

ROMANS

Chapter 7

Released from the Law

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? 2 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. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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. 6 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.

Luther says: In chapter 7 (Paul) supports the (freedom) with an analogy from married life. When a man dies, his wife is also alone, and thus the one is released entirely from the other. Not that the wife cannot or ought not take another husband, but rather that she is now for the first time really free to take another – something which she could not do previously, before she was free from her husband. So our conscience is free, and the one is released from the other. Not that the conscience is to do nothing, but rather that it is now for the first time really free to hold fast to Christ, the second husband, and bring forth the fruit of life. (TLSB)

Then he depicts more fully the nature of sin and the law, how by means of the law sin now stirs and becomes mighty. The old man comes to hate the law all the more because he cannot pay what the law demands. Sin is his nature and of himself he can do nothing but sin; therefore the law to him is death and torment. Not that the law is bad, but the old man's evil nature cannot endure the good, and the law demands good of him; just as a sick man cannot stand it when he is required to run and jump and do the works of a well man. (TLSB)

Therefore St. Paul concludes that the law, correctly understood and thoroughly grasped, does nothing more than to remind us of our sin, and to slay us by it, making us liable to eternal wrath. All this is fully learned and experienced by our conscience, when it is really struck by the law. Therefore a person must have something other than the law, something more than the law, to make him righteous and save him. But they who do not correctly understand the law are blind. They go ahead in their presumption, thinking to satisfy the law by means of their deeds, not knowing how much the law demands, namely, a willing and happy heart. Therefore they do not see Moses clearly; the veil is put between them and him, and covers him (Ex 34:29-35; 2 Cor 3:12-16). (TLSB)

They he shows how spirit and flesh struggle with one another in a man. He uses himself as an example, in order that we may learn how properly to understand the work of slaying sin within us. He calls both the spirit and the flesh "laws"; for just as it is in nature of the divine law to drive men and make demands of them, so the flesh drives men and makes demands. It rages against the spirit, and will have its own way. The spirit, in turn, drives men and makes demands contrary to the flesh, and will have its own way. This tension lasts in us as long as we live; though in one

person it is greater, in another less, according as the spirit or the flesh is stronger. Nevertheless the whole man is himself both spirit and flesh, and he fights with himself until he becomes wholly spiritual.” (TLSB)

7:1 *brothers* – This is an intimate term with which he introduces a section revealing Paul’s personal struggles. (TLSB)

law Perhaps Paul has in mind the Mosaic law, but his concern here is with the fundamental character of law as such. (CSB)

Either Jews or Gentiles familiar with the Law would know the laws of marriage (vv 2–3). (TLSB)

law is binding – The Law demand obedience. (TLSB)

as long as he lives? Laws apply only to living people. (TLSB)

7:2–3 These verses illustrate the principle set down in v. 1. Death decisively changes a person’s relationship to the law. (CSB)

This view of marriage reflects teachings of the Torah, but would also have been familiar to most Gentiles. (TLSB)

7:2 A widowed spouse does not violate wedding vows by remarrying. (TLSB)

7:4 So, Paul now draws the conclusion from the principle stated in v. 1 and illustrated in vv. 2–3. (CSB)

The Law was fulfilled by Jesus’ obedience and sacrificial death. United to Him in Baptism (6:3–5), we are now free from the Law’s condemnation. (TLSB)

died to the law. The law’s power to condemn no longer threatens the Christian, whose death here is to be understood in terms of 6:2–7. There, however, he dies to sin; here he dies to the law. The result is that the law has no more hold on him. (CSB)

through the body of Christ. His physical body (self) crucified. (CSB)

belong to another. The resurrected Christ (see 6:5). The purpose of this union is to produce the fruit of holiness. (CSB)

may bear fruit – Our lives are devoted to God’s service. (TLSB)

7:5 *cwe were living in the flesh.* A condition, so far as Christians are concerned, that belongs to the past—the unregenerate state. (CSB)

Controlled by sin (TLSB)

passions – Can be sinful or righteous; Paul describes control by sinful desires. (TLSB)

aroused by the law. The law not only reveals sin; it also stimulates it. The natural tendency in man is to desire the forbidden thing. (CSB)

Rebellion against the Law may incline sinners to commit more sins. Melancthon: “The Law even increased sin. For when it accuses and terrifies, doubt is kindled, and there follows indignation against God and despair” (*Romans*, p 153). (TLSB)

death.† Physical death and, beyond that, eternal death—final separation from God—were the fruit of our “union” with the law. (CSB)

Apart from Christ, our lives serve sin, not God. This leads to death. (TLSB)

7:6 *which held us captive.* The law; see vv. 4, 6. (CSB)

United to Christ, we have been freed from the Law. (TLSB)

new way of the Spirit. A life of faith, given by the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies. (TLSB)

old way of the written code. Life under the OT law. (CSB)

The Law, epitomized in the Ten Commandments. The Law can command but cannot empower us to keep it. (TLSB)

7:1–6 As the Law confronts fallen human nature, it accuses and condemns, revealing sinfulness and the unreachable standard of God’s holiness. Faithless people may be driven to sin and despair by the Law (v 5). Thanks be to God, in Christ we have died to the Law (v 4). Now we need not live in bondage and fear, but in a new life in the Spirit. • O Holy Spirit, fill me with faith and new life, so that I may bear the fruit of love for You. Amen. (TLSB)

The Law and Sin

7 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.” **8** But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. **9** I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. **10** The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. **11** For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. **12** So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. **13** 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. **14** For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. **15** For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. **16** Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. **17** So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. **18** 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. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. **21** So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. **22** For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, **23** 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. **24** Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25** 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.

7:7 More rhetorical questions from Paul (cf 6:1, 15). (TLSB)

we. Christians who have been “released from the Law” (v 6). (TLSB)

Is the law sin? This question was occasioned by the remarks about the law in vv. 4–6. (CSB)

I. Paul seems to be using the first person pronoun of himself, but also as representative of mankind in general (vv. 7–12) and of Christians in particular (vv. 13–25). (CSB)

I would not have known sin. The law fulfilled the important function of revealing the presence and fact of sin. (CSB)

The internal sin of evil desires leads to outward sinful acts, yet is not recognized as sinful until we hear God’s forbidding command. “Defects and concupiscence are both sin and punishment” (Ap II 47). (TLSB)

7:8 *opportunity afforded by the commandment.* Personification shows sin’s iron grip, which corrupts even our hearing of the Commandments. (TLSB)

covetousness. God’s Ninth and Tenth Commandments may cause fallen humans to rebel and do the exact opposite. (TLSB)

sin lies dead. Not nonexistent but not fully perceived. (CSB)

Something is only sinful if God forbids it. The Law naturally stirs up rebellion in sinners. (TLSB)

Apart from the law, sin is dormant. Si is there, but needs a line in the sand to step over in order to show itself as sin. (PBC)

7:9 *Once I was alive.* Paul reviews his own experience from the vantage point of his present understanding. Before he realized that the law condemned him to death, he was alive. Reference is to the time either before his *bar mitzvah* (see below) or before his conversion, when the true rigor of the law became clear to him (see Lk 18:20–21; Php 3:6). (CSB)

Paul thought that he was alive and keeping the Law, but he was really dead in sin (Eph 2:1-2). He realized sin and guilt had been in him all along. (TLSB)

when the commandment came. When Paul came to the realization that he stood guilty before the law—a reference either to his *bar mitzvah*, when he, at age 13, assumed full responsibility for the law, or to the time when he became aware of the full force of the law (at his conversion). (CSB)

If a freshly painted park bench has a WET PAINT sign on it, as surely as night follows day, people will go up and touch the paint to see if it really is wet. The fault lies not with the sign but with the perversity of the passerby. The end result, however, can easily be that the thing that was intended to be helpful and protective now appears to be the problem. (PBC)

I died. Paul came to realize he was condemned to death, because law reveals sin, and sin's wages is death (6:23). (CSB)

7:10 *promised life.* See Lev 18:5. As it worked out, law became the avenue through which sin entered—both in Paul's experience and in that of mankind. Instead of giving life, the law brought condemnation; instead of producing holiness, it stimulated sin. (CSB)

One who kept the Law perfectly was promised life (lv 18:5), but no sinful human could reach this standard of holiness. (TLSB)

7:12 *the law is holy.* Despite the despicable use that sin made of the law, the law was not to blame. The law is God's and as such is holy, righteous and good. (CSB)

The Law's effect shows a problem in us, not in the Law. God's Law remains good, even though we cannot keep it. (TLSB)

7:13–25† Whether Paul is describing a Christian or non-Christian experience has been hotly debated through the centuries. Some claim that he is speaking of the non-Christian life as suggested by: (1) the use of phrases such as “sold as a slave to sin” (v. 14), “I know that nothing good lives in me” (v. 18) and “What a wretched man I am!” (v. 24)—which may not seem to describe Christian experience; (2) the contrast between ch. 7 and ch. 8, making it difficult in the opinion of some for the other view to be credible; (3) the problem of the value of conversion if one ends up in spiritual misery. In favor of the view that Paul is describing Christian experience are: (1) the use of the present tense throughout the passage; (2) Paul's humble opinion of himself (v. 18); (3) his high regard for God's law (vv. 14, 16); (4) the location of this passage in the section of Romans where Paul is dealing with sanctification—the growth of the Christian in holiness. The following notes prefer the latter view. (CSB)

7:13 God's Law, intended for our good (v 12). (TLSB)

become sinful beyond measure – Sin is not inconsequential. We are not to excuse our sins; we are completely sinful. (TLSB)

7:14 *spiritual.* The law had its origin in God. (CSB)

Of divine origin. (TLSB)

I am. The personal pronoun and the verb, taken together, suggest that Paul is describing his present (Christian) experience. (CSB)

unspiritual. Even a believer has the seeds of rebellion in his heart. (CSB)

Part of the fallen world. (TLSB)

sold as a slave to sin.† A phrase so strong that many refuse to accept it as descriptive of a Christian. However, it may graphically point out the failure even of Christians to meet the radical ethical and moral demands of God. It also points up the persistent nature of sin. (CSB)

7:15-20 As a Christian, Paul struggles with his sinful nature. He has sinful desires but knows they are wrong. He tries to avoid sin but inevitably fails. Even as a Christian, he cannot overcome sin by his efforts. Luther: “Both expressions are true, that he himself does it and he himself does not do it. He is like a horseman. When his horses do not trot the way he wants them to, it is he

himself and yet not he himself who makes the horse run in such and such a way. For the horse is not without him, and he is not without the horse. But because a carnal man certainly consents to the law of his members, he certainly himself does what sin does” (AE 25:331; see SA III III 40). (TLSB)

7:15 *I do not understand.* The struggle within creates tension, ambivalence and confusion. (CSB)

I do – katerazomai – In Romans 7:15-21 Paul uses three different Greek words for “do,” “produce behavior,” “effect a work.” Katerazomai (“produce [in deeds]”) focuses more on the effecting of a result, and “practice” has about it the idea of steady and habitual practice while poineo is a more colorless “do.” They are synonyms, and their distinguishing nuances may be of only minor importance in this passage.

7:16 *I agree that the law is good.* Even when Paul is rebellious and disobedient, the Holy Spirit reveals to him the essential goodness of the law. (CSB)

7:17 *no longer I myself who do it.* Not an attempt to escape moral responsibility but a statement of the great control sin can have over a Christian’s life. (CSB)

7:18 *nothing good dwells in me.*† A reference to man’s fallen nature, as the last phrase of the sentence indicates. Paul is not saying that no goodness at all exists in Christians, only not in their sinful nature. (CSB)

7:21 *law.*† Here means “principle” (see 3:27). (CSB)

A regular occurrence: Whenever Paul attempts good, he still sins. (TLSB)

7:22 *I delight in the law of God.* The Mosaic Law or God’s Law generally. It is difficult to see how a non-Christian could say this. (CSB)

Although our fallen nature rebels, the new nature rejoices in God’s truth. (TLSB)

inner being – God’s redeemed and forgiven child. (TLSB)

7:23 *law of my mind.* The inner being (v 22) that delights in God’s Word. (TLSB)

another law.† A principle or force at work in Paul preventing him from giving obedience to God’s law (see 3:27; 7:21). (CSB)

law of my mind. His desire to obey God’s law. (CSB)

law of sin. Essentially the same as “another law,” mentioned above. (CSB)

The power or control of sin over us. (TLSB)

7:24 *wretched man* – talaiporos – “Miserable, wretched, distressed,” this emphatic by word order. (QV)

Paul detests his continued sinfulness. (TLSB)

who will deliver me from this body of death – This enslaving sin merits death. (TLSB)

body of death. Figurative for the body of sin (6:6) that hung on him like a corpse and from which he could not gain freedom. (CSB)

7:25 The first half of this verse is the answer to the question stated in v. 24—deliverance comes, not through legalistic effort, but through Christ. The last half is a summary of vv. 13–24. (CSB)

I myself. The real self—the inner being that delights in God’s law (v. 22). (CSB)

with my mind – We are fallen sinners who are bound to sin, yet as God’s new creation we want to serve and obey Him. Paul neither ignores his sinfulness nor gives up. He relies on Christ alone. Luther says: “The old man is infected with all vices and has by nature nothing good in him (Romans 7:18). Now when we have come into Christ’s kingdom (John 3:5), these things must daily decrease. The longer we live the more we become gentle, patient, meek and ever turn away from unbelief, greed, hatred, envy, and arrogance. (TLSB)

7:7–25 Our struggle with sin is not a past event; it is a present reality. We know God’s will and desire to serve Him, but we cannot overcome sin. Even if we try, we fail. We cry out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” There is only one answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Jesus rescues us. Though we sin daily, He continues to forgive and restore us. • Lord Jesus, I love You. Lead me in daily repentance. Forgive my sin and strengthen my faith. By Your Spirit, deliver me. Amen. (TLSB)