

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
MAN’S RUIN & CHRIST’S REDEMPTION – Chapters 4-7

LESSON 21 – FREEDOM FROM THE LAW – Romans 7:1-13

There are very few things that divide Christians like their attitude toward the law. There are essentially two extremes...Legalism and License.

Legalism reduces a person’s relationship with God to a set of rules...dos and don’ts...that can then be used to measure spirituality.

License improperly applies Christian liberty for the purpose of gratifying the flesh rather than letting the Holy Spirit be in control.

Legalism and license are both extreme positions in regard to the law and are both the wrong place for Christians to be. Before we jump in and start talking about Romans 7 specifically, let’s spend a bit of time looking at some verses that help us understand the basics of God’s law.

The Law’s Credibility

Psalm 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.”

Romans 7:12, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”

1 Timothy 1:8, “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.”

The Law’s Unity

Matthew 5:19, “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

The Law’s Penalty

Galatians 3:10, “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

Romans 4:15, “The law brings wrath...and where there is no law there is no transgression.”

Romans 8:2, “Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

The Law’s Possibility

Leviticus 18:5, “Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.”

Matthew 19:17, “If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

Romans 10:5, "Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: The person who does these things will live by them."

The Law's Impossibility

Acts 13:39, "Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses."

Romans 3:20, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

Galatians 2:16, "Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

Galatians 3:11, "Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because the righteous will live by faith."

The Law's Frailty

Romans 8:3, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh"

In Romans 7, Paul refers to the law in each of the first fourteen verses and a total of thirty-five times between chapters 7:1 to 8:4. So what is the place of the law in Christian discipleship?

What Paul is going to say in answer to this question is really a detailed explanation of what he already said in chapter 6. "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace" Romans 6:14.

We are going to divide these 13 verses of chapter 7 into two sections and organize it around the Spiritual Person and the Natural Person.

The Law and the Spiritual Person

Romans 7:1, "Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?"

Paul is simply saying here that any law...no matter what kind...only has jurisdiction over a person as long as they are alive. A criminal cannot be tried and convicted after they have died.

Romans 7:2-3, "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man."

Paul is making the point that the law ends at death and as we've discussed, because we are in Christ we have been set free from the former obligations of the law. Just as a person is free to marry another once their spouse dies since they are free from the bond that formerly held them.

Romans 7:4-6, "So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

The spiritual person is no longer "married" to the law since they are dead to the law as a means of being righteous and are alive in a whole new way. Because of our identification with Christ, the claims of the law are broken and do not control us any longer. The believer has been "married" to another. Remember that Scripture refers to us...Christians of the Church Age...as the Bride of Christ.

Instead of being driven by the desire to conform to the external rules of the law, Christians are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit and have a new inward desire to serve God. The "new way of the Spirit" has replaced the "old way of the written code."

The Law and the Natural Person

Romans 7:7-13, "What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, You shall not covet. But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

The spiritual person has been delivered from the law, but the natural person has been condemned by it.

Romans 3:20, "Through the law we become conscious of our sin."

The greatest function of The Law is to expose and identify sin. People try to cover sin, excuse it, camouflage it and call it by respectable names.

A person is not a liar; he is someone with a lively imagination. People say they have affairs, God says they are adulterers. People speak of books and movies as daring, God would call them filthy. This is one of the most deadly and dangerous games that unsaved people like to play. Downplaying and disguising sin is no different than pouring poison in a bottle and labeling it Vanilla Extract. The result to the human soul is just as deadly.

The Law not only defines evil deeds, it also shines a light on evil attitudes and intentions deep within us. Paul says that sin, seizing the opportunity provided by the commandment, produced in him every kind of covetous desire.

The law has the power to reveal sin, but it cannot remove sin. The function of the law is not to reward those who keep its commands but to punish those who break them. Seven of the Ten Commandments have the death penalty associated with it.

1. Do not worship any other gods

Exodus 22:20, "Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed."

2. Do not make any idols

Exodus 32:1 & 27-28, "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him. Then he said to them, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor. The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died."

3. Do not misuse the name of God

Leviticus 24:15-16, "Say to the Israelites: Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death."

4. Keep the Sabbath holy

Numbers 15:32-36, "While the Israelites were in the wilderness, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp. So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses."

5. Honor your father and mother

Exodus 21:17, "Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death."

6. Do not murder

Exodus 21:12, "Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death"

7. Do not commit adultery

Leviticus 20:10, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death."

There are two aspects to The Law. The first is regulation. This was put in place to control the lifestyle of people through defining what was permitted or not and laying out ceremonies or rituals to be followed. This aspect was ended at the death of Jesus, when the Temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom.

The second aspect is revelation. This is the information The Law reveals about God...His nature, His holiness and His character. The Law pictures the Person and work of Christ, shows the plan of God, reveals what He thinks of sin and never comes to an end. This is the permanent aspect of The Law which makes it "holy, righteous and good."