

# The Book of Romans

## Lesson 8: Released from the Law; the Struggle with Sin -- Romans 7:1-25

Anyone who has ever made a New Year's resolution knows the strange experience Paul is about to describe. You decide, with real sincerity, that this is the year you will change. You know what is right. You want what is right. And somehow, by February, you find yourself doing the very thing you swore off, almost as if some other force inside you were steering the wheel. I do not understand my own actions, Paul writes. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. It is one of the most honest sentences ever written about the human heart, and it has comforted and puzzled readers for two thousand years.

But before Paul gets there, he has unfinished business with the law. In chapter six he said we are no longer under law but under grace, and now he explains how. Using the picture of marriage, he says that just as death ends the binding of the marriage law, so we have died to the law through the body of Christ, in order to belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead. We are not lawless; we have simply been freed from a relationship that could only condemn us, so that we can be joined to the risen Christ and serve in the new way of the Spirit, not the old way of the written code.

Then Paul defends the law against a misunderstanding. If the law exposed our sin and even seemed to stir it up, is the law itself evil? By no means, he says. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. The problem was never the law; the problem is sin, which is so perverse that it can take even a good and holy command and use it as a launching point for rebellion. Tell a heart bent toward sin not to covet, and sin seizes the opportunity and produces all kinds of covetousness. The law is the diagnosis, accurate and good. But a diagnosis cannot cure; it can only reveal how sick we are.

And that brings us to the famous war within. Whatever else Paul means in these closing verses, this much is clear: the law and our own willpower can show us the good but cannot deliver us to it. The cry at the bottom of the chapter, Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? is not the last word, and it was never meant to leave us in despair. It is the cry that finally gives up on self-rescue and looks away to a Savior. And the answer comes at once: Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Read this chapter honestly, let it expose the futility of fighting sin in your own strength, and let it drive you, as Paul intends, straight into the deliverance of chapter eight.

**Group Discussion:** Paul says we have died to the law in order to belong to Christ and serve in the new way of the Spirit rather than the old way of the written code (vv. 4-6). What is the difference between trying to please God by mere rule-keeping and serving Him in the new way of the Spirit, and why can rule-keeping alone never produce the life God desires?

**Personal Reflection:** Paul describes the painful experience of wanting to do right and yet doing the very thing he hates (vv. 15–19). Where do you most feel that war in your own life, sincerely wanting to change in some area while repeatedly falling back into it? What have you learned about trying to win that battle in your own strength?

*Read Romans 7:1–25*

## Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

## Now or Later

**Reflect on these passages:** Galatians 2:19–20, dead to the law, crucified with Christ, Christ living in me; Galatians 5:16–17, walking by the Spirit and the desire of the flesh against the Spirit; Romans 8:1–4, no condemnation and the law fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit; Psalm 19:7–11, the goodness and value of God's law; Philippians 3:7–9, counting law-righteousness as loss for the sake of Christ