

Episode 182 Conquerors Not Captives with Joey Dodson

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

Joey Dodson

Hello, my name is Dr. Joey Dodson. I'm the Craig L. Blomberg Chair of New Testament at Denver Seminary.

David Capes

Dr. Joey Dodson, Joey, good to see you. Welcome to *The Stone Chapel Podcasts*. I'm so proud of the work that you've done through the years. And I'm grateful for all the good books that you've written and the students you've been teaching. And I mean, all of it. You're the whole guy.

Joey Dodson

Well, we're a product of our teacher's teachers. So, your investment in me has been manifest.

David Capes

You're here just coming through town, but you've been here to the library before, correct?

Joey Dodson

Yeah, I'm always just amazed at what you have done and what you're doing and the big dreams that you have for what's ahead.

David Capes

Well, we want to serve the church and the academy together. Today, we're going to be talking about your book. But before we do that, I want to talk about who you are. For people that don't know, who is Joey Dodson?

Joey Dodson

To tell you about myself, I probably should tell you about my family. I first met my wife in first grade. I was in the cafeteria eating tater tots and drinking chocolate milk, and she walked in and something about her first-grade beauty compelled me to stand on my chair and say, "who is that pretty girl?" And now we've been together for 29 years. We have five children, two in-laws, two grandchildren with one on the way. We both went to Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas. After that I came to study under the esteemed Dr. David Capes.

Actually, I don't know if you remember this or not, but I wrote my master's thesis on Romans 7, under you. So, what we're talking about today has seeds from way back. The Lord used you and then to the University of Tübingen. From Germany to Greece on the island of Cyprus, I studied modern Greek. And then from Cyprus back to Houston Christian University (HCU, then Houston Baptist University). And I

taught at Houston Baptist University for a year. Then, the Lord opened up the door for us to go back to Ouachita Baptist University where worked for 11 years. And now I'm in my fifth year at Denver Seminary.

David Capes

We're delighted that you're here to talk about your book on Romans 7, *Conquers Not Captives* is the title. And it's a book by Lexham Press, which is publishing some great things these days. So ,what's the big idea of your book?

Joey Dodson

I'll tell you about the series. First of all, it started out with the Snapshot Series. Larry Hurtado wrote the very first one.

David Capes

Oh that's right. I wrote the forward to his book.

Joey Dodson

The series is trying to take what is standard in the academy and bring it to the church, to every person in the pew. Sometimes people in the academy understand a passage in a way that people in the pews don't know about. Michael Bird was one of the editors. And he asked me to do one on Roman seven. There's a huge gap between what most people in the pews think Roman 7 is about, and what the standard interpretation is in the Academy.

David Capes

Yes. I'm going to read it in just a minute. But has your mind changed over the years as to what it's talking about?

Joey Dodson

Yes! The big change actually happened in seminary when I was with you. At that point, I thought that Paul was talking about himself and the normative Christian life, post conversion Paul. And I didn't really know there were any other options. And then we read Doug Moo's *New International Commentary of the New Testament*, where he argued that it was pre-conversion Paul. And that was my first time realizing the options. Since then, I've continued to be convinced that Paul's not giving us a picture of the normative Christian life.

David Capes

Let me read Romans 7. I'm going to begin back in verse 7:12, because that sets up the passage (from the New Revised Standard Version).

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good then bring death to me? By no means. It was sin working 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. We know that the law is spiritual but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if

I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want, that is what I do. Now, if I do what I do not want it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the love of God and in my inmost self.

But I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with my mind, I am slave to the law of God, but with my flesh, I am slave to the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

So that's Romans 7 beginning in verse 12 and going on to chapter 8 verse 2. Sometimes those chapter dividers distract from the full meaning. So what's going on in this passage? It is not the normative Christian life.

Joey Dodson

I don't think so. As you know, the first rule of fight club is you don't talk about fight club. First rule of mind club is that you don't talk about mind club. But the first rule of Bible interpretation is context, context, context. And often, as you even mentioned, we just stop with one little section of Romans 7, and we don't realize that Roman 7 is part of Paul's argument that starts in chapter 6 and goes through chapter 8. If we really want to understand what the verse is talking about, we want to look at the context, the immediate context, the literary context.

The second rule of Bible interpretation is that you don't read your own experience into the text. You know, we want to do exegesis and get the interpretation from the text rather than eisegesis, reading our own presuppositions and experiences into the text. And so, if you really want to understand the identity of who Paul is talking about, you have to back up, starting in at least chapter 6. If you remember, in chapter 5, Paul says that the law snuck in the back door in order to increase trespasses, but where sin abounds, grace super abounds. And so, this is when Paul asked this rhetorical question, “shall I continue in sin so that grace may abound?” And as we would say, where I grew up, “Heck to the nah, nah.” How can you live in it any longer?

And Paul uses the syllogism, where Christ died to sin once and for all. Amen. We died with Christ through baptism. Therefore, we are dead to sin. How can we live in it any longer. And Paul goes again and again and again and again, to the point that it's redundant and superfluous to just remind the believers that sin is no longer your master. You are no longer a slave to sin. You're no longer a slave to sin, you live to serve God, you live to serve God, you are a servant of righteousness.

David Capes

That happens over and over again.

Joey Dodson

Exactly. If you go through and you read Romans 6, underlying it all is Paul begging and pleading and standing on his chair and waving, saying "sin is no longer our master." And so, the grace of God is not just that which forgives us of our sin, but that gives us power to say no to sin. We see it later on when he says in Titus 2, grace showed up to teach us to say no to sin, and yes to righteousness and self-control. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. And so, what we see Paul saying in Romans 6 with respect to a Christian's relationship with sin, and it resonates, and redounds with what we see him say everywhere else in Scripture. If we walk by the power of the Spirit, we will not fulfill the desires of sinful nature. Sure, sure, sure. Right, right, right. So we still struggle with sin.

But what we're going to see in a moment in Romans 7 is not a struggle with sin. It's an absolute defeat to sin. It's an impotence. It's being sold as a slave to sin. And so, reading through that context of Romans 6, we get to 7:1, where Paul switches the tone. So now I'm talking to those of you who know the law and Paul gives us a clue that Romans 7 is going to be about the law. Paul says a lot of bad things about the law, seemingly bad things. And so now he has to exonerate the law, he has to come and save the day because the problem is not actually the law. The problem is the power of sin that is manipulating the law. And so here Paul has the time to walk us through point by point, while helping us follow his train of thought, to say that the law is not sin, and that the law comes to show how sinful sin really is.

And so, we see that Romans 7 is Paul talking about the law. He begins with this illustration of marriage. If a married woman goes off with someone else, she would be called an adulterer. But if the man dies, she is free to serve someone else. And so, Paul mixes up the metaphor a little bit because he so much loves this idea of us dying with Christ. We expect in the metaphor for the woman to be the Christian and the man to be the law and the law is going to die. And the woman is now free to be with Christ. But Paul says no, we have died. Since we have died now we are free to be with Christ. And so that gets us to chapter 7, verses 5-6, where Paul gives us the outline of where he's going to go.

I'm teaching a class on John right now. And it can be hard to follow his line of reasoning. He's kind of all over the place. He's kind of like me, just ADHD, you know, and he's here and he's there. And he's back to where we just got from.

But with Paul, it's easy to follow his train of thought. And so in 7:5 it talks about how we no longer serve the old way of the written code that leads to death. But now we serve Christ in the spirit that leads to life. And what we have for the rest of Chapter 7 is this depiction of what it looks like to live under the law. And what will happen in the rest of Chapter 7 is law, law, law, flesh, flesh, flesh, death, death, death. Frustration! And then we'll get to Romans 8. And all of a sudden, as you read, therefore there is now no condemnation. Because what we were under, we've been set free from and now it's life, life, life, spirit, spirit, spirit, freedom, freedom, freedom. We're no longer obligated to fulfill desires of our sinful nature. And you see this frustrated tone in Romans 7 lead to this triumph where the captive now becomes the conqueror in Christ. I'll stop right there. Because we can keep going on.

David Capes

That's a fascinating retelling of that particular passage. I used to hear about this as the "I" passage. And obviously, that's because when we come to this section, "we know this law is spiritual, but "I" am of the flesh, (I) do not do the very thing that "I" want, etc. The question is, who is the I? And a lot of people do what I think you talked about earlier. They read their own experience into it because we have sometimes fallen into sin because we have felt that sin was mastering us. We read that into Paul's normative Christian life, right? But what you're saying is, No, that's not the normative Christian life.

Joey Dodson

No. What we see in Romans 7, if a Christian does fall into sin, that should be the exception to the rule, not the rule. The rule is Romans 8. But as we continue to go on, Paul gives us the outline of where he's going with chapter 7, verses 5-6. But another way to follow his train of thought is to look at those rhetorical questions. He asked a rhetorical question in 6:1, as we mentioned earlier, shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound. No. And then in 7:7 is the law of sin. And so, what Paul's talking about next is the law. He's not talking about "can the Christian overcome sin?" Paul is telling us what is important here.

And then Paul brings in this "I." I would not know what sin was had this, how the law not said do not covet. But when the law came, sin, wow, it's sprung on the law, and it manipulated law. It deceives me, and I died. Here. If we stop and think, when was Paul alive before the law came? Corinthians he was dead and transgressions we all were, when did the law come? And it deceived me and I died. And so here, I'm going all the way back to origin to the second century Christians. This is read as an impersonation of Adam. And you may look at me like, oh, Dodson, you're stretching too much time at this high altitudes and Colorado.

But again, if we follow the train of thought and Romans 5:12, Paul has already introduced Adam, not just by himself, but sin and death entering into the world through Adam, where he also introduces righteousness and grace and so 5:12. This is already in the mind. And again, for many modern readers, we may just read chapter 7, but when Phoebe is delivering this letter, they just heard chapter 5, we'll see Adam and Romans 8 creation was subjected to futility, not our own but in hope. And so, this takes us back to the Genesis 3 forecasts. And so most people think that I'm here, Paul is echoing Adam as a Jewish person. Paul would relate to Adam and he would relate to Israel who was kind of like the second Adam. And so even the mention of the giving of the covenant.

And so here if Paul even was focusing on the Christian life, he's focusing on the Jewish Christian who is trying to live under the law, rather than the Spirit. Paul will go on in Romans 8 to say it was weak and that which it was powerless to do. Guess what God did through Jesus Christ who came and condemned the sin that is in this man and law was really powerful enough to do that's right. So that's how Paul exonerates it.

David Capes

So, is sin then a kind of a power in Paul?

Joey Dodson

Yeah, that's a great point. So often when we think of sin, we think of sin like a little "s" (sin).

David Capes

A deliberate act of that we agree to that we know to be wrong.

Joey Dodson

Or even like the Romans 3:23, where we've just fall short. It's like even when we tried to do well, we missed the mark. So, it could be like a transgression in the sense that we know it's wrong and we do it. But in Romans 5-8 sin is more of this cosmological power (Sin), like flesh. Some of our English translations translate this as sinful nature, but as my great Greek professor from HBU, but way back in the day was said, this is "flesh." You know, it's *sarx*, and so *sarx* is like a fleshly power as well.

And so, sin is not something Paul does. Sin is something that does something through the "I" in Romans 7. And so, the "wretch" is not me that does it. It's sin that does it within me, this is almost like the devil made me do it. But even worse, the devil is doing it through me is what we have in Romans 7. It's not me at all, its sin working through me. But Christ came to conquer so that we can live in freedom. And that's one of the messages of the gospel, right?

We in Protestant backgrounds, emphasize forgiveness, which is true, which is wonderful, which is amazing. But even what we think with Galatians Christ, came to set us free from this present evil age, it's for freedom that Christ has come to set us free. And that freedom is both from the legalism and also from our lust and our desires. As you say, in Romans chapter 13, the day is passing the day of our redemption is closer now than when we first believe, therefore, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and stop thinking about how to indulge your flesh. And so, the great, great promise of righteousness is that it's not just a status, but now through Christ and by the power of His Holy Spirit. We can live righteously. Not that we're perfect by any means.

David Capes

Not that we achieve some sort of perfection, which I think is an important distinction.

Joey Dodson

Well, you're almost perfect.

David Capes

I still have a long way to go! The book is entitled *Conquerors Not Captives* by Dr. Joey (Joseph) Dodson. And it's due to be out in March of 2024. And it's written for?

Joey Dodson

Laypeople who are interested in the Bible. And so, my daughter helped write it. She has a degree in English Lit and is also a seminary student who reads very well. So, she helps me bring it down. When I get really, really nerdy. She says, "okay, let's bring it down to where everyone can understand it and not just understand it, but hopefully enjoy it as well."

David Capes

And not get the idea that normative Christian life is the one we were going to be beat up for the next 30 to 40 years, but in fact, it is a life of conquering; not that we are the conquerors but that the Conqueror has himself come. Dr. Joey Dodson, thanks for being with us today on *The Stone Chapel Podcasts*.

Joey Dodson

Thank you so much.