

The Way
Maturity of the Church
Lesson 23: Believers are not Under the Authority of the Law

We are indebted to [Ethnos360](#) for providing the basis of these lessons

Review (Where We've Been)

Charting Paul's Teaching Through Romans...

Condemnation - You are far from God (Romans 1-3)

Justification - You are made right with God through faith (Romans 4-5)

Sanctification - You are free from the power and penalty of sin (Romans 6-8)

Restoration - You are restored to God (Romans 9-11)

Transformation - You are to live in obedience to God (Romans 12-16)

Last week we learned...

We all need to constantly be reminded that our life is better in God's hands or living according to God's plans.

We concluded that...

How do we keep sin from ruling in our lives?

- Recognize and repent of sin so it cannot control you

Romans 6:12 (NLT) Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV) No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

- Surrender yourself moment by moment to the Lord

Romans 6:13 (NLT) 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.

BIG Idea

Paul will spend Romans 6 explaining that God's grace, love, and forgiveness is not a license to continue in sin. Paul dives deeper into sin's relationship to the law. And he seeks to answer whether there is hope for those who struggle with sin and desire to follow Christ.

Information (What You Need to Know)

Paul opens the chapter with a very simple common statement and then immediately gives us an analogy to make his point.

Romans 7:1-3 (NLT) Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only while a person is living? **2** For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. **3** So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

Paul is not here making any point or argument about marriage/adultery/divorce. Paul gives us this analogy to point out that when a couple is married their marriage covenant/contract is completely intact. To the point that if one of them has an affair, they are breaking that marriage covenant/contract. And the truest way to be free of one's marriage covenant is simply death. At the death of a spouse the surviving spouse is free to marry another.

Paul knows his audience is thinking..."so what?"

Romans 7:4 (NLT) 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.

The idea that in our faith in Christ God immediately gives us His Spirit to indwell us thus beginning a lifelong process of transforming us. We are new creatures with new desires, new goals, new plans, a new life, and a new end game is something Paul frequently references in his letters. But why? Why does he keep bringing this up and repeating it?

Paul understood our human struggles our fleshly struggles. This was not something that we easily step into. As soon as we surrender ourselves to Christ and his ways an unseen battle begins. We become keenly aware of the things in our world that are against God and his ways. Our ethics, family, relationships, plans, and desires all begin to change (as well they more often than not should change). At the same time, the enemy pushes back. He would rather you and I be a lukewarm Christian than someone in Christ seeking to live out their lives according to God's Word. Christians by name only don't bother the enemy. Paul wants us to grasp our new life and new journey in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT) This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Ephesians 5:8 (NLT) For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light!

Galatians 5:16-17 (NLT) **16** So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. **17** The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

You determine what you give dominion and control to. Do you fill yourself with truth and life and allow the Holy Spirit living in you to have control or do you just keep living according to the flesh?

So, Paul in verses 4 & 5 begins to give us a further dichotomy between the old man and the new man to show the stark contrast of the results of the new versus the old man. Look now at verse 5.

Romans 7:5 (NLT) When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death.

Paul draws our attention to the results or fruit of the Old and New Man. The new man, the Holy Spirit produces fruit in us that results in a harvest of Good Deeds for God. Notice that he is not saying that you are doing these deeds to be accepted or loved by God but they come out (grow out) of our lives as a result of a life lived in His ways for His glory.

On the other side, Paul gives us the old nature. Sin is deeply at work in us. And the fruit produced from a life controlled by our old nature is sinful deeds resulting in death. New man produces life and the old man produces death. But here is the KEY: Verse 5 says: “...**the law aroused these evil desires that produced this harvest.**” Hold that thought because it carries us into the next several verses.

Romans 7:6 (NLT) 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.

We are no longer enslaved to our sinful desires. We are released, set free. In Christ, we no longer need to choose to return to that old dead nature. We are alive and empowered by the Spirit. And we choose daily, hourly,

moment by moment whether to feed and fill ourselves with truth or be drawn away to that old nature.

When we are free to serve God from love we are not being slaves to the law. The law cannot save anyone. The law does not make us more like Christ. The law does not take us deeper with God or in any way nor does it make us holy.

Paul introduces another important question about the law.

Romans 7:7-12 (NLT) Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, “You must not covet.” **8** But sin used this command to arouse all kinds of covetous desires within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power. **9** At one time I lived without understanding the law. But when I learned the command not to covet, for instance, the power of sin came to life, **10** and I died. So I discovered that the law’s commands, which were supposed to bring life, brought spiritual death instead. **11** Sin took advantage of those commands and deceived me; it used the commands to kill me. **12** But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good.

Paul’s big question is important. “Is the law of God sinful?” Because certainly in our time people are questioning God’s law. With the idea that God is some kind of moral monster for some of his specific laws. And if people today don’t like what the law says or take the time to understand the laws, the lawgiver, or when or to whom it was given then they assume that the laws are the problem. Which is an absurd challenge on its face.

Paul says “the law showed me my sin.” Some would call the law a mirror giving reflection to us of our broken sinfulness. Much more than that,

David Guzik says, the law is an X-Ray that reveals our innermost being, our thoughts, our desires, our heart. That which is there within us but we keep hidden. I can't get an X-Ray and blame the machine for what it exposes (brokenness, disease).

This is why Paul uses the 10th Commandment. Thou Shall Not Covet (and Paul stops there). In the Law in Exodus 20:17 in case there is any question a list of things one could covet are added. Coveting is all about desires and wants. Desires and wants in themselves are not sinful. For example: I want a 1970, 71, 72 Ford Mustang fastback. I know there are better and even cooler cars but the early 1970s is my dream car. Now, there was a gentleman in my neighborhood who had one in the back of his garage. It caught my eye every time we walked the dogs. What if I began to look into my neighbor's life and family and developed a very intricate plan to deal with my neighbor and steal the car? I think safely said that is then my love for a particular car turned really bad. But as our enemy prefers, he takes a normal thing and poisons and warps it. So a normal appreciation and desire becomes evil, deadly, and even murderous.

Paul uses this commandment of coveting to show that we are all incriminated by the law. Have you ever coveted someone else's spouse, family, home, furniture, vehicle, vacation, meal, clothes? Men, how about someone's golf clubs, tools, athletic ability, guns, boat, truck, grill, or grill master abilities? The enemy takes that which God gives and warps it. Love becomes lust and perversion, the desire to provide for our family becomes greed.

God's intent was for the law to show us what sin is. The things we have warped desires for disappoint, distract, and can even destroy us. God

wants our desires to be toward things that are true, lovely, honest, pure, good, and truly satisfying. In essence, God wants our desires to be for Him and His ways.

But as Paul says, “sin took advantage of the law and deceived me and used those commands to kill me.” This is the same thing Adam faced in the garden. God is wrong. Live your truth. Forget His stupid rules. You know better than the one who created and gave you life. The problem is not the law or the lawgiver but the Sin that is embedded within me. Look at verse 13.

Romans 7:13 (NLT) But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God’s good commands for its own evil purposes.

And what are sin’s purposes? Death

Warren Weirsbe calls the law “a magnet that draws out of us all kinds of corruption.” And what corruption does the law draw out? It draws out our wretched filthy sinfulness. As we read the Pentateuch (first 5 books) we get situations where laws were given and then immediately those laws were broken or transgressed. This final section is where Paul gets deeply personal. Very real. It is one of the best passages in the Bible that accurately reflects what goes on in a believer’s mind and heart. They are laments.

Romans 7:14-17 (NLT) So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. **15** I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. **16** But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. **17** So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

You can feel Paul's internal battle over his flesh and sin. He desires to do what is right. And he knows what is right. He is powerless to do it in his sinful flesh. Sin is the source of the problem. Look at his next lament.

Romans 7:18-20 (NLT) And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. **19** I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. **20** But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

Paul comes back to his flesh, his sin problem (our sin problem). We feel that strain and tension. And again the source is revealed in the same words, "sin living in me that does it." Paul goes into his final lament.

Romans 7:21-24 (NLT) I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. **22** I love God's law with all my heart. **23** But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. **24** Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

Our problem and Paul's problem is not desire. We genuinely want to do what is right. Paul takes us to the bottom of the barrel. We look up from the bottom and cry out. **Yes, I am a wretched and miserable person.**

Griffith Thomas says, “The point of the passages is that it describes a man who is trying to be good and holy by his own efforts and is beaten back every time by the power of indwelling sin; it thus refers to anyone, regenerate or unregenerate.”

This is not just a Christian’s battle but humanity’s battle. It is exhausting. The word, wretched means worn out and exhausted because of hard labor. And thankfully we are not left panting and exhausted on the ground. Because at the end of this dire lament Paul brings the answer.

Romans 7:25 (NLT) Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

The answer is that, as Paul pointed out earlier in the chapter, we are dead to our sinful nature. No longer do we need to be beholden to it. Now we are alive in Christ. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Our choice comes back to what we give control to within our lives. Our dead old nature or the Holy Spirit sent to help and guide us.

Galatians 2:19-23 (NLT) For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. **20** My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. **21** I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

We choose what we fill our lives with and what controls us. Do you live your life like you are dead to sin? Because in Christ you are. He died to set you and me free. Who are you giving dominion to?