

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 7: 7-9

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 7. We will read verses 7-9 today.

Saints who have received grace and salvation, though their sinful deeds can be forgiven through confession and applying Christ's precious blood, still have a sinful nature within. As soon as the old self takes over, the sinful nature activates, leading to sin. Every saint still has certain sins they cannot overcome. Though past sinful deeds have been dealt with and forgiven, when the same temptation arises again, the old self immediately reacts; once the old self takes over, the sinful nature drives us to fall into the same sin. After sinning, we feel distressed in our heart, and though through confession and repentance the Lord's grace remains, and we are still forgiven, prolonged struggling like this leads us into doubt, uncertain whether we are truly saved.

In Romans chapter 7, Paul uses his own experience to help us face this issue head-on, and chapter 8 will provide the final answer. To address the struggle with sin, in 7:1-6, Paul first helps us resolve the root of the problem, confirming that our old man has been freed from the old husband through the cross and released from the law of the husband; moreover, our new man is to serve the Lord in the newness of the Spirit.

Then, in 7:7-13, Paul further addresses the relationship between the law and sin. Here is an overview: verse 7 states that the law makes us aware of sin; verses 8-9 describe how sin becomes exceedingly active through the law; verses 10-11 explain how sin uses the law to tempt us; and verses 12-13 conclude this section, stating that the law is good and reveals how exceedingly evil sin truly is.

Verse 7: “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’”

In this verse, Paul responds to 7:5, which states that when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. Sinful desires are stirred by the law, producing the fruit of death. Paul continues this thought, explaining how sin is provoked by the law. Does the fact that the law stirs sin mean the law itself is sin? The answer is an emphatic “Certainly not.” The law is not sin; rather, I would not have known sin except through the law. This statement tells us that the law’s function is to make us aware of sin.

Paul already expressed this concept in 3:20: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” In 3:20, the law makes us aware of sin; Paul emphasizes that no one can be saved by performing the law because the law reveals human sin, showing that our entire being is sinful and incapable of fulfilling the whole law. Thus, salvation cannot come through keeping the law but only through the Lord’s grace.

Here in 7:7, addressing those already saved, Paul states that the law still reveals human sin and makes us aware of it. This tells us that pleasing God by keeping the law is impossible, both before and after salvation. For those who have received grace and salvation, Paul does not use examples like murder, adultery, lying, or bearing false witness, as saved saints may no longer commit these sinful acts. Instead, he specifically highlights the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” which deals with human relationships and focuses on the condition of the heart.

Do not covet what does not belong to us. Unless the law had said, “You shall not covet,” I would not have known covetousness. Does the law cause me to covet? Absolutely not. I was already covetous, but without the law, my sin could not be identified, and I did not know what covetousness was. When the law came, sin was exposed, and I understood what covetousness is. Covetousness itself is sin, regardless of the object of desire. The object of covetousness may be lawful or even

good, but as long as it does not belong to us, the desire to possess it is covetousness, which is sin.

If covetousness is not properly addressed, as taught in Colossians 3:5, it is equated with idolatry. This means our desire for something can become so intense that it reaches the point of idolizing the object we wish to obtain, making the heart that seeks to possess it akin to worshipping an idol. Likewise, as stated in 1 Timothy 6:10, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and some, in their greed for wealth, have been led astray from the faith, piercing themselves with many sorrows. Paul even regards the love of money as a source of all kinds of evil. Before the law existed, we did not recognize covetousness as sin, nor were we condemned for it; our heart only felt it was desirable and wanted to acquire it. Notice that from this verse, Paul begins using the first person to describe covetousness. Paul is using his own experience to share with us his struggle with covetousness.

Verse 8: “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.”

When the law came and identified covetousness as sin, sin seized the opportunity. That is, when the law came and declared covetousness a sin, sin found a starting point, and through the commandment, it produced all manner of evil desire in me. Here, “sin” is singular, referring to the sinful nature within us, which is always present. Without a target, sin, though present, was as if dead, having no effect; for apart from the law, sin was dead. When the law came, sin was exposed, found a starting point, and began to activate. Paul seems to compare the law to an alarm clock: before the law, sin was dead and inactive, but when the law came and identified sin, sin was awakened and became active.

For example, after a Sunday service, on your way home, you stop at the supermarket to buy a gallon of milk. You are still immersed in the joyful and peaceful atmosphere of the service. While waiting in line to pay, you notice a magazine on the rack with an indecent photo of a celebrity on the cover. At first, you glance at it unintentionally and think nothing of it; the photo does not disturb you. But then

the voice of the law comes, telling you that you should not look, as it is unbecoming for a Christian. This law of “do not look” awakens the dormant sinful nature, which then activates and rationalizes, saying, “It’s no big deal to look.” As a result, you pick up the magazine and start browsing. This illustrates what is meant here: apart from the law, sin was dead, but when the law came, sin became active within.

Verse 9: “I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.”

Remember that Paul is describing a saved person here, using himself as an example. I was alive once without the law; continuing the example above, after the service, you are joyful and alive—this is the new self in you. Perhaps you are humming a hymn, and accidentally glancing at the indecent photo is insignificant; it does not affect you. You see it but do not dwell on it. This is what it means to be alive without the law. However, when the commandment “do not look” comes, it awakens the dormant sinful nature. Once the sinful nature is awakened and becomes active, the old self in you takes over, sinful desires activate in your members, and you pick up the magazine to look. In that moment, the old self comes alive, and the new self dies.

Every saint who has received grace and salvation, including you and me, constantly switches between the new self and the old self. When we live out the new self, the old self is dead; when we live out the old self, the new self is dead. The starting point of this switch is the law. The new self, in the realm of Christ’s grace, does not need the law. If you come out of the service and remain in the realm of grace, defiling things cannot affect you; seeing an indecent photo is as if you didn’t see it, not impacting your peace or joy. Only when you focus on the law and start debating whether to look or not, the old self usually prevails because the law awakens the sinful nature, which drives the old self to take over, causing the new self’s peace and joy to vanish.

Dear brothers and sisters, what Paul describes is a very real experience. When we remain in the new self, submitting to Christ, we transcend the law and stay in the

realm of grace, which is where we belong. Once we fall into the law, engaging in disputes over good and evil, in our experience, the old self often prevails. This may be why many saints cannot overcome persistent sins. The more you try to overcome, the more you fail.

Christian victory does not rely on human willpower but on remaining in Jesus Christ, triumphing through Him. Thus, victory is grace, not self-effort, and such victory does not produce pride. Victory through human willpower causes the old self to rise, leading us to look down on saints who cannot overcome the same sins. Dear brothers and sisters, Christian victory is not achieved by striving but by letting go of our struggles and remaining in the grace of Jesus Christ. This is the secret to our victory.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, how we thank You! What You have accomplished for us exceeds what we could ask or imagine. Not only is our salvation through simply believing in Your completed redemption, but even after salvation, victory in life depends on Your grace, not our effort. Christian victory is not through keeping the law, as the law awakens our old self and causes it to take over. Help me truly understand this truth and grant me practical experiences in life to learn that true victory is through Jesus Christ, remaining in the realm of grace. Bless my daily life. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.