



Lesson 8

Released from Law's Ineffective Realm *Romans 7*

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Summary

The summary of the argument is laid out (v.5-6). Notice how each of the phrases corresponds to Romans 6 – 8.

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. = Romans 6

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code = Romans 7

but in the new life of the Spirit = Romans 8

What is wrong, having learned what we have from Romans 6 when the universal experience of Christians is that of *STRUGGLE*. We find ourselves in the midst of an enormous battle that it seems should have been won in Romans 6.

It seems to me that Romans 7 is meant to do three major things:

It is meant to undercut reliance on law as a means of sanctification. Law keeping cannot save nor can it sanctify. And there are number of questions raised by that statement that Paul wrestles with here.

It is meant to reflect the universal struggle with sin in both unbelievers – particularly those who are self-righteous – and in believers, particularly those who function by legalism.

It is meant to show us the third way – that it is neither license nor legalism, but life. It is meant to bring us to Romans 8:20-25. Thus, Romans 7 is about the already-not yet reality of people in relation to sin.

Our Freedom from the Law (v.1-6)

The Law is treated as a sphere of authority and power which we have been delivered from.

He is answering the questions that might be raised in response to Romans 6:14 where we are said to be not under law, but under grace. How is that so and what does it mean?

Its Clarifying Illustration (v.1-3)

Paul poses a question based on a l e g a l principle.

Law only has jurisdiction over a person when they are alive. This would have been true in both Jewish and Roman law, as it is in ours. A person who has died is beyond the reach of the Law. Their death moves them out from its sphere of authority.

This is a carefully crafted illustration.

To make this clear, think about the authority of law to bind together a marriage. Notice that the woman is freed from the binding affect of the law, not because of her own death, but because of the death of another, her husband. A married woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If he dies, she is released and is free to remarry *even if there were no divorce*. The point here is that they are married and any living with another man while married is adultery. Paul has carefully chosen this illustration because it is so close to the reality.

Its Careful Instruction (v.4-6)

Upon the death of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been released from the authority sphere of the Law.

Paul makes the connections between his illustration and its implications (v.4). We have been released from the Law so that we may be united to Christ and bring forth all that union is intended to bring forth, here described as *fruit*. We are released from the authority of the Law so that we might be united to Christ.

Our release from the Law is a redemptive-historical reality that impacts us personally and individually.

That arises from the language itself: “while we were” and “but now we are.” Now that Christ has come, having died on the cross and having been raised from the dead, the new era of life in the Spirit has begun. The Law as an authoritative sphere came to an end at the cross. Further, we were under law while in the flesh until we were saved. Now that we have been saved, we are now under grace. Once again, there is the historical aspect (before/after the cross) and personal aspect (before/after conversion).



TEACHER: Note that the PPT slide has the two spheres which can be referenced here. *This is the most important sentence in Romans 7.* The tendency is for people to focus on resonating with the end of chapter instead of affirming the beginning of the chapter. The struggle of verses 13-20 exists *when we try to live by law.* It would be good to state that and then tell the class to hang on there, we'll get to those verses.

This perspective prepares us to expect an i n a u g u r a t e d and i n c o m p l e t e experience of its reality.

The rest of Romans 7 unpacks verse 5 to show how our sinful passions, aroused by law, worked in our body so as to bring about death. What follows is designed in such a way that we will be gripped by the glorious hope set forth in Romans 8.

The Functioning of the Law (v.7-13)

Verses 7-12 argue that though the Law is holy and its content just and good, it is bent by the power of sin to arouse wants and passions leading to evil deeds resulting in the judgment of death.

Even today when we take Paul at face value and declare that we are released from the Law's authority, people will ask, "Are you then implying that the Law was sinful or not holy?" Paul anticipates that objection. Of course not. Just because we are delivered from the Law, does not mean that the Law was sinful. What it was is limited. It had a limited purpose and was essentially powerless to cause what was commanded. That is because it is a description of righteousness, and not the righteousness itself.

Grammatical point: the use of the past tense verbs points to this operating primarily in the unregenerate, the unbeliever. There is a very definite and deliberate shift from the past tense in verses 7-12 to the present tense in verses 13-20.

In its Purpose (v.7)

To s h o w us what sin is...

What was the purpose of the Law? The law is intended to identify and illuminate sin. We would not have know that coveting was wrong. The Law told it was wrong. So we know what righteousness is and sin is.

In its Powerlessness (v.8-11)

Sin uses the law to stir up evil d e s i r e s and d e e d s resulting in the judgment of death

This happens instead of the Law actually producing in us what it demanded of us. The problem with the Law is not the Law itself. The problem is in the



pervverting power of sin to take the good law and use it to stir up in us the very evil forbidden. This is the depths to which our depravity has taken us.

Teacher: use an illustration of children being told not to do something and immediately going to do it...

Paul clearly sees sin as an a c t i v e f o r c e, a power whose affects can be felt and described.

Later, he will call this a law of sin. It has helped me over the years to compare this to gravity and the law of gravity. The power of gravity is “something” while the law of gravity describes how that power works.

So, verses 8-11 describe the e n e r g i z i n g power of sin in the presence of people trying to live by law.

Paul plays on the wages of sin being death from Romans 6 to be ironic here. Sin was dormant until it was told not to sin. Then sin was aroused to stir up the desire to do what was forbidden. So the desire for a sin leads to the doing of the sin with the result of judgment, death as the wages of desiring and doing sin.

In its P e r f e c t i o n (v.12)

S i n is the problem, not the law.

The law is perfect. The law itself is holy. The law may be weak, having a limited purpose and subject to being misused by sin, but it is still holy in God’s sight. The law is the holiness and righteousness of Christ as exhibited and encoded for a people (Jews) in a particular time (Sinai to the cross). It is an authority sphere. But incredibly, our sinfulness is such that sin thrives within the sphere of the Law.

We are released from the Law, not because it is sinful, wrong or evil, but because it only r e v e a l s, not s o l v e s our sinfulness.

Our F u t i l i t y under the Law (v.13-25)

In showing our futility under the Law, Paul develops the contrasts and conflicts between sin and law in me.

In its C a u s e (v.13)

What is the cause of our futility under the Law?



By making sin worse, sin is revealed for what it really is. The Law does not produce death; rather it fully uncovers the awfulness of sin's power and the utter depravity of our sinful state.

We know how b a d sin is because it is so perverted and so powerful that it u s e s the Law the way it does.

OK, the Law is holy and I have sin in me that uses the Law to stir up evil. So, is the good and holy Law actually the instrument of spiritual death and judgment? Are we released from the Law, not because it is sinful, but because it produces death in me? No, it is sin *using the Law* that produces death. The wages of **sin** is death, *not* the wages of the Law is death.

With its C o n f l i c t (v.14-20)

The conflict is the great conflict between that which is s p i r i t u a l and that which is f l e s h.

These two categories are going to shape the rest of Romans 7 and most of Romans 8. There is that which is of God and invisible and essentially holy and spiritual. And there is that which is of the world, in and connected to fallenness and essentially evil and fleshly. And these are in constant and never ending conflict. The Law is in the category or realm of spiritual. But, we are in the realm of the flesh – we are still living here in the midst of fallenness.

We are decisively delivered from the p o w e r of sin while we live in the p r e s e n c e of fallenness.

If we try to live by the Law, we will be defeated by sin even in the face of Romans 6 because the way sin uses the law to stir up evil in us. Romans is not supposed to bring us to some triumphalistic, victorious Christian life where we live separate from and not affected by any real struggle with sin.

So, here is the \$100 question. Is this Paul the sinner or Paul the Christian? Is this the struggle of a sinner under the conviction of the Law who wants to obey the Law but finds that sin is using the Law to cause what he doesn't want? Or is this a Christian who is struggling with the reality of sin when we know the truth of our deliverance?

Doesn't this text resonate with the reality of our own struggle? Aren't the tensions exactly what we feel? Doesn't this ring true with our experience? We delight in God's truth and yet seem enslaved to sin. We are under grace and yet live as though we were under law. We have been delivered from the power of sin, yet struggle with the presence of the flesh.

Notice the repetition of the word "d o".

The struggle is clearly between what the law says to me is right and wrong and the powerful urges and passions of sin that cause me to do what I know I ought not to do. Here is his terrible plight. In himself he acknowledges what is right

and wrong and finds in himself sin that does evil. So this section about what he does, ends with the struggle because of indwelling sin.

Notice also the repetition of the word “w a n t”.

In his flesh sin remains. He wants to do what is right, but finds himself doing the opposite of what he wants. We do not read this and say to ourselves, “Boy, I have no idea what Paul is talking about here.” We know this very well. We do what we know we ought not. And we often do the opposite of what we apparently want. He ends this section by repeating that it is indwelling sin that is causing him to do what he does not want.

Paul is not saying that since this is our s t r u g g l e we are then no longer r e s p o n s i b l e.

This is not, “I am excused because this is so.” Not at all. This is the very essence of the frustration and futility.

In its C o n s e q u e n c e (v.21-25)

Here is what Paul finds to be true in this struggle. Here are his observations and responses.

He observes the presence of conflicting s p h e r e s of authority and law (v.21-23).

There is a principle that when we want to do good, evil is close at hand. How is that so? Well, we rejoice in God’s Word in our minds. But we find a principle that sin is at war in us, taking us captive through the power of sin our bodies.

He observes the terrible s t a t e we are in if we try to live by the Law (v.24)

How thoughtful Christians resonate with verses 24-25. We are wretched people indeed if this is all there is. If we have a decisive deliverance from sin’s power in Romans 6 and yet we are captive to its remnant because we are still in the presence of sin in our fallenness, then we need deliverance from the body that sins. And that deliverance is through Christ.

He responds by pointing us to Jesus Christ, our Lord (v.25).

Here it is then. We no longer have to be subject to sin’s power. We need to yield ourselves to God and not to sin. The Law cannot help us and further, we are no long under its sphere of authority. Jesus will deliver us from the frustration and futility of our struggle with sin. And that deliverance has begun, but is not yet complete. We will fail and fall if we try to live in the old way under the Law. But we will begin to succeed and grow in holiness if we live the new way by the Spirit.



Lessons for Living

Listen to the key texts from each of Romans 6-8 from the NLT:

So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace. (Romans 6:11-14)

So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were [in the flesh (*Gr*)], sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit. (Romans 7:4-6)

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently. And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. (Romans 8:22-26)

Not l i c e n s e and not l a w , but l i f e by the Spirit

Hughes' 4 Pillars of Romans 7- (Kent Hughes, *Romans*)

First Pillar: Our marriage to the Law has been broken by our death and resurrection in Christ. The Law has no more power over us.

Second Pillar: The Law is good, for it reveals to us the righteous demands of God. It reveals the utter pervasiveness of sin. To the believer this is grace.

Third Pillar: When a believer tries to live a life that is pleasing to God in his own strength, he will fail every time.

Fourth Pillar: That very failure makes him ready for God's grace.

Victory over sin is begun now but groaning in s t r u g g l e
and s u f f e r i n g until the day Jesus comes.



TEACHERS' NOTES