

Who Will Set Me Free

Romans 7:13-25

Introduction: Scripture states that not only can The Law of Moses NOT save you, but it actually provokes you to sin and then condemns you for that sin. These are stunning assertions so let me be sure that you realize that I am not making them up.

Romans 3:19-20 ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

Romans 7:5 ⁵while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

Romans 7:9-10 ⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

Romans is about the Gospel which declares that no human privilege or effort can take away sin. We inherited our sinful and corrupt nature from Adam and because of that we all commit sin. To make matters worse, mankind is rebellious toward God and although they want blessing and salvation they do not want God. Jesus pointed this out when he said to the Jews....”you refuse to come to me that you may HAVE Eternal life!”

BUT....surely the keeping The Law of God is an exception to this assertion. Of all the things that exist in the world...the Law of God must be the one thing by which men can be saved. After all, God gave the Law to men and it is His Holy Standard of Righteousness!

But Scripture again says NO! The Law cannot make a sinful person righteous any more than a law against stealing can make a thief an honest man. Any law is only able to condemn. This same principle applies to our State and Federal laws. No one knows how many federal laws there are and yet the prisons are still full and the culture is in decline. Why? Because law....no law....no law anywhere....can make men good. It can only reveal and punish their faults. If you are trying to be justified by the works of The Law you will remain a slave of sin and you will go to hell. Without The Law of God men are blissfully unaware of their deplorably lost condition, but....

Romans 7:9-11 ⁹ when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; ¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

But what about believers? Once we have trusted in Christ alone by Grace and through Faith alone...once that has happened God begins His perfecting or sanctifying work. Is

that done through the keeping of The Law? We know that the Law cannot save us but surely something as perfect as The Law of God should be able to perfect us and make us holy before God? Again...God says NO! The Law cannot do that because nothing external can change us. We need an inner righteousness that we simply do not have as human beings. We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, if we are to make any progress toward being like Jesus.

Scripture has been speaking of this transformation since Rom. 6:1. Explaining that it is brought about solely by union with Christ! Through the miracle of New Birth our spiritual bond with Adam was broken and a new one...to Christ... took its place. But the Law makes no one righteous...and that does not change after salvation. It still cannot make you Christlike. This too will be completely a grace work of God. If you try to do this yourself you will remain a slave to sin.

Romans 6:14 ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

And this brings us to the text this morning. In it Paul asks and then answer this question. How can something as good as The Law of God not be able to transform us into Christlike men and women?

Romans 7:13-25 ¹³ Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. ¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. ²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, ²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Here Paul describes what happens to any man...not just to himself, but any man who seeks to use the Law to do what it was never intended to do...make a person godly. All believers struggle with sin after salvation, but Scripture reveals that, although we are still fallen sinners, we have been delivered from slavery to sin. In Christ we do not have to succumb to sin. Chapter seven answers the question of The Law's role in all this. The Bible says that:

- Death cancels the authority of all law. [7:1-3]
- Believers are dead to The Law of God and joined to Christ [7:4]
- It is our Union with Christ that bears righteous fruit [7:4]
- It is not the Law that causes our death, but our sin! [7:13]

Starting in verse 7:14, Paul gives an account of a man seeking righteousness through the Law, the very thing The Bible says is impossible. He gives a first person account of His life as a Law keeper. He will give it in the present tense. There are examples in the Bible of what we call historical present tenses. English translators often put them in the past tense even though they are present tense in Greek. In this case translators have left it in the present.

Mark 1:12 ¹² Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness.

The word “impelled” is actually “impels” in the Greek. John’s gospel has a lot of these also. We can tell a story this way in English too. We could say for example: “I was struggling with telling the truth when I thought; “**I am** acting in a way **I do not want** to act. I am not telling the truth even when I know I should. **I do not even understand** why I lie.” This is a story in the past told with present tense verbs.

If Paul is giving an account of his present struggle in the Christian life [as many suppose] then this means he is regenerate and joined to Christ as he writes. That would make this every believer’s struggle today. If, on the other hand, he is telling of a past time when he knew the Law well, agrees that it is righteous and good, but was enslaved to sin anyway, then that means that he was unregenerate and not joined to Christ. That would make this every Law keeper’s story...the experience of self-righteous men. I think the text and the context will show that Paul was not speaking as a reborn man who was joined to Christ.

These verses illustrate why Law keeping is a fool’s errand. Although the Law is good and holy and just, men and woman are not. Sin rules everyone who is not joined to Christ through new birth. God reveals the outcome of human efforts to overcome our sinful fallen nature by the application of The Law of God.

Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be!
[13a]: Paul denies the possibility of the Law being the cause of his condemnation.

Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. [13]: The Law is doing its intended job when it condemns you. The Law was given to show sinful men [all of whom believe they are just fine by the way...] how sinful they are. The same Law prescribes the punishment for violation and therefore condemns us. Again, it is not the law against murder that causes the killer’s death. It is the fact that he broke it, defied it and rebelled against it. That is why a murderer is condemned. The law is good and righteous, but the criminal is not. Apart from Christ this is every person’s standing before God.

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh [14]: The closest match for the words “we know” is “everybody knows.” With the little “for” it means “because of what we have said...we all now know.” “Spiritual” means not of human origin. The Law has a spiritual origin! The Law is Scripture and The Bible says....

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

Sold into bondage to sin [14b]: Now this is the first statement in Paul’s account that shows he is speaking as he would have in his unsaved past. We humans are of the flesh; meaning we are physical beings born of physical parents and that is our nature and our legacy. We were born into the slave market of sin. It was from there Christ bought us and we should never forget it. Christ came for sinners! The great physician came for the sick. The shepherd came for the lost sheep. When Christ bought you...He bought a sinner and a slave to sin. But Paul says that he is still a slave to sin. If this is who Paul is when he wrote this he is contradicting everything he has been teaching up until now. This is not the born again Paul who is joined to Christ and free from bondage to sin. This is the Pharisee Paul who knew the Law inside and out and sought to keep it perfectly, but apart from Christ.

For what I am doing, I do not understand [15a]: Again he starts the verse with the little word “for” which tells us that he is continuing his reasoning and argument. So, this statement is intended to be a further explanation of what it means to be sold into bondage to sin. Have you ever heard someone say after some sin or violation of political correctness...”that just isn’t me to do something like that!” These are people who have a very strong code of what should or should not be done but they have violated it totally and are exposed. This is what Paul said happened to him and it happens to all men until they are delivered from sin by Grace. Until then they cannot give the only true explanation for their sin and weakness. Paul already understands why he sins....but speaking as an unbelieving and self-righteous man he does not!

.....I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. [15b]: He knows what The Holy Law of God says, but he is not practicing it. He wants to be righteous, but he is doing the very things that he condemns others for. Paul has pointed this out to others already in Romans. This confession is another indication of Paul’s condition before union with Christ by Grace through Faith. The self-righteous moralist is content to condemn everyone else. In this way they convince themselves that God sees their strong disapproval of sin and will give them credit for it. Paul will have none of it!....

Romans 2:21-23 ²¹ you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. [16]: As a self-righteous and unregenerate moralist, Paul agrees that

the Law is good. His point is that “he does not want to sin” just like the Law tells him. So his mind is agreeing with The Law, but his body is violating it.

So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [17]: Paul makes a point of logic here. “If I don’t want to do it, but do it anyway, it is not me that is doing it. This is the language and thought of a slave to someone else. This is a bold assertion but it has been made repeatedly already. Here sin is personified! How is it in him and so vicious and powerful? Where does it come from?

Romans 5:12 ¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned--

Our first birth brought us a life of slavery to sin. It is our inheritance from the first Man Adam. It has passed to all men and it dominates, controls and enslaves us. It does not matter what you know is right if you cannot do it. It does not matter to a prisoner that just across the fence is every pleasure and freedom if he is unable to escape and enjoy it.

This cannot be used as an excuse before God for your sin. You cannot say in the judgment...”It was not my fault that I sinned!” “It’s just not me to sin!” Now....follow me carefully here. There are two types of sinners. Those who don’t care anything for God and actually hate him and distance themselves from him in every way. We read about them in Chapter one. Then there are moral, religious and self-righteous sinners. They make an effort to draw near to God through religion and good works. Paul was in the latter group as are almost all of the practitioners of religion in the world. They believe that they can put enough righteous behavior on the scale to balance their sin and be justified before God.

Paul’s point throughout Romans has been this...THEY BOTH HAVE THE EXACT SAME STANDING BEFORE GOD! They are lost because of their sin nature. Lost because they have died to God with Adam and sin owned them at birth. They are slaves to sin. Morality, religion and self-righteousness will not, ever deliver any man. Paul is beginning to realize this as he struggles as an unregenerate law keeping Pharisee to find righteousness. He says in verse 18....

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. [18]: Still making this point. Men can know the Law and even want to keep it but the power to do so does not dwell within the human nature [in my flesh]. It is sin inherited from Adam and it holds men as slaves to its will. Religion and moralism are the basic principles of every religion in the world. God says they are useless to restrain sin. Paul warns and instructs the Colossians about it. The word elementary means the basic building blocks of this world which are moralism, religion and good works. They are the exact opposite of being joined to Christ.

Colossians 2:8 ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. [19]: This is the perfect description of slavery. Someone else is telling you to not do what you want to do and TO DO what you do not want to do.

But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [20]: And so the only possible conclusion...If I am forced to do something I think is wrong...is...I am a slave. Slaves are not the ones making the decisions in their lives! It is their slave masters that are doing that. Paul suddenly recognizes his master...It is sin! It is that union with Adam that all humans inherited at birth. This is the unregenerate Pharisee still speaking. Paul has already spoken of this very subject from his present regenerate prospective.

Romans 6:14 ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

What exactly is Grace? We throw that word around a lot in church, but when it comes to salvation what is it exactly? You might say “it is undeserved favor” and you would be correct, but I still ask...”what favor did God give us. Does Scripture tell us? Actually it does and it is very explicit.

Ephesians 2:4-7 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Saving Grace is when God in mercy and with great love makes these spiritually dead sinners alive to Him. He breaks Sin’s hold and joins them to Christ. This is what “raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places means.” That is Union with Christ and it shatters the hold of the slave master known as SIN.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. [21]: A principle is something that is established and set in stone. “A fundamental truth or proposition serving as a foundation. Sin is now described...it is evil and it is ever present with the unregenerate man who is trying to do good works and be good apart from being joined to Christ.

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man [22]: This is in the mind. People join the Jehovah Witnesses and other religions because they want to please God and go to heaven. They do this with mountains of good works and moralism. They, like all religions concur with the law of God in the inner man. I always ask them what their plan is for getting rid of their sin. Will they tell God in the judgment that they were religious and they liked His law even though they broke it regularly all their life? Is that your plan? Millions of evangelicals have the exact same plan.

But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. [23]: Paul describes the mind against the body. We sin with our body no matter what we might think in our minds. The “different law” is the same Greek word translated “principle” in verse 21. Paul has finally realized the war that goes on in the life of a religionist or a moralist. No one was stronger in their self-righteousness and religion than Paul and yet... evil won this war and made him a prisoner to sin. This DOES NOT describe the believer Paul has been speaking of in Chapter’s six and seven so far. Paul is giving an account of his unregenerate attempts to be justified by The Law of God.

Evil and sin are who men are and no amount of good works, morality or religion will ever, ever change that. With this realization, Paul tells us that he cried out to God....

Wretched man that I am! This is the cry of a lost man and not a believer. We are still struggling with sin but it’s hopeless hold on us through Adam is broken. We know the answer to this question. which Paul gives immediately

Who will set me free from the body of this death? [24]: “The body of death” refers directly to these member that have been enslaved and forced to sin.” He wants relief. He wants freedom. He wants hope that he might have some victory over sin and some power to actually do the good that he embraces with his mind.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! [25a]: Jesus is the answer to our slavery to sin.

So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. [25b]: Paul sums up the whole brawl this way... On my own, severed from God, my mind can decide to be good and to honor the good, just and righteous Law of God...but my body will still serve sin because sin has taken me prisoner to always do its will.

CONCLUSION: Now we have said repeatedly this morning that Paul was speaking as an unregenerate, religionist....a Pharisee who prided himself on his grasp of and loyalty to the law, but could not live up to or keep the law because of sin. That is clearly the context and his account illustrates all the truths he has been teaching in Romans six and seven. But there is a clear and vital application for you this morning. Let me start with a strong warning;

Even after union with Christ you will not and cannot keep the law of God perfectly. Chapters 6-8 are about living the Christian life. Paul takes a few verses to describe the absolute slavery to sin and the complete impossibility of the Law to deliver from it. This is his constant drumbeat throughout Romans and also in Galatians.

Galatians 2:21 - 3:1 ²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

But Christ did not die needlessly and neither did He live that way. He lived righteously and kept the entire Law of God perfectly down to the least detail and precept. Jesus

Himself said you have to keep it perfectly...better than Paul the Pharisee or you will NOT enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-20 ¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

You, me and all men are condemned by the law because we are born dead to God and as slaves to sin. The dead cannot resurrect themselves and slaves cannot free themselves. And nobody....even born again believers can keep the Law of God. Even if we delude ourselves into thinking that we can keep it perfectly going forward....you cannot change the past.

SO WHAT about you? Have you kept the whole Law of God perfectly your entire life? Then how are you ever going to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? This is the question of the ages...the one that the fate of your eternal soul hangs on. Here is the answer! It is the only answer. Peter put it this way when he preached in Jerusalem...

Acts 4:12 ¹² "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

The answer is that Jesus Christ kept the entire law perfectly. He alone among all the men who ever lived fully attained to the perfect righteousness of God. No sin ever! Then by Grace you were made alive to Him and by faith you have trusted Him. To trust Christ means to trust His Righteousness. You are joined to the Holy Son of the Living God by faith alone. Who Christ is you are. This is how a man becomes righteous before God.

What about your sin? Jesus again! He bore your sin as if it were His own. In His body! On the Cross! He died in your place and He did it willingly and knowingly. He knew you before He formed you. Your name was on His lips on the Cross.

He will and can transform you giving you a growing Christlikeness. The Law will not do this because it cannot even break the power of Sin for salvation. Only Christ can do this. Chapter six tells how we have been joined to Christ. Chapter seven reveals that The Law had nothing whatsoever to do with it and Chapter eight is going to trumpet the glories of our Union with our Lord. Scripture sums up what Christ has done and will do for you this way....

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.