

The Book of Romans, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Released from the Law; the Struggle with Sin

Romans 7:1-25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Romans 7 is one of the most discussed chapters in the Bible, and the teacher should approach it with both honesty and care. Paul has two main concerns. First, he completes his teaching that the believer has died to the law (in the sense of the law as a system of justification and condemnation) in order to belong to the risen Christ and serve in the new way of the Spirit. Second, he defends the law against the charge that it is evil: the law is holy, righteous, and good; the problem is not the law but sin, which is so perverse that it exploits even a good commandment. The teacher should be ready to explain the right sense in which Christians are free from the law (we are not lawless, but we are no longer under it as a means of being made right with God) and the good purpose of the law in exposing sin.

The famous struggle of verses 14 to 25 requires particular care, and the teacher should handle it the way Paul intends, not as Paul intends to leave us. Interpreters have long differed over the identity of the I: some see Paul describing life before conversion, some a Jew under the law, some anyone (believer or not) who tries to conquer sin by law-keeping and willpower apart from the Spirit, and some the ongoing tension every honest believer feels. The teacher need not settle every question, but should make the main point unmistakable: the law and the flesh, left to themselves, cannot deliver anyone from sin. The good news is not better effort but a Deliverer. Above all, the teacher must guard against a serious misreading: this passage does not teach that a Christian is doomed to remain a helpless slave of sin. Romans 6 has already declared that we have been set free from sin's dominion, and Romans 8 will immediately declare that there is no condemnation and that we now walk by the Spirit who gives life. Chapter 7 describes the powerlessness of self-rescue precisely in order to drive us to the Spirit-empowered life of chapter 8.

This chapter is also deeply formative. It speaks with rare honesty to the believer who keeps losing the same battle and is tempted either to despair or to grit their teeth and try harder. Paul models a third way: an honest naming of the struggle that ends not in self-effort but in turning to Christ. The teacher should help students take sin seriously without taking their eyes off the Deliverer, and should leave the class leaning forward into chapter 8, where the answer to the cry of verse 24 is unfolded. The disciple being formed here is a person who has given up on self-rescue, who feels the seriousness of sin, and who has learned to cry, Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul uses the picture of marriage to explain that just as death releases a person from the binding of the marriage law, so we have died to the law through the body of Christ, in order that we might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, and bear fruit for God (vv. 1–4). What does it mean that the Christian has died to the law, and how does this free us to belong to and serve the risen Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul uses a marriage illustration to explain our changed relationship to the law (vv. 1–3). A wife is bound to her husband by law as long as he lives; when he dies, she is released from that law and free to marry another. Paul applies this: through the body of Christ, we have died to the law, so that we may belong to another, to the risen Christ (v. 4).

Clarify the sense in which we have died to the law. Paul is not saying that God's moral will no longer matters or that Christians may live however they please. He has just spent chapter 6 calling us to holiness. He means that we are no longer under the law as a system that defines our standing before God and pronounces condemnation. That relationship has ended in Christ's death, which we share.

Explain the purpose of the release: to belong to another and bear fruit for God (v. 4). We were not freed from the law in order to be masterless, but in order to be joined to the risen Christ. The believer's life is not lawlessness but a new marriage, a living union with Jesus from which real fruit grows. Freedom from the law is freedom for Christ.

Apply it pastorally. Many believers still relate to God primarily through the lens of law: keeping rules to stay in His good graces, fearing condemnation when they fail. Paul says that relationship has ended. We now belong to a Savior who loves us, and we serve from union with Him, not from fear of a code that could only condemn. The teacher can help students feel the difference between being married to the law and being married to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dying to the law as a system of justification and condemnation (7:4)
- Freedom from the law as freedom for union with the risen Christ
- The believer not lawless but belonging to Christ and bearing fruit
- The difference between relating to God by law and by union with Christ

Discussion Prompts

- In what sense have we died to the law, and in what sense have we not?
- Why did Christ free us from the law, according to verse 4?
- What is the difference between being married to the law and married to Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says we now serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (v. 6). Are there ways you still try to relate to God mainly as a set of rules to keep, rather than as a living relationship empowered by His Spirit? What would it look like to move from mere rule-keeping toward serving God from the heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes Paul's contrast between the new way of the Spirit and the old way of the written code (v. 6) and asks students which way actually governs their walk with God.

Describe the old way. Relating to God as mainly a set of rules produces either pride (when we keep them) or despair (when we fail), and it tends to be external, joyless, and fear-driven. The written code can direct and condemn, but it cannot give life or change the heart.

Describe the new way. Serving in the Spirit means a living relationship in which God works in us, changing our desires, empowering our obedience, and motivating us by love and gratitude rather than fear. The rules are not abandoned, but they are now written on the heart and obeyed from a transformed inner life.

Help students discern and move. Ask where they still operate by the old way: checklist religion, performance anxiety, obedience from fear. Then encourage one concrete movement toward the new way: obeying a particular command out of love rather than duty, inviting the Spirit's help rather than relying on willpower, relating to God as a beloved child rather than an anxious rule-keeper.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The old way of the written code versus the new way of the Spirit (7:6)
- Rule-keeping producing pride or despair, never heart-change
- Spirit-empowered obedience motivated by love and gratitude
- Obedience from a transformed heart rather than external pressure

Discussion Prompts

- Do you relate to God more by rule-keeping or by the Spirit?
- What does serving God in the new way of the Spirit look like in practice?
- What is one way to move from duty-driven obedience toward heartfelt obedience this week?

Question 3**Student Question:**

Paul asks whether the law is sin, and answers emphatically that it is not; rather, through the law he came to know sin, for he would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet (vv. 7-8). What does this teach about the good and proper purpose of God's law, and why does Paul insist the law is holy, righteous, and good even though it exposes our sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul anticipates a wrong conclusion. If the law exposes and even seems to stir up sin, is the law itself sinful? His answer is emphatic: By no means! (v. 7). The teacher should help students hold a high and grateful view of God's law even while understanding its limits.

Explain the good purpose of the law. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Paul gives a personal example: he would not have known covetousness as sin if the law had not said, You shall not covet (v. 7). The law functions like a diagnostic instrument, revealing what is actually wrong with us, naming sins we would otherwise excuse or never notice.

Affirm the goodness of the law. Paul calls the commandment holy, righteous, and good (v. 12). The law reflects God's own character. The teacher should resist any tendency, common in some circles, to speak of God's law with contempt. The law is a good gift; it simply cannot do what only Christ can do. Its goodness is precisely in telling us the truth about ourselves.

Apply it to Scripture today. God's word still functions this way, exposing sin we had not seen and naming what we had excused. A grateful believer welcomes this exposure, painful as it is, because we cannot repent of what we will not name. The teacher can help students see the diagnostic work of Scripture as an act of God's kindness, the first step toward healing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law as holy, righteous, and good (7:12), reflecting God's character
- The law's good purpose, giving knowledge of sin (7:7)
- Scripture as a diagnostic that exposes what we would excuse
- The exposure of sin as an act of God's kindness toward healing

Discussion Prompts

- What good purpose does God's law serve according to this passage?
- Why does Paul insist the law is holy and good even though it exposes sin?
- How is the exposing work of Scripture actually an act of God's kindness?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says he would not have recognized covetousness as sin without the commandment that exposed it (v. 7). Has God's word ever shone a light on something in your life that you had not

recognized as sin, or had excused? How did you respond when the truth exposed it, and is there something His word is exposing in you now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes Paul's experience of the law exposing covetousness (v. 7) and asks students whether God's word has done the same in them. The teacher should create space for honest reflection on how Scripture has named or is naming sin in their lives.

Help students recall such moments. Most believers can remember a time when a passage, a sermon, or a Scripture brought to mind suddenly revealed something they had excused, minimized, or never recognized as sin: a resentment, a greed, a pride, a habit. Naming the experience helps them recognize the ongoing work of the word.

Examine the response. The crucial question is how we respond when the word exposes us. We can welcome the light and repent, or we can resent the messenger, rationalize, and turn away. The same exposure that leads one person to repentance hardens another who refuses to face it.

Press the present tense. Ask whether there is something God's word is exposing right now that the student has been reluctant to face. The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to encourage an honest, welcoming response to the light, trusting that God exposes sin in order to heal it, not to shame us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture's ongoing work of exposing hidden or excused sin
- Two responses to exposure, repentance or hardening
- Welcoming the light as the path to healing (John 3:20–21)
- Honest self-examination under the word

Discussion Prompts

- When has God's word exposed a sin you had not recognized or had excused?
- How did you respond, and what did that reveal?
- Is there something His word is exposing in you now that you have been reluctant to face?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says that sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived him and through the good commandment produced death, so that sin might be shown to be sin (vv. 11–13). How can sin take something genuinely good, like God's holy law, and turn it into an occasion for rebellion, and what does this reveal about the deceitful and serious nature of sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a striking observation about the perversity of sin: sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived him and produced death (vv. 11–13). The teacher should help students grasp how sin can exploit even a good command, which reveals both the deceitfulness and the seriousness of sin.

Explain the dynamic. There is something in the fallen heart that, told not to do a thing, suddenly wants to do it all the more. The prohibition itself becomes an occasion for rebellion. This does not make the command bad; it exposes how deeply rebellious sin is. Sin turns even God's good gifts into launching points for evil.

Highlight the deceitfulness of sin. Paul says sin deceived him (v. 11). Sin rarely presents itself honestly; it disguises itself as freedom, as harmless, as deserved, as just this once. Part of taking sin seriously is recognizing that it lies to us about what it is and where it leads. The believer must be on guard against sin's deceptions.

Draw out the purpose. Paul says this happened so that sin might be shown to be sin, and might become sinful beyond measure (v. 13). The law forces sin out into the open, where its true ugliness can be seen. This is part of why we needed the law: not to cure us, but to unmask the enemy so thoroughly that we would stop excusing it and seek the only real remedy, Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin's perversity, exploiting even a good command (7:8–11)
- The deceitfulness of sin, disguising itself to lead us astray (7:11)
- The law unmasking sin, showing it to be sinful beyond measure (7:13)
- The seriousness of indwelling sin as a reason to seek Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How can sin take something good, like God's law, and turn it into rebellion?
- In what ways does sin deceive us about what it really is?
- Why does God allow the law to unmask sin so thoroughly?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul gives voice to the inner conflict: I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (v. 15). Describe a time you have felt this divided heart, the desire to do good present in you but the follow-through failing. What does this experience teach you about your own need and your own resources?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question invites students into Paul's honest description of a divided heart: I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate (v. 15). The teacher should let the class name this experience without rushing to fix it, because feeling its weight is part of the lesson.

Normalize the honesty. Many believers feel ashamed of this inner conflict, as though a real Christian should not experience it. Paul's candor gives permission to be honest. The presence of the conflict, wanting good and yet failing, is itself a sign that the heart has been changed, for the old self felt no such war.

Draw out the lesson about our resources. The point of the experience is to teach us our own insufficiency. Sincere desire and firm resolve are not enough to defeat indwelling sin. The believer who keeps losing the same battle is being taught, painfully, that self-rescue does not work, and that another source of strength is needed.

Point ahead without resolving too quickly. The teacher should let students feel the genuine difficulty here, while assuring them that Paul does not leave us in it. The cry of verse 24 and the answer of verse 25, unfolded in chapter 8, are coming. For now, the aim is honest acknowledgment of the war and of our need, which is the doorway to depending on Christ rather than ourselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The divided heart as an honest reality of the Christian struggle
- The conflict itself as evidence of a changed heart
- The insufficiency of sincere desire and resolve against indwelling sin
- The struggle teaching us our need for a Deliverer

Discussion Prompts

- When have you felt the divided heart Paul describes?
- What does that experience teach you about your own resources?
- Why might God allow us to feel our insufficiency so keenly?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says that he has the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out, for nothing good dwells in his flesh, and that when he wants to do right, evil lies close at hand (vv. 18–21). What does this passage teach about the limits of human willpower and the seriousness of indwelling sin, and why can the flesh, left to itself, never win this battle?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul presses the diagnosis further: I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out, for nothing good dwells in my flesh (v. 18). The teacher should draw out two truths: the limits of willpower and the seriousness of indwelling sin.

Explain the limits of willpower. Paul distinguishes desire from ability. We may genuinely want to do right and still lack the power to do it consistently in our own strength. This confronts the popular belief that we can fix ourselves if we just decide firmly enough. Against deeply rooted sin, raw willpower repeatedly fails.

Explain the flesh. By flesh Paul does not mean the physical body as evil, but our fallen human nature considered apart from the Spirit, the self relying on its own resources. Of that flesh he says nothing good dwells in it, not because we are worthless, but because the flesh has no power to produce true righteousness. Left to itself, the flesh always loses to sin.

Show why the flesh can never win this battle. The flesh is precisely the realm where sin operates; asking the flesh to defeat sin is asking the disease to cure itself. This is why the answer, when it comes in chapter 8, is not stronger flesh but the Spirit: those who walk by the Spirit do not gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). The teacher should help students stop expecting the flesh to deliver what only the Spirit can give, which prepares them to depend on God rather than themselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The distinction between desiring good and having power to do it (7:18)
- The limits of human willpower against indwelling sin
- The flesh as fallen nature apart from the Spirit, unable to produce righteousness
- The need for the Spirit's power, not stronger flesh (Galatians 5:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference Paul draws between desire and ability?
- What does Paul mean by the flesh, and why can it never win this battle?
- How does this prepare us to depend on the Spirit rather than ourselves?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul reaches the point of crying out for rescue rather than trying harder (v. 24). When you keep losing the same battle with sin, do you tend to respond by gritting your teeth and resolving to try harder, or by turning to Christ for deliverance? What would it look like this week to stop relying on willpower and lean fully on the strength Christ supplies?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question addresses the practical crossroads every struggling believer reaches: when we keep losing the same battle, do we grit our teeth and try harder, or turn to Christ for deliverance? The teacher should help students recognize the futility of the first and the freedom of the second.

Name the try-harder reflex. The instinctive response to repeated failure is greater resolve: more rules, more self-discipline, more determination. There is a place for discipline, but when it becomes self-rescue, an attempt to defeat sin by sheer effort apart from Christ, it repeats the very failure Paul has described and often ends in exhaustion and despair.

Describe the turn to Christ. Paul models a different move. He stops trying to rescue himself and cries out for a Deliverer (v. 24), then gives thanks to God through Jesus Christ (v. 25). The believer's strength against sin is not found in the mirror but in Christ and His Spirit. Depending on Christ means confessing our weakness, drawing on His strength, walking in the Spirit, and using the means He provides (prayer, the word, the fellowship of the church).

Make it concrete and hopeful. The question asks for one way to stop relying on willpower this week and lean on Christ. This might mean bringing a recurring sin honestly to God in prayer, enlisting a brother or sister for support, removing an occasion for sin, and consciously asking the Spirit for power rather than resolving to be stronger. The aim is to move students from the treadmill of self-effort to the strength Christ supplies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The futility of self-rescue by sheer willpower
- Turning to Christ the Deliverer as the believer's true resource
- Depending on the Spirit and the means of grace against sin
- Confessed weakness as the doorway to Christ's strength (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Discussion Prompts

- When you keep losing a battle with sin, do you try harder or turn to Christ?
- What is the difference between godly discipline and self-rescue?
- What would leaning on Christ's strength rather than willpower look like this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul cries, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? and immediately answers, Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (vv. 24–25). Interpreters differ over whether the I in this struggle pictures a person before conversion, a person trying to be justified by law-keeping in their own strength, or the ongoing tension every believer feels; but whatever the precise reference, the chapter's point is clear, that the law and the flesh cannot deliver us, and only Christ can. How does this passage take the seriousness of sin and the

powerlessness of the law with full honesty, while pointing us away from self-rescue to Christ; and why must we not misread the wretched man as teaching that a Christian is doomed to remain helplessly enslaved to sin, when chapters 6 and 8 declare that we have been set free and now walk by the Spirit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and the teacher should handle it with both honesty and clarity. Paul's cry, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? followed at once by Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (vv. 24–25), is the climax of the chapter and a passage long debated.

Acknowledge the interpretive question without getting lost in it. Faithful students of Scripture have understood the I in different ways: Paul describing himself before conversion; Paul representing the Jew under the law; anyone, regenerate or not, who tries to conquer sin by law-keeping and willpower apart from the Spirit; or the ongoing tension every honest believer feels between the new self and remaining sin. The teacher need not insist on one view dogmatically, but should note that the chapter's main point does not depend on settling it.

State the main point unmistakably. Whatever the precise reference of the I, Paul's argument is that the law and the flesh cannot deliver anyone from sin. The law can reveal sin and even provoke it, but it cannot defeat it; the flesh, our own resources, cannot defeat it either. That is the whole burden of the chapter. The deliverance must come from outside ourselves, and it comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. The cry of despair is immediately answered with thanksgiving, not because Paul tried harder, but because of Christ.

Now guard carefully against the dangerous misreading. Some use the wretched man to teach that a Christian is simply a helpless slave to sin, perpetually defeated, unable to make real progress, and that this is the normal Christian life. The teacher should clearly reject this. Romans 6 has already declared that we died to sin, that our old self was crucified, and that sin shall not have dominion over us. Romans 8, which follows immediately, declares that there is now no condemnation, that the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death, and that we walk by the Spirit. Chapter 7 is not the believer's permanent prison; it is the description of the powerlessness of self-rescue, written precisely to drive us to the Spirit-empowered victory of chapter 8.

Close by pointing forward with hope. Paul deliberately ends chapter 7 with the cry and the thanksgiving, and then, with no condemnation as the very next words, opens chapter 8. The teacher should help students feel the design: take sin seriously enough to despair of self-rescue, then look away from self to Christ, and step into the life of the Spirit. The wretched man's cry is meant to become the believer's grateful confession: I cannot save myself, but thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The interpretive views of the I (pre-conversion, the Jew under law, anyone relying on self/law, the believer's ongoing tension)
- The chapter's main point, the law and the flesh cannot deliver; only Christ can
- Deliverance from outside ourselves, through Jesus Christ our Lord (7:24–25)
- Rejecting the misreading that a Christian is doomed to helpless slavery to sin
- Romans 6 and 8 as the frame, set free from sin, walking by the Spirit, no condemnation
- Chapter 7 as the driver toward the Spirit-empowered life of chapter 8

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one clear point Paul is making, regardless of how we identify the I?
- Why must we not read the wretched man as teaching that Christians are doomed to lose to sin?
- How do chapters 6 and 8 keep us from misreading chapter 7?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this honest chapter. Paul has shown you freedom from the law to belong to Christ, the good purpose of the law in exposing sin, the deceitfulness of indwelling sin, the futility of fighting in our own strength, and the cry that turns at last to Christ. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Romans 7:1–25 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back over the chapter and name how Jesus is forming them through it. The teacher should gather the threads and make sure the class leaves leaning toward Christ rather than toward despair.

Recall the journey: freedom from the law to belong to the risen Christ, the good and exposing work of the law, the deceitful seriousness of indwelling sin, the futility of fighting in our own strength, and the cry that finally turns from self to the Deliverer.

Encourage a single takeaway. For one it may be relating to God by the Spirit rather than mere rule-keeping; for another, welcoming the word's exposure of a hidden sin; for another, giving up the exhausting project of self-rescue; for another, learning to cry out to Christ rather than grit their teeth.

Close with hope and anticipation. Chapter 7 was never meant to be the believer's resting place. The disciple being formed here is a person who takes sin seriously, has stopped trying to save themselves, and turns with thanksgiving to Jesus Christ, ready to step into the life of no condemnation and the power of the Spirit that chapter 8 unfolds.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest acknowledgment of sin leading to dependence on Christ
- Serving in the Spirit rather than the written code
- The end of self-rescue as the beginning of real freedom
- Spiritual formation that drives us toward the life of the Spirit (Romans 8)

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from Romans 7:1-25 most needs to shape your week?
- Where has this chapter exposed your own reliance on self-effort?
- How does ending in Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ change the way you face your struggle with sin?