

Free From the Law

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Preacher: Jeremy Martinson

[0 : 00] Okay, now Romans 7 and the whole of it. Okay, good. Romans 7. Since I am speaking to those who know the law, brothers and sisters, don't you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives?

For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding the husband. So then, if she is married to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress.

But if her husband dies, she is free from that law. Then, if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another.

You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death.

But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law. What should we say then?

[1 : 11] Is the law sin? Absolutely not. But I would not have known sin if it were not for the law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, Do not covet.

And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again, and I died.

The commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and though it killed me, and through it killed me. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

Therefore, did what is good become death to me? Absolutely not. But sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave under sin. For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.

[2 : 15] Now, if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now, I am no longer the one doing it, but it is the sin living in me. For I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my flesh.

For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. Now, if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me.

So I discover this law. When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self, I delight in God's law. But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then, with my mind, I myself am serving the law of God, but with my flesh, the law of sin.

Aaron Rodgers is the former quarterback of the Green Bay Packers, and this year he is going to play for the New York Jets.

[3 : 30] I don't like Aaron Rodgers. It's really nothing personal. It's just, as a Vikings fan, I always want him to lose.

And that is sin. But sin is not merely the wrong that you do. Sin is an evil force with uncanny strength and nearly unlimited effect.

Sin dominates from without a person, but also dwells deep within every human heart. And because of sin's pervasive influence on your personhood, sin's treachery cannot be overstated.

Because of sin, Jeremiah describes the human heart as deceitful and desperately wicked.

Paul talks about a conscience in Romans chapter 2 that is conflicted and untrustworthy. That's because of sin. Because of sin, the human will is locked in stubborn rebellion against God.

[4 : 53] Romans chapter 8. Because of sin, our emotions, emotions like jealousy and anger, envy, these drive our emotions.

Because of sin, your body is weak and your body will die. And when your body is put into the grave, it will decay.

That is because of sin. Because of sin, you desire darkness rather than light. Jesus said that in John chapter 3.

And because of sin, when you hear the gospel, you find it unsatisfying at best and foolish at worst.

Every part of what it means to be a human being is grossly impacted by sin. Now, we do not dismiss reason, nor emotion, nor the need for those who share the gospel to be winsome and compassionate with unbelievers.

[6 : 08] We don't dismiss reason, nor emotion, nor the need to be winsome. But biblically, we understand that reason and emotion and even winsomeness are insufficient to overcome the stubborn unbelief caused by sin.

The gospel, then, seems foolish to those who are without the Spirit. Not because it is incoherent or incomprehensible, but because absent the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel seems unnecessary and therefore unacceptable.

And all of these truths about sin make Paul's claim in Romans chapter 6, just before our text, startling. Paul writes this in Romans chapter 6, in verse 14, for sin will not rule over you.

For you are not under law, but under grace. those who believe the gospel, those who anchor their hope in grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, they have experienced a fundamental change in their relationship to God's law.

Paul explains this fundamental change in Romans chapter 7, and he begins with a helpful illustration so that readers of Romans 7 can follow how followers of Jesus have been set free from the law.

[8 : 06] And, the best part for us, Paul speaks Minnesotan. Look at verse 1. Since I am speaking to those who know the law, brothers and sisters, don't you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives?

For example, a married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law regarding her husband.

And so then, if she is married to another man while her husband is living, she will be called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is free from the law.

Then, if she is married to another man, she is not an adulteress. Don't miss Paul's logic here.

Lawyers don't represent corpses in coffins. The long arm of the law is shortened by death.

[9 : 16] That's Paul's argument. When you die, you are no longer legally under the law. And then notice how Paul takes this illustration and applies it to followers of Jesus.

This is in verse 4. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were put to death in relation to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong to another.

You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. My brothers and sisters, Paul says.

Jesus died for you in your place as your substitute, but he also died as you. When Christ died, that death of Christ on the cross was also your death.

your death to the law. You are now free from the law as followers of Jesus.

[10 : 32] You do not need to fear the law's condemnation and you do not need to seek approval from the law. Why? Because Paul says it so beautifully, you belong to Jesus.

And now, it is your union with Jesus that is transformative, life-giving, life-changing, fruit-bearing.

In verse 5, Paul makes another outrageous claim. The law actually makes sin worse.

look at verse 5. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused through the law were working in us to bear fruit for death.

But now, we have been released from the law since we have died to what held us so that we may serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the old letter of the law.

[11 : 51] The law provokes sin but cannot rescue from sin. The law makes sin worse because it arouses sinful desires.

It's the law that arouses our desires for lust and jealousy, pride, anger, covetousness, bitterness, and when left unchecked, these sinful desires will lead to sinful behaviors.

As Paul writes, they bear fruit for death. death. So, if the law provokes sin, if the law stirs up sin, then the problem is with the law, right?

Paul anticipates this question in verse number seven. What should we say then? This is how you know when Paul is anticipating a question.

What should we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not. On the contrary, I would not have known sin if it were not for the law.

[13 : 12] For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, do not covet. And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.

For apart from the law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from the law. But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again, and I died.

the commandment that was meant for life resulted in death for me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

So then, the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good. What's happening in these six verses? I think Paul is in some way retelling the narrative from the opening chapters of Genesis.

He's talking about the fall in the Garden of Eden. God gives Adam and Eve a command, a law. And what happens? Sin seizes on that opportunity of having that law put in front of them, seizes the opportunity to stir up inside of them covetousness of all kinds.

[14 : 43] And then, sin deceives the first couple into thinking that disobedience will result in their blessing. That if they disobey, they will be more like God.

God gives them everything they need in the garden. There is no reason for them to be coveting the one thing he forbids.

And yet, what happens? The law comes in. Do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And when that law comes in, what happens? Covetousness is stirred up inside of them.

The one thing that God forbids is the one thing they can't live without. If you paint your fence, odds are no one is going to touch it when they walk by.

But as soon as you put a wet paint sign on your fence, every single person who walks by is going to touch your fence to see if the paint really is wet.

[15 : 56] when the speed limit says 75, we all set our cruises for 80. We see the law and we know we can get by with more.

Sin puts that law, stirs up inside of us. What can I get away with? Don't bother your brother. It would have been better never to say it, right?

Because what happens? As soon as you say, don't bother your brother, it's the one thing that the older brother is going to do. I want you to listen to your sister.

You'd have been better off not saying it, because as soon as you say, listen to your sister, the answer is, why is she in charge of me? What is happening?

Sin sees the law and stirs up inside of us all kinds of sin. Your wet paint sign is not the issue.

[17 : 10] The problem is sin using the law to provoke sinners to rebellion and disobedience. sin. If Adam and Eve had obeyed God's law in the garden, Paul says their obedience would have led to life.

But as it is, their disobedience leads to death. The law provokes sin, but cannot rescue from sin.

So since the law is the bridge between sin and death, is the law itself death?

Since the law forms that necessary bridge between sin and death, I would not have known sin if it wasn't for the law. And if I had not sinned, I would not have resulted in death.

Is the law then death? Paul anticipates this question, verse 13, therefore, did what is good, in other words, the law, become death to me?

[18 : 41] Absolutely not. On the contrary, sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me, through what is good, the law, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure.

The law is powerless but not purposeless. Think about it.

Without God's law, we wouldn't know what sin is. The law gives sin a platform so that sin is exposed.

I suspect most of us are at least familiar a little bit with the, I guess, semi-reality TV show America's Got Talent.

talent. Without America's Got Talent, we wouldn't know that this person is an untrained but gifted opera singer.

[19 : 59] And we wouldn't know that she can juggle while she's eating a sandwich and painting her fingernails. We wouldn't know these things. America's Got Talent has certainly provided a platform for some incredible people to be discovered.

But some people use America's Got Talent just to get their five minutes of fame. My brother showed me an act this week and I watched about six seconds of it.

And the stage of America's Got Talent exposes truly awful performances as well, doesn't it?

The law is like that. Because of God's law, we understand that sin is truly awful.

Paul describes it, I love this, as sinful beyond measure. To insanity and beyond. God's law is powerless, but not purposeless.

[21 : 22] Because of the law, we know just how sinful sin is. Now, this final section of Romans 7 has led to a variety of interpretations.

And some interpretations are better than others. And so, I offer that to you as just mindful to go and study and read.

Okay? This is one of those cases where we are happy to have humility to learn, wisdom to discern, and grace to disagree. the challenge in this section is Paul's use of the first person singular pronoun I.

We have to answer this question, is Paul referring to himself as though this is a clip from an autobiography, or is Paul voice acting?

Like, the people who play the cartoon characters, you don't ever see their faces, and yet they are lending their voices and their emotion and their personality to the characters.

[22 : 41] Is Paul talking about himself when he says I, or is he voice acting in order to help us get a sense of the emotions behind the words?

Here's why I think Paul may be voice acting. Look at verse number nine. once I was alive apart from the law.

But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again, and I died. Look also at verse number 14. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh sold as a slave to sin.

Now, who is Paul? Paul is a Jew, and not only a Jew, he is a Pharisee, he was a Pharisee, like Nicodemus, who we met last week in John chapter three.

Paul believed that life came through obedience to the law. And so, verse nine, I don't think could ever have referred to Paul.

[23 : 58] He was alive apart from the law. No, Paul believed that by his obedience to the law, he had found life. And Paul has already explained that Christians are not under law, but under grace.

So, he is not under flesh, like we see in verse 14, because Paul has the spirit. He is a slave to God, yes, end of chapter six, sin.

But a slave to the law under sin? I don't think so. And so, I believe that Paul is voice acting here.

Speaking of voice acting, I wonder if you are familiar with the name Mel Blanc. Anybody? His nickname is the man of a thousand voices. In reality, it's a bit of a misnomer.

he was only capable of 400 unique character voices. But if you watch cartoons, especially older cartoons, he does almost all of the voices.

[25 : 08] I was really surprised to learn this this week. He does Porky Pig and Daffy Duck and Elmer Fudd and Tweety and Sylvester.

He does Wile E. Coyote. I didn't even know Wile E. Coyote had words. But apparently he does Wile E. Coyote. But he also does The Road Runner. I guess that's just the beep.

Because The Road Runner I don't think ever has any actual words. He also does Yosemite Sam, Speedy Gonzalez, Marvin the Martian, Foghorn Leghorn, Pepe Le Pew, and Barney Rubble late in his career with the Flintstones.

He does almost every voice. All of the major characters. So, think about that as we notice Paul using the first person singular pronoun I.

I believe Paul is voice acting Adam. I think he is voice acting the people of Israel. And I think in some way he may also be voice acting for himself.

[26 : 17] but I believe it's best to see this section primarily as the words of a Gentile God fearer.

In other words, someone who is not born a Jew, not born under the law of God, didn't grow up knowing the law, and yet has arrived at a place where he now fears God, respects God, respects God's law.

See if that seems to connect with Paul's flow as we work our way through these verses. Look at verse number 15. verse number for I do not understand what I am doing because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.

Now, if I do what I do not want to do, I agree with the law that it is good. so now I am no longer the one doing it, but it is sin living in me.

For I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my flesh. Amen. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.

[27 : 47] for I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.

Now, if I do what I do not want, I am no longer the one that does it, but it is the sin that lives in me. So I discover this law, maybe better, this principle.

When I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. For in my inner self I delight in God's law.

But I see a different law or a different principle in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.

This persona that Paul portrays is powerless, pathetic, pitiful, does not seem to have the Holy Spirit inside.

[29 : 07] Delight in God's law, whatever there is, is overshadowed by sin. sin. And sin takes advantage of the law, using it to provoke all kinds of evil inside.

Sin enslaves this character, but also indwells this person. And because of sin, the character Paul voices is under the law's curse and condemnation, fully deserving of the law's penalties.

no wonder, no wonder the monologue ends this way. What a wretched man I am.

Who will rescue me from this body of death? death? I don't like Aaron Rogers.

It's nothing personal. I just always want him to lose. The law is like that.

[30 : 24] It always wants the sinner to lose. It always wants you to fail to measure up to God's perfect standard.

Why? Because until your sin is fully exposed, salvation is not desired, grace is not received, and Jesus is not prized.

Can you sense the despair in these words? The hopelessness, the helplessness? The question implies the answer. No one.

Who is going to deliver me from this body of death? No one. Not yourself. And no one else is going to rescue you from this body of death.

And yet, the pit of despair is also the precipice of salvation.

- [31 : 36] salvation. When a sinner is most despairing of any rescue from without or from within, when guilt feels most heavy, when the blackness of sin feels most oppressive, when obedience to the law feels most impossible, when God's judgment feels inevitable, then, then, then, the law has fulfilled its divine purpose.

And from the pit of despair an anguished cry arises, God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Let not conscience make you linger, we sing together, nor of font fitness fondly dream.

All the fitness he requires is to feel your need of him. This he gives you, this he gives you, tis the spirit's rising beam, come ye sinners poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore.

Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love and power. Verse 25, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Is Jesus your savior? Have you trusted in Jesus for your salvation?

- [33 : 33] Some of you are familiar with Nanny McPhee. Some of us are not. And so just for the sake of getting everybody caught up, Nanny McPhee is kind of like the story of Mary Poppins except in Mary Poppins the children are very prim and very proper, raised in a proper British home and so on.

In the story of Nanny McPhee, the children are misfits, troublemakers,! Deviant miscreants! They are feral, as Mike Diley might say.

And this is what Nanny McPhee tells the children. When you need me, but do not want me, then I must stay.

But when you want me, but no longer need me, then I must go. There's a similar principle for the law.

When you need the law, but do not want it, then the law must stay.

- [34 : 59] But when you want the law, but no longer need the law, then the law has to go.

Followers of Jesus, we are free from the law, and yet not lawless. Hear that.

We are free from the law, but not lawless. Through Jesus' death, we are free from the law's curse, free from the law's condemnation, and now we want the law of God.

We delight in the law of God. We treasure the law of God. We set it together during the call to worship. We see the law of God and we want more and more and more of it in our lives, and yet in some sense the law must go.

We are free from its curse, free from its condemnation, free from its demands. The law for those in Christ has accomplished its purpose.

- [36 : 15] It has provoked our sin. It has exposed our sin. It has driven us into the pit of despair so that we cry out for salvation to Jesus.

The law is holy, just, and good. As Paul says, we affirm that together, and yet the law's role in the life of the believer is important but limited.

The law guides right behavior, but it cannot give right desires. Right desires are the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work.

And the Spirit's fruit is nourished by roots that are deep down in God's promises rather than God's law. Listen, if you root your Christian life in the soil of law, you will be sharp and brittle and self-righteous and critical and judgmental of yourself and of others.

You will be prickly! Like a spiritual porcupine. So don't depend on your own self-righteous best efforts.

[37 : 39] instead rely on the Holy Spirit in order to live for God's glory. Our profound spiritual needs, brothers and sisters, are met by faith in God's good promises to us in Christ, not by obedience to God's laws.

When you need the law but do not want it, then it must stay. But when you want the law but do not need it, then the law has to go.

Follower of Jesus, you are free from the law. So walk by the Spirit. Put to death the deeds of the body and you will live.

let's pray. Father, we are grateful for your word.

We confess that at times we think about the law and the gospel and we hear them as very dissonant notes.

[39 : 00] like playing two keys on a piano keyboard that are right next to one another. We hear them and we sense that dissonance.

Forgive us. Forgive us for our foolishness in thinking that the law and the gospel are somehow opposed to one another.

Forgive us, good Father, for thinking that the law is merely supplementary to the gospel. That the gospel is somehow insufficient and that we have to add some of our own good to it.

Thank you for helping us to see from this beautiful text the harmony of the law and the gospel. Thank you for showing us our sin.

Thank you for revealing it to us so that from that pit of despair we would cry out for salvation. Thank you blessed Holy Spirit for giving us life so that we see the hopelessness, the helplessness of our condition and we call out Lord have mercy on me a sinner.

[40 : 31] Father we receive the good promise that you have given to us in your word that comes just after this lovely text that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We receive that promise. We receive the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. would you please help us as we continue now in our time of worship.

Help us as we prepare our hearts to participate in the Lord's Supper. Help us to evaluate and consider and examine our hearts.

We look to you and ask that you would help us as we do that even right now. Father, your word tells us if we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We are people, claim that promise to us in Christ. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Abend Nab! Thank you.