTOR BRIAN CARROLL · NOVEMBER 8, 2026

Some things only look dead. Sin can lie quiet for years, until a single command wakes it up and shows us what was there all along. In Romans 7:7–13, Paul tells the story of the day sin came alive in him, and why the law that exposed it was never the enemy.

CHATTANOOGA VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

Introduction

- So… that happened.
  - That's my yard. March of 2024. Recorded by the camera above our garage.
  - Most people's Ring cameras catch package thieves. Mine caught me.
  - Let me tell you what you just watched.
- It was a nice spring afternoon, and I was doing what responsible homeowners do.
  - I was getting rid of a lot of leaves and debris leftover from the winter.
  - Had a small burn pile.
  - I didn't think it was too reckless.
  - The fire was doing what fire is supposed to do…the mess was going to be gone in no time.
- In that corner of the yard, there are all of these utility pedestals - power, phone, maybe mission control - who knows?
  - It's kind of ugly, so former owners surrounded all those pedestals with these big ornamental pampas grass bushes.
  - If I'm being honest, I was probably a little closer than I should have been.
  - Now, if you don't know pampas grass, it's that big tall grass with the feathery plumes.
  - People plant it because it looks nice.
- I didn't think about what pampas grass is after a winter: dead, dry, and packed tight. It's basically a decorative pile of kindling.
  - One ember. That's all it took.
  - It didn't catch. It erupted.
  - Like, the kids getting out of school at Ridgeland probably thought that Missionary Ridge was a dormant volcano that just woke up.
  - Y'all know that old Johnny Cash song - Ring of Fire - yeah. That's what I had.
  - And all I could think was all those utility pedestals inside the burning ring of fire.
  - So I ran and got the hose and started dumping all the water I could find - not on the actual burning bushes, but I was hosing down the box where all the electricity was located.
  - Fortunately, I saved the electricity.
  - The phone pedestal was a little less fortunate.

    - As I was trying to contain the inferno, our neighbor got home.
    - She called my wife to tell on me - because the giant patch of scorched earth, the missing pampas grass bushes, and the melted utility pedestals wouldn't have been sufficient.
    - There was no making this mishap disappear by the time Heather got home.
    - Pampas grass grows fast - not that fast.
- Now, afterward I had a choice about how to tell this story.
    - I could blame the fire.
    - "Leaf burning is dangerous. Never burn leaves again."
    - But that's not what happened.
    - The leaf fire was fine. It did exactly what it was supposed to do.
- The fire didn't make the bush flammable.
    - The bush was already flammable.
    - That bush had sat there looking harmless for years.
    - One spark revealed what it had been all along.
- That's what Paul is talking about this morning.
    - In the first six verses of Romans 7, Paul told us that in Christ, we have died to the law.
    - Its demands on us no longer reach us.
    - That raises an obvious question: if we needed to be released from the law, is the law the problem?
    - Is God's commandment bad?
- Paul's answer is clear.
    - The problem isn't the commandment.
    - The problem is what the commandment lands on.
- Every one of us has something dry and dead in our hearts that has looked harmless for years, until God's Word gets close to it.
    - And when it does, it doesn't smolder.
    - In Paul's words, sin *comes alive.*
    - Hopefully you've already got your bibles opened to Romans 7, please stand as I read vv. 7-13.

Scripture Reading

Romans 7:7–13 ESV

> 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.

- The law is a challenge for us as Christians.
  - We unpacked this last week, so if you want a fuller picture of what we’re talking about, go back and listen to last week’s sermon.
  - In Chapter 7, Paul gives us four principles to help us understand our relationship to the law.
  - The first one - which we talked about last week is this: “through our identification with Christ’s death, we have been released from our old binding relationship to the law.”
    - That doesn’t mean that in Christ, we get to run wild without restraint.
    - It does mean that we want to honor Christ with how we live our lives.
    - When we become Christians, we are given a wonderful gift.
    - The Holy Spirit empowers us to live this new way, free from the demands of the Law.
    - Now, we live to please Jesus, not to check boxes.
- And that’s exactly how we ended last week:

Romans 7:6 ESV

> [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.

- As we dig into the text this week, we will see the second principle for how Christians relate to the law.
- God's law is good. Sin is so corrupt that it takes even God's good commandment and uses it to stir up rebellion and bring death.
- So how does Paul present that principle this week?

The Law Names What We Try to Excuse (v. 7)

- Just last week, we celebrated the fact that Christians have died to the law and are released from it.
  - With that kind of language, it would be easy to reach the conclusion that the law must be bad.
  - If I have to be released from something - then most will assume *that* something must be a problem.
  - You get released from jail, hostages get released by their captors, you get released from a debt or obligation.
- But, as we have seen repeatedly through Romans, Paul is a master at anticipating arguments, recognizing questions before they're asked.
  - So here's the question - is the law sin?
  - And again, we meet that strong negation - By no means!
- We need to remember that the Law is the inspired Word of God.
  - It is perfect and without error.
  - It came from God himself.
  - Paul will say it plainly in verse 12: the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.
  - There's nothing about God's word that is sinful.
- But the law does have a very important responsibility - the law *reveals* sin.
  - I used to fly fish a lot, and one of the things I always made sure I had in my fishing vest were my polarized sunglasses.

    - When you wear polarized lenses they cut the glare off the water and help you see what's beneath the surface.
    - They don't make fish appear, they simply reveal what was already there.
- That's what the law does with sin.
    - It doesn't create sin, but it does reveal that which is already in place.
    - Paul didn't become a coveter the day the commandment finally hit home.
    - He was already an expert in the art of coveting.
    - But the law gave it a name.
- And coveting is an appropriate example for us.
    - I'd guess most of us couldn't define that word if we had to.
        - It's not one we use much.
        - Nobody says, "I coveted a biscuit on the way to church this morning."
    - So what is it?
        - Coveting is a grasping desire for what belongs to someone else, or a desire that turns into resentment toward God over what he has given you.
        - Hear me carefully: desire itself is not sin.
        - The word Paul uses here for desire is the same word Jesus uses about himself in Luke 22: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you."
    - Wanting isn't the problem. Wanting what isn't yours is.
        - And coveting rarely stays a feeling.
        - When Achan got caught in Joshua 7, he said, "I coveted them and took them."
        - The heart goes first. The hands follow.
    - That's why Paul chose this one.
        - It's the one commandment you can break sitting perfectly still in a church pew.
        - You can look obedient on the outside while breaking this commandment in your heart.
        - Nobody will ever see you break the tenth.
    - Paul knew that from experience.
        - In Philippians 3 he says that as to righteousness under the law, he was "blameless."
        - From the outside, nobody could point a finger.
        - Then he came to the tenth commandment, and it went right past his behavior and into his heart.

    - The Bible doesn't treat this as a small sin, either. Colossians 3:5 calls covetousness "idolatry."
    - When I covet, I'm saying two things.
        - First, that thing will satisfy me.
        - Second, God has been holding out on me.
- But the God who wrote the tenth commandment is the God who gives.
    - Hebrews 13:5 says, "Be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"
    - Contentment isn't settling. It's trusting.
- Here's the uncomfortable part.
    - Most of us don't have to look very hard to find this.
    - Scroll through your phone for thirty seconds and pay attention to what happens in your heart.
    - You didn't say a word.
    - You didn't lift a finger.
    - The tenth commandment still found you.
- That's Paul's point.
    - He wouldn't have known it was sin if the law hadn't named it.
    - So what do we do with that?
- We need to learn to call it what God calls it.
    - We have softer names for coveting. "I'm just wishing." "I've earned it." "Everybody wants one."
    - But if God's Word calls it coveting, I don't get to rename it.
    - We like renaming things to make them more palatable, but that's not our prerogative.
    - The law named it so I could confess it by name.
- At the same time, it is helpful if we can turn our wants into prayers.
    - The next time you catch it happening, say it out loud to God: "Lord, I want that thing or that opportunity or that recognition. Help me trust that what you've given me is sufficient."
    - You're not praying so that God will give you what you want.
    - You're praying so you can learn to trust God with what you have.

Sin Exploits What God Intended for Good (vv. 8–11)

- In 1941, Clark Field in the Philippines was the largest American air base in the Pacific outside Hawaii.
    - On December 8 of that same year, just hours after Pearl Harbor, Japanese bombers hit it.
    - Within a month, the Japanese army had taken it over.
    - And for the next three years, they used it as a major base of operations against the very people who built it.
    - The base wasn't the enemy. The enemy took the base.
- That's exactly what Paul describes in verse 8: "But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment…"
    - The word Paul uses for "opportunity" was a military term.
    - It meant a base of operations.
    - Sin didn't build the commandment. God did.
    - Sin just moved in and started launching attacks from it.
- It's easy to understand how a foreign army can use a captured base to wage war, but how does this work in terms of sin?
    - God says, "Do not covet."
        - That's not a mean prohibition.
        - That is grace. It is inherently good that God established the rules.
        - But sin takes that commandment and turns it into a suggestion.
        - Sometimes the commandment makes the thing more attractive precisely because it's forbidden.
            - You can be perfectly content until somebody tells you, "You can't have that."
            - Then something rises up inside you: "Who says I can't?"
            - That's more than wanting the thing.
            - That's wanting to be the one who makes the rules.
        - God's commandment didn't put that rebellion in your heart.
            - Sin seized the commandment and used it to stir up what was already there.
            - Just like the toddlers in the room from last week.
            - The prohibition only stirred up what was already there.
    - That's sin's oldest strategy. You even see it at work in the Garden of Eden.

        - When the serpent came to Eve…it didn't come to her and engage in an apologetic debate over the nature of sin.
        - It came to her with a subtle bit of spiritual propaganda.
        - "Did God actually say 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"
        - The serpent knew the commandment God gave, and he got it wrong on purpose.
        - God never said "any tree."
        - Sin always twists what God says because deception is part of its scheme.
    - Then Paul adds in v. 8: "For apart from the law, sin lies dead."
    - Dead doesn't mean gone. It means dormant. Asleep.
    - Paul isn't saying sin didn't exist.
    - He's describing how sin sprang into action through the commandment.
- Paul continues in verse 9: "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."
    - What does Paul mean, "I was once alive"?
    - Paul felt fine. Better than fine.
    - In Galatians 1 he says he was "advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age… so extremely zealous was I."
    - He was confident. Respected. Comfortable.
- Then the commandment came home to him, and everything changed.
    - Sin woke up.
    - And Paul realized he wasn't nearly as alive as he thought.
    - When Paul says 'I died,' he doesn't mean he stopped breathing.
    - He means the commandment showed him he was already under sin's death sentence: spiritually dead, cut off from God, exactly what God warned Adam about in the garden.
- Verse 10 is the heartbreaking part: "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me."
    - The law really did promise life.
    - Leviticus 18:5: "If a person does them, he shall live by them."
- The problem was never the promise.
    - The problem was the person.
    - Apart from Jesus, nobody has ever kept it well enough to collect on that promise.
    - Not Paul. Not you. Not me.

- Then verse 11 tells us how sin pulled it off: “For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.”
    - “Deceived” is the same word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 11 for how the serpent deceived Eve.
    - Eden is happening all over again inside every one of us.
- And notice what the deception looks like.
    - Sin never says, “Do this and die.”
    - Sin says, “Do this and you’ll be happy.”
    - “You won’t be happy until you have that.”
    - “God is holding out on you.” (Sound familiar? That’s coveting.)
    - Sin delivers pleasure, but it never delivers happiness.
    - And at the end of the road, it delivers exactly what God said it would: death.
- So how can we take this knowledge and put it to work in our lives?
- We have to learn to recognize the sales pitch.
    - Every temptation comes with a promise attached.
    - The next time you feel the pull, ask, “What is this promising me?”
    - Then ask, “Has it ever actually kept that promise?”
- And we must not mistake feeling fine for being fine.
    - Paul felt alive. He was asleep at the wheel.
    - If you can sit under God’s Word week after week and never feel the weight of your sin, that might not be spiritual health.
    - It might be sin lying dormant.
    - And the kindest thing God can do is wake you up.

The Law Exposes What Sin Really Is (vv. 12–13)

- After everything Paul has said about sin - how it set up its forward operating base in the very commandments of God, how it deceived and killed - he comes back to where he started.

Romans 7:12 ESV

> [12] So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

    - The law is holy because it comes from a holy God.

    - The law is righteous because it is always right.
    - The law is good because it is for our good.
- Then Paul asks his question one more time, just to make sure we didn't miss it.
    - Verse 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…"
    - He opened this passage with "By no means," and he closes it the same way.
- Here's where everything has been heading:
    - The law didn't lie to you.
    - The law didn't trap you.
    - The law didn't kill you.
- Sin did.
    - But Paul doesn't stop there.
    - He tells us why God allowed sin to work through the law: "…in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."
- God let sin show its hand.
    - Sin's greatest strength is disguise.
    - It looks like happiness, freedom, or just "what everybody does."
    - The commandment pulls off the disguise.
- When sin takes something holy, righteous, and good and uses it to kill, there's no more pretending it's harmless.
    - Paul's phrase literally means something like 'excess upon excess.'
    - Sin goes beyond anything you can measure.
    - We like to think of our sin as manageable.
    - Small. Mostly under control.
    - The law says otherwise.
    - And this has significant implications in our walk with Christ.
- First, don't rewrite the law to quiet your conscience.
    - One of the most common ways people deal with guilt today is to decide God's commands don't apply anymore.
    - "That was then." "Times have changed." "God wouldn't really care about that."
    - But if the law is holy, righteous, and good, the problem was never the commandment.

    - Changing the rule doesn't change your heart. It just puts the glare back on the water.
- Second, seeing more of your sin is not a sign you're going backward.
    - Some of you have been following Jesus for years, and you're more aware of your sin now than you were when you started.
    - That can feel like failure. It's usually the opposite.
    - The closer you get to a holy God, the more clearly you see what doesn't belong.
- Third, let the law do its job, and then let it hand you off.
    - The law is good at a lot of things.
    - It can reveal and expose sin.
    - It can show you how big your sin really is.
    - But there's one thing it can't do.
    - It can't save you.
    - The law can show you the problem, but only Jesus can fix it.
    - And that's exactly where Paul is going.
        - In a few verses he'll cry out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"
        - And he'll answer, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Conclusion/Invitation

- Let's go back to my yard for a minute.
    - Remember why that pampas grass was there in the first place?
    - The former owners planted it to hide something ugly.
    - For years, nobody saw those utility pedestals.
    - The bushes looked nice, so nobody asked what was behind them.
    - We lived there for a long time before I even realized what was there.
- One spark, and all of it was exposed.
    - The bushes were gone, and what they'd been hiding was out in the open.
    - A little melted, but out in the open.
- That's what God's law does.
    - It doesn't plant anything in us.
    - It exposes what's already there.

    - An uncomfortable truth this morning is this: we spend a lot of time planting and cultivating nice-looking things around what we don't want anyone to see.
- But here's the good news.
    - God doesn't expose your sin to leave you standing in the ashes.
    - He exposes it so he can deal with it.
- Remember verse 10?
    - "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me."
    - That promise of life was real.
    - Somebody just had to keep it.
- And somebody did.
    - Jesus is the only person who ever kept the law perfectly.
    - Every commandment, including the tenth.
    - He never once wanted anything the Father hadn't given him.
    - He earned the life the law promised.
    - Then he went to the cross and died the death our sin earned.
- Paul will say it in chapter 8: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son…"
    - The law could take you as far as the ashes.
    - Jesus takes you the rest of the way.
- So where does that leave you this morning?
- For some of you, today is the first time you've felt the weight of your sin.
    - That isn't God pushing you away.
    - That's God waking you up.
    - You can stop planting bushes.
    - You can stop trying to look fine.
    - Turn from your sin and trust the one who kept the law for you and died for you.
- For the rest of us, listen to David in Psalm 32:5

Psalm 32:5 ESV

> 5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

- Stop covering it. Call it by name.
    - Not to earn God's forgiveness.
    - Jesus already paid for it.
    - You confess because you belong to him, and he's faithful to forgive.
- And if you're just not sure about where you stand, today is a good day to seek understanding.
    - You don't have to dwell in the uncertainty.
    - You can have confidence in your standing.
    - Come talk with someone. You can come pray.
    - The law has shown you what's there.
    - Jesus is ready to deal with it - I pray that you are as well.