

# Bible Study June 15, 2022

## ROMANS 7 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

### Released from the Law

***<sup>1</sup> Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup> For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. <sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.***

***<sup>4</sup> Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.***

When a person dies to the old life and now belongs to Christ, a new life begins. Those who don't follow Christ have only their own self-determination as their source of power. By contrast, God becomes the center of a Christian's life. God supplies the power for the Christian's daily living. Believers find that their whole way of looking at the world changes when they come to know and depend on Jesus.

***<sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> 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.***

Paul uses marriage to illustrate our relationship to the law. When a spouse dies, the law of marriage no longer applies. Because we have died with Christ, the law can no longer condemn us. Since we are united with Christ, his Spirit enables us to produce good fruit for God. We now serve God, not by obeying a set of rules, but out of renewed hearts and minds that overflow with love for him.

Some people try to earn their way to God by keeping a set of rules (obeying the Ten Commandments, attending church faithfully, or doing good deeds), but all they earn for their efforts is frustration and discouragement because they can never do any of those things perfectly. However, Christ's sacrifice has opened the way to God, and we can become his children simply by putting our faith in him. No longer trying to reach God by keeping rules through our own efforts, we can become more and more like Jesus as we live for him day by day. Let the Holy Spirit turn your eyes away from your own performance and toward Jesus. He will free you to serve him out of love and gratitude. This is "living in the Spirit."

Keeping the rules, laws, and customs of Christianity doesn't save us. Even if we could keep our actions pure, we would still be doomed because our hearts and minds are perverse and rebellious. Like Paul, we can find no relief in the synagogue or church until we look to Jesus Christ himself for our salvation--which he gives us freely. When we do come to Jesus, we are

flooded with relief and gratitude. Will we keep the rules any better? Most likely, but we will be motivated by love and gratitude, not by the desire to get God's approval. We will not be merely submitting to an external code, but we will willingly and lovingly seek to do God's will from within.

## The Law and Sin

***<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.<sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.<sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.<sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.***

God's law makes people realize that they are sinners doomed to die, yet it offers no long-term remedy. Sin is real, and it is dangerous. Imagine a sunny day at the beach. You plunge into the surf; then you notice a sign on the pier: No swimming. Sharks in water. Your day is ruined. Is it the sign's fault? Are you angry with the people who put it up? The law is like the sign. It is essential, and we are grateful for it--but it doesn't get rid of the sharks.

***<sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.***

Sin deceives people by misusing the law. The law is holy, expressing God's nature and will for people and showing them how to love God and treat each other. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent deceived Adam and Eve by taking their focus off the freedom God had given them and putting it on the one restriction God had made (Genesis 3). Ever since then, we have all been rebels. Sin looks good to us precisely because God has said it is wrong. When we are tempted to rebel, we need to look at the law from a wider perspective--in the light of God's grace and mercy. If we focus on his great love for us, we will understand that he only restricts us from actions and attitudes that ultimately will harm us.

***<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.<sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.***

Paul shares three lessons that he learned in struggling with his sinful desires: (1) Knowledge of the rules does not make it easier to obey them (7:9). (2) Self-determination and self-improvement cannot change our hearts (7:15). (3) Becoming a Christian does not stamp out all sin and temptation from a person's life (7:22-25).

Being born again happens in a moment of faith, but becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. Paul compares Christian growth to a strenuous race or fight (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy

4:7). Thus, as Paul has been emphasizing since the beginning of this letter, no one in the world is innocent; no one deserves to be saved--not the pagan who doesn't know God's laws, nor the person who knows them and tries to keep them. All of us must depend totally on what Jesus Christ has done for our salvation. We cannot earn it by our good behavior.

This is more than the cry of one desperate man--it describes the experience of anyone struggling against sin or trying to please God by keeping rules and laws without the Spirit's help. We must never underestimate the power of sin. We must never attempt to fight it in our own strength. Instead of trying to overcome sin with human willpower, we must take hold of the tremendous power of Christ that is available to us. Satan manipulates and deceives. As a crafty tempter, he arrogantly tried to tempt Jesus. He succeeded with Adam and Eve, and he tries with us. We have an amazing ability to make excuses, so be alert to temptation. This is God's provision for victory over sin: He sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us power. And when we fall, he lovingly reaches out to help us up.

***<sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.***

"The devil made me do it." It sounds like a lame excuse, but there is some truth in it. Without Jesus' help, sin is stronger than we are, and sometimes we are unable to defend ourselves against its attacks. That is why we should never try to stand up against sin on our own. Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin once and for all, promises to fight by our side. If we look to him for help, we do not have to give in to sin.

***<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.***

***<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.***

Paul shows that the law is powerless to save a sinner (7:7-14), someone who diligently keeps the law (7:15-22), or even the person with a new nature who has begun to follow Christ (7:23-25). The sinner stands condemned by the law; the lawkeeper ultimately can't live up to it; and the person with the new nature finds his or her obedience to the law sabotaged by the effects of the old nature. Once again, Paul declares that salvation cannot be found by obeying the law. No matter who we are, only Jesus Christ can set us free.

Here the "power within me" means the sin deep within us and our vulnerability to the power of sin. It refers to everything within us that keeps us more loyal to our old way of selfish living than to God.

We feel great tension in our daily Christian experience. We face conflict because we agree that God's commands are right and good, but we cannot carry them out fully on our own. As a result,

we are painfully aware of our sin. This inward struggle with sin was as real for Paul as it is for us. From Paul we learn what to do about it. Whenever he felt overwhelmed by the spiritual battle, he would return to the beginnings of his spiritual life, remembering how he had been freed from sin by Jesus Christ. When we feel confused and overwhelmed by sin's appeal, let us claim the freedom Christ has given us. His power can lift us to victory.