

WALKING THROUGH ROMANS – PART 12

ROMANS CHAPTER 7:1–13 – FREEDOM AND THE LAW: RELEASED YET REVEALED

The driving question remains: Has God remained faithful in a fractured world?

Paul wrote Romans to believers living in a fractured world. They faced social, political, religious, and spiritual pressures that could have caused them to question God's faithfulness. That same question remains relevant for believers today. We also live in a world marked by conflict, confusion, suffering, and brokenness. Romans reminds us that the condition of the world does not cancel the faithfulness of God.

In the previous lesson, Paul explained that believers have been freed from sin and are now called to live lives shaped by righteousness. Sin is no longer supposed to govern their decisions, direct their behavior, or define their identity. Through Christ, they have entered a new life and are called to live under a new authority.

As Paul continues his argument, another question emerges: What place does the law have in the life of a believer?

Throughout Romans, Paul has repeatedly referred to the law—its purpose, its relationship to sin, and its place within God's larger plan. In Romans 7, Paul slows down and gives the subject his focused attention. His purpose is not to disrespect or dismiss the law. He wants believers to understand what the law could accomplish, what it could not accomplish, and how their relationship to it has changed through Christ.

BUCKET 1 – ROMANS 7:1–3

Paul begins with an illustration from everyday life involving relationships, obligations, and legal authority.

He explains that the law has authority over a person only while that person is living. He then uses marriage as an illustration. A married woman is legally bound to her husband while he lives. If he dies, that particular legal obligation ends, and she is free from that former relationship.

Before applying the illustration, it is important to understand what Paul means when he refers to the law.

The law was the collection of instructions God gave Israel through Moses to show them what a life aligned with God's will should look like. It served as their covenant blueprint for living. It gave them commands, standards, and instructions intended to guide their relationship with God and one another.

The Hebrew word Torah means instruction or teaching. The Greek word nomos means law, instruction, or standard. When Paul refers to the law in Romans, he is generally discussing the commands and instructions given through Moses to the people of Israel.

The law was not merely a list of religious rules. It represented a covenant relationship. It described the responsibilities and expectations connected to Israel's relationship with God.

Paul uses the marriage illustration because his audience would have understood legal and covenant obligations surrounding marriage. Such discussions were familiar within their culture and were reflected in passages such as Deuteronomy 24.

However, Paul's primary subject is not marriage, divorce, or remarriage. Marriage is the illustration, not the main argument.

Paul is not attempting to teach that every divorced person who remarries while a former spouse is living must automatically be identified as an adulterer in a modern setting. Reading the illustration that way removes it from Paul's larger argument.

His main concern is authority, obligation, and relationship.

Paul uses marriage to explain that death changes the legal relationship between two parties. The illustration prepares the reader to understand how the believer's relationship to the law has changed through the death of Christ.

This introduces the concept of covenant obligation.

A covenant obligation is a responsibility or expectation connected to a covenant relationship. When someone enters a covenant, that relationship carries commitments, responsibilities, and expectations.

Paul honors the law as part of Israel's former covenant relationship, but he also explains that believers have now entered a new relationship through Christ. Grace has come through the gospel—the good news that Jesus died for humanity's sins, was buried, was raised from the dead, ascended, and now reigns as Lord and Savior.

The believer's covenant relationship has shifted. The believer now belongs to Christ.

This leads to a practical truth: You cannot continue living by old obligations after you have entered a new relationship.

Spiritually, believers should not continue living as though they are still controlled by their former sinful nature. Christ has brought them into a new relationship, and that new relationship carries a new direction.

This truth also applies to ordinary relationships. People must be careful not to make present relationships pay for the pain created by past relationships. Past betrayal, rejection, disappointment, and trauma should not be continually transferred onto a spouse, friend, family member, church, pastor, or partner who did not create that pain.

Unaddressed wounds can keep people emotionally obligated to relationships that have already ended. Healing requires acknowledging the pain, addressing the damage, and refusing to continue bleeding on people who did not cause the wound.

Paul's illustration therefore introduces a major truth: a new relationship should produce a new set of obligations.

BUCKET 2 – ROMANS 7:4–6

Paul now applies the illustration directly to believers.

He explains that believers have died to the law through the body of Christ so that they may belong to another—to the One who was raised from the dead—and bear fruit for God.

The phrase “through the body of Christ” points to Christ's crucifixion. Through Christ's death, the believer's former relationship to the law has changed.

Notice what Paul does not say.

He does not say that the law died.

He says that believers have died to the law.

The law itself did not become evil, useless, or unholy. Rather, the believer's relationship to the law changed through Christ. The law is no longer the covenant authority under which the believer attempts to become right with God.

Believers now belong to Christ.

This new relationship has a purpose: believers are called to bear fruit for God. Their lives should begin producing attitudes, actions, decisions, and character that reflect their relationship with Christ.

Paul then explains that while people were living according to the flesh, sinful passions were at work within them and produced fruit that led to death.

At first glance, this statement may sound as though Paul is blaming the law for creating sinful desires. That is not his argument.

The law did not create sin.

The law exposed sin.

The sinful condition was already present within humanity. The law revealed God's standards and made humanity's failure to meet those standards more visible.

The problem was not the standard.

The problem was the sinful condition that resisted the standard.

The law showed people what alignment with God looked like. At the same time, it exposed how frequently their lives were out of alignment. Humanity's sinful nature continually rebelled against the very standards the law revealed.

Paul then contrasts two ways of serving.

One way is serving under the old written code.

The other is serving in the new life of the Spirit.

This is not merely a change in information. It is a change in relationship and power.

The law gave people information about God's will. It identified what was right and what was wrong. However, information alone could not transform the human heart.

Through Christ, believers now receive the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. They are no longer attempting to resist sin through human discipline alone. The Spirit works within them, strengthens them, convicts them, directs them, and empowers them to live according to God's will.

The law provided information.

The Spirit provides power for transformation.

This does not mean information is unimportant. Believers need to know God's truth. However, knowing what is right does not automatically produce the ability or willingness to do what is right.

Knowing better does not always mean doing better.

People can possess the correct information while continuing to repeat the wrong behavior. Genuine change requires more than knowledge. It requires transformation.

Transformation means being changed from one condition into another. It is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly—moving from crawling to flying. Spiritually, transformation means moving away from former patterns and increasingly becoming the person God intends.

The goal is not merely to collect information about God.

The goal is to allow God's truth and Spirit to transform how we live.

BUCKET 3 – ROMANS 7:7–8

Paul anticipates another question: If believers have been released from the law, does that mean the law itself is sinful?

His answer is immediate: "By no means."

Paul refuses to identify the law as sin. Instead, he explains that the law helped him recognize sin.

He uses coveting as an example. To covet means to possess an unhealthy desire, craving, or longing for something that belongs to someone else. The law's command, "You shall not covet," did not create the sinful desire. It identified and exposed it.

The law brought clarity to something that was already present.

Without the commandment, a person might desire what belongs to someone else without fully recognizing the spiritual condition behind that desire. The law identified the behavior and revealed that it was outside God's intended standard.

Paul also explains that sin seized the opportunity created by the commandment. Once the standard became clear, the sinful nature resisted it.

The command said, "Do not."

The sinful nature responded, "I want to."

This does not make the commandment evil. It demonstrates the rebellious nature of sin.

The theological study of sin is called hamartiology. The Greek word hamartia means sin or missing the mark. To sin is to step outside God's intended direction, purpose, or standard.

The law helped Paul recognize where he was missing the mark.

It exposed his condition.

That exposure was uncomfortable, but it was necessary.

This leads to an important principle: We cannot address what we refuse to acknowledge.

People often remain trapped in destructive cycles because they refuse to honestly name the problem. They avoid responsibility, reject correction, blame others, or pretend that nothing is wrong.

However, what remains unacknowledged usually remains unaddressed.

Accountability is essential for transformation. Before change can occur, there must be an honest recognition that something is out of alignment.

Exposure is often the first step toward transformation.

The purpose of exposure is not always embarrassment or condemnation. Sometimes exposure is God's way of bringing clarity to an area that needs healing, correction, or change.

The law exposed sin so humanity could recognize its need for help.

BUCKET 4 – ROMANS 7:9–13

Paul now explains what happens when the law encounters the sinful condition.

The commandment was intended to lead toward life. It revealed God's good and holy standard. Yet when sin encountered the commandment, the result was death.

Once Paul measured his condition against the commandment, he recognized how far he had fallen short. The law exposed the distance between God's standard and humanity's condition.

Paul repeatedly makes an important distinction.

The law is holy.

The commandment is holy.

The commandment is just.

The commandment is good.

The problem is not the law.

The problem is sin.

Paul refuses to blame the law for what sin accomplishes. The law revealed God's standard, while sin revealed humanity's condition.

Paul's background helps explain why he handles the law so carefully. He was Jewish and deeply formed by the Torah. Before embracing the Jesus movement, he had been committed to the law and its traditions. His encounter with Christ changed his theology and reshaped his understanding, but he did not suddenly begin describing the law as evil.

He honored the law while explaining its limitations.

This introduces the diagnostic function of the law.

A diagnosis identifies a condition. When a doctor diagnoses an illness, the diagnosis reveals what is wrong. However, the diagnosis itself does not cure the illness.

The diagnosis identifies the problem.

The cure addresses the problem.

In the same way, the law functioned like a diagnosis. It identified sin, revealed humanity's condition, and showed where people were out of alignment with God.

But the law could not cure the condition it exposed.

Christ is the cure.

The law identified humanity's need.

Christ responded to that need.

Jesus died to address sin.

Jesus was buried to address sin.

Jesus was raised from the dead to defeat the power of sin and death.

Jesus ascended and now reigns as Lord and Savior.

The gospel announces what Christ has done, and grace makes available what humanity could never earn.

A diagnosis can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary. People cannot seek healing until they recognize the condition that requires healing.

In the same way, spiritual growth requires the willingness to hear the truth about ourselves. God may expose attitudes, habits, wounds, relationships, or behaviors that are out of alignment with His will.

That exposure is not intended to destroy us.

It is intended to direct us toward healing.

We cannot be made well while continually denying the condition.

Romans 7 teaches that the law was never the enemy. The law revealed God's standards, exposed sin, and identified humanity's need. The problem was not the law. The problem was the sinful condition that the law revealed.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Paul explains that believers have entered a new relationship through Christ.

The law was holy, just, and good. It revealed God's standard and exposed humanity's sin. However, it could not provide the power necessary to cure the condition it diagnosed.

The law provided the diagnosis.

Christ provides the cure.

Believers are no longer called to serve only under the old written code. Through Christ, they now live in the new life of the Spirit.

This new relationship should produce fruit for God, freedom from old obligations, honest acknowledgment of sin, and transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The final question is not whether God's truth will expose something within us.

The question is how we will respond when it does.

Will we resist the diagnosis, or will we allow God to use the truth to lead us toward healing and transformation?