

## LESSON 11: ROMANS 7—FREEDOM IN CHRIST AND OUR STRUGGLE WITH SIN

This Bible Study was written by Luann Budd (intended for small group discussion or personal reflection)

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**In Romans, Paul lays out the Good News of Christianity, the gospel. He says he is not ashamed of the gospel** “because it is the power of the God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a **righteousness** that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16,17)

**How are we saved?** By grace through faith.

**How do we become righteous?** By grace through faith.

**How should we live?** By grace through faith.

**Which raises the question: What role does the Law play in our sanctification?** In Romans 6, Paul says we grow in the Christian life by counting ourselves dead to sin and offering ourselves to God. When I offer myself to righteousness, am I saying that I will keep the Law? What is the Christian’s obligation to keep the Ten Commandments, the moral code of the Mosaic (Moses) Law? How should we think about the Law?

### Discussion/Reflection

For the Jewish Christian, what do you think was the difference they felt between living under the Law and living in the freedom of grace? How do you think it changed their thinking about their relationship with God?

In Romans 7, to explain the Christian’s relationship to the Law, Paul introduces **a new metaphor: a fruitful marriage**. The Christian, because of her death with Christ, is free from her marriage to the law and is brought into a new marriage with Christ. The new union of Christ and the believer gives birth to children, i.e. “bearing fruit for God.” Paul is now primarily addressing the Jewish converts in the church in Rome.

### Read twice Romans 7:1-6 Released From the Law, Bound to Christ<sup>1</sup>

**7** Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? <sup>2</sup>For example, by law, a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. <sup>3</sup>So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: Romans 7:1-6 Paul is talking about the Christian’s relationship to the Law and is using marriage as a metaphor to explain sanctification. Paul is not talking about marriage as his subject so he does not fully address marriage and divorce, adultery and exceptions, in this passage. It would be an error to draw principles about marriage and adultery from this text alone.

<sup>4</sup> So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For when we were in the realm of the flesh,<sup>[a]</sup> the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

## DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

**Describe the difference between living under the Law and living under grace. This is key to understanding the difference between Judaism and Christian spirituality.**

If you became a Christian as an adult, in your experience, has living under grace fundamentally changed your behavior, attitudes, and/or the activities you engaged in before you became a Christian?

What do you think it looks like to “live under grace”? As Christians, we do try to be good and keep the “rules” as we understand them. Why isn’t this being “legalistic”?

Has grace made a difference in your focus, your motivation, and/or how you view your relationship with God? In your personal experience, what would you say is the value of living under grace or having “freedom in Christ”?

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### THE LAW

**The Law (i.e. the Old Testament Law, the Law of Moses, the Covenant of God with Israel)<sup>2</sup>**

***The Law was given specifically to Israel.*** God gave the Law through Moses as a covenant with a particular people (Israel), for a particular time (until Jesus Christ), for a particular purpose. That purpose was to constitute and govern the nation in its civil, religious, and moral responsibilities until the Messiah, Jesus, came to redeem mankind and establish His kingdom (Gal. 3:19-25).

It was also intended to expose the sinfulness of man and the futility of establishing their own righteousness before God (Rom. 3:20).

***The Law was an indivisible unit.*** Though the Law contained moral, civil, and ceremonial regulations, it has always been considered an undividable unit (Gal. 5:3; James 2:10). It was given as a unit, sealed as one covenant, and Israel was held responsible to keep it as a unit.

***The Law was temporary.*** God's moral principles existed before the Law and continue after the period of Law. The Law encoded those principles for Israel for a specific time until the Messiah, Jesus, would fulfill it (Matt. 5:17-18).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gracelife.org/resources/gracenotes/?id=84&lang=eng>

## Jesus' Relationship to the Mosaic Law

**Jesus kept the Law.** Unlike sinful humans and disobedient Israel, Jesus was able to keep all the demands of the Law. He lived under the Mosaic Covenant observing its rules and rituals (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 4:4-5).

**Jesus fulfilled the Law.** Because Jesus kept the law perfectly, He was able to say that He fulfilled its demands on behalf of all people. He did not come to destroy it, but to terminate it and set it aside since He was the fulfillment of its purpose (Matt. 5:17-18). God's moral principles were in force for Israel throughout His life, which principles remained after His life, though not encoded in the Mosaic form. But Jesus is the end of the Law, because He fulfills its intended goal, especially for those who believe in Him (Rom. 10:4; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:13-14).

**Jesus rendered the Law obsolete.** Jesus inaugurated a **New Covenant** making the Old Covenant of the Law obsolete (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 8:13). No longer are priests and sacrifices necessary because Jesus became our final High Priest and our final eternal sacrifice (Heb. 7:20-28; 10:11-14).

### Discussion/Reflection

Why it would have been hard for a Jewish convert to understand her new relationship to the Law?

## The Christian's Relationship to the Old Testament (Mosaic) Law

1. **The Christian is not under the Law but under grace.** This is affirmed by many verses (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6; 10:4; Gal. 2:19). However, **the moral principles of the Law are timeless and ultimately repeated in the New Testament.** For example, it was wrong to murder before the Law, under the Law, and now also under grace. Though no longer under the Law, the apostle Paul voluntarily submitted to it on occasion in order to win those under the Law, the Jews (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:19-23).
2. **The Christian should respect the Law as holy and good. Since the Law was given by God and reflects His righteous and holy character, the Law itself was holy.** It was also good because it gave Israel moral guidance and restrained evildoers (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8). While not under the Law as a code, Christians today can **learn from the timeless principles taught by the Law.** The Christian can apply the principles of the Law. For example, the Law demanded that Israelites give a certain percentage of their produce and flocks to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-32; Deut. 14:22-24; 26:12-13). But giving a percentage to the Lord was evidently practiced before the Law (Gen. 4:3-4; 14:18-20). The principle of giving is repeated in the New Testament with **the difference that giving is no longer under the compulsion of Law, but is voluntary under grace and motivated by gratitude for God's blessings (2 Cor. 9:7-15).** The principle remains, but the application varies.
3. **The Christian is under the Law of Christ.** Jesus left Christians with His "new commandment" to **love one another (John 13:34).** When Christians love one another, they fulfill the intended requirements of the Mosaic Law (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:13-14). In Galatians 6:2, the apostle Paul makes it clear that "the law of Christ" is the principle of **caringly loving one another** (cf. 1 Cor. 9:21; also the "royal law" of James 2:8). **The Law of Christ begins with love, but also includes all that love encompasses.** Those led by the Spirit under the Law of Christ are not under the Law of Moses (Rom. 8:2-4; Gal. 5:18). In the Church Age, grace does not evade the Law but replaces and exceeds it.

This chart shows the difference between the Law of Moses and the grace of Jesus Christ

LAW	GRACE	SCRIPTURE
God's rule for the nation of Israel	God's rule for the church	Rom. 2:14; 6:14; 7:6; 9:4
Came by Moses	Came by Jesus Christ	John 1:17; 2 Cor. 3:7-14
Written in stone	Written on the heart	Rom. 2:28; 2 Cor. 3:3
Exposes sin	Expiates sin	Rom. 3:20-26; 5:13; 6:23; 7:7; Eph. 1:7
Curses	Blesses	Gal. 3:10, 14, 22; 4:1-7
Brings death and condemnation	Brings life and righteousness	Rom. 3:19; 5:18; 7:10; 2 Cor. 3:6
Cannot justify before God	Justifies before God	Rom. 3:20-24; 10:3-4; Gal. 2:16-21
Demands holiness	Gives holiness	Rom. 7:12; 8:3-4; Titus 2:11-12
What man must do for God	What Christ has done for men	Rom. 5:17-21; 10:5; Heb. 10:1-14
Cannot bring spiritual maturity	Brings spiritual maturity	Rom. 7:22-8:4; Gal. 3:2-3; Heb. 10:14
Leads to faith	Lives by faith	Gal. 2:19-20; 3:12, 24; Phil. 3:9
Gives what is deserved	Gives what is not deserved	Rom. 2:5-16; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9
Enslaves to sin	Frees from sin	Rom. 8:2-3, 15; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:1-7

Judges according to one's works	Judges according to Christ's work	Rom. 2:5-16; Col. 2:13-14; Heb. 10:10
Do good in order to be blessed	Do good because you are blessed	Rom. 10:5; 12:1-3; Gal. 3:12-14

## The Christian Rule and Motivation

God's commandments in any form communicate His moral principles. However, through the various periods of time, God has encoded his morality in different forms. For Israel, God's principles of morality were coded through the Mosaic Covenant. For Christians, they are expressed in the Law of Christ. We are always expected to follow God's moral principles and commands, but only under the code specified for His people at any particular time. **In the Church Age, the Christian is under Christ's new commandment of love motivated to obedience by God's love and grace, which far exceeds the more external emphasis in the demands of the Mosaic Law for Israel. Rather than being motivated by the Law's rules and consequences, the Christian is motivated by grace and the resultant relationship it brings with God.**

**The Christian has a higher motivation under grace.** Simply put, **under the Law, people were blessed because they obeyed; under grace, people obey because they are blessed.** This is a higher intrinsic motivation that far exceeds the morality sought by the Law because it realizes the love of God who gave His Son to save us when we did not deserve it. Therefore, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). **Love motivates our obedience** to His New Testament commands (John 14:21).

### Discussion/Reflection

#### 1. Discuss: What's the problem with the law?

The standard is too low. Can you think of an example?

Example: Nancy loves her father and wanted to do something special for him so on Father's Day she invited him over for dinner and together with the whole family. They spend the afternoon celebrating him and expressing how he had made a difference in their lives. But during the week following, in conversation with her mother, she learned that her step-father was offended that she had not sent him a card for Father's Day even though she had intentionally celebrated with him and tried to express her love. Nancy couldn't believe it. She told me next year she will send him a card (keeping the "rule of his law" — Thou shalt send your step-father a card on Father's Day). We talked about how easy it is to send a card and how you can sign your name without your heart being in it. She could keep his rule without loving him at all. God is not like Nancy's step-father. God wants our love, not just our conformity to a rule.

#### 2. Should a Christian live under grace AND also strive to keep some parts of the Old Testament law?

Some Jewish Christians thought circumcising male babies and converts to show that they were dedicated to God made sense—what could be wrong with doing that? Paul discusses this in his

letter to the believers in Galatia. Some people had come into the church who were saying that Christians needed to be circumcised in accordance with the law. **Paul said, Absolutely Not!** He said that we have a choice to make. Either we are going to live under the law or live under grace. The two are mutually exclusive. Why do you think this was so important to Paul?

**Galatians 5:** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

3. Can you find 5 ways from Gal. 5:1-6 that trying to keep the law negates the spiritual impact of Christ's gift of grace?

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.
- v.

**Galatians 5:** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be **burdened again by a yoke of slavery**. <sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, **Christ will be of no value to you at all**. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is **obligated to obey the whole law**. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by the law have been **alienated from Christ**; you have **fallen away from grace**. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

4. Discuss the meaning of Romans 6:17: **"obey from the heart"** the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance." How is obedience from the heart different from keeping the law?
5. What is this 'freedom' that Paul is referring to in Gal. 5:1? Discuss why you think 'freedom' is so important to our new life in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

How are we supposed to live our Christian life? By grace. Why?

**Grace frees us to love God and other people well.**

**Grace enables us to live for God from a heart of love.**

**Grace enables us to let ourselves be authentically known and loved by God.**

It is only as we integrate the truth of God's love and grace that we are able to reject the enticement of sin and live alive to Jesus. We are drawn into sin and legalism when we think that the satisfaction we seek will be met by being selfish or putting ourselves first or doing what we think will make us feel in control, powerful or happy. We cannot simply sign and mail a card to God, our heart must be in it.

The hole in our heart can only be filled by God's love...every other "thing" that we try to fill it with (with wild living or the self-satisfaction we feel with meticulous adherence to a moral code) won't satisfy us. If we are to grow in our new life in Christ, it must be by grace, receiving God's love and acceptance, responding to God's love with gratitude and devotion and love, loving him and others because his love flows through us. Love is the true motivation for living a holy life. Love is our Rule. We make progress in our Christian life when we focus on LOVE.

**How should we live?** Each day, we should count ourselves dead to sin and instead offer ourselves to righteousness because we have received God's gift of grace AND WE LOVE HIM. "We love him because he first loved us." We desire to obey from our heart the teaching that has won our allegiance. **We are compelled by the love of God to live a life that is honoring to God, which is a life of love. We must embrace our freedom in order to truly love.**

## REFLECTION ON OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Thinking about the role of "freedom" in our process of becoming like Christ...it seems that knowing that we are free...totally and completely...absolutely...100% free is such a hard concept for us. We think that surely there must be something that we must do to please God. And although we don't fall into "keeping the Law" like recent converts from Judaism would in Paul's day, we do fall into the rules we've established for what it means to be a godly woman in our day. Truly, I think God wants us to be free to simply follow our hearts into what draws us close to him in love with joy.

God created us to find joy in those things that are joyful to us...whether it's reading, or jogging, or walking at the park, or painting, or going on a drive in the mountains. God has created us to enjoy his gifts...and he has given us the gift of being able to receive his gifts. What I learned over the last 18 months is that my experience of joy and beauty and goodness is all an experience of God's love. He gives himself to us in those activities in which we find joy. So when we follow our heart into devotion, we are following our heart into an immediate experience of God who is giving himself to us in that moment. It's just such a beautiful relationship. There's no need for discipline, or guilt about not doing enough, or shame that we aren't worthy. Instead, there is just pure freedom to love him as we actually can, as we actually do. Enjoying him, loving him, is Holy Spirit led and it is Holy Spirit enabled. It's all a gift he gives us. We simply respond to his grace, grateful that we are loved, which leads us to love him from our heart.

Often we try to draw near to God in ways that have stopped working for us, and we don't know what to do about the fact that our hearts feel disconnected as we are doing the very activities that are supposed to be helping us to connect with God. We keep doing our usual practices even though we are basically just going through the motions. I received an email from a friend expressing her frustration in being at a loss for how to get her devotional time to become a meaningful expression of worship once again. I responded:

When I read your email I think I hear behind the words a sigh...and you describe it as "struggling with wanting to distract myself with lesser things" and I wonder if what you are considering "lesser things" are in fact those things that are bringing you joy in the place where you are finding yourself. What if you "baptize them," make that activity sacred by making it a time of enjoying God's gift to you and of loving you in your place of vulnerability and low energy. What if you can receive God as actually giving you the gift of himself in those moments.

For instance, when I was having a hard time being able to do anything "spiritual," I found I was drawn to looking at portraits of my kids when they were little. I found that I loved looking into their eyes and seeing their innocence and I lifted them without words to the Lord. That was the best I could do. At another time, I found that my heart was drawn to water coloring. And in the time I spent painting, I found a lot of joy. And when I talked about these experiences with my spiritual director, she called them "my prayer." And I had to spend some time thinking about whether I would ever call them "my prayer." And that reflection, along with some other theology I was reading, totally convinced me that they were my prayer. My study of Romans 4-7 and Gal 5 has just underscored it. We are free to love God however we can. And sometimes that looks like Bible Study and Prayer Lists and sometimes it looks like enjoying a bouquet of fresh flowers. ["Everything is holy now."](#) And receiving it all as God's gift of himself to me personally is actually receiving God Himself. It is the way that he created me to receive him: close, intimate, satisfying. I am entering into a "taste of the joy divine" that believers will enjoy in the fullest way in heaven. For Christians, living under grace, living in the freedom of Christ rather than the old covenant, baptizes everything that is good and beautiful, and true.

ALL this to say, I'd love to encourage you to release the weight of expectation upon yourself and be free. Know that God delights in you. He thoroughly delights in you just as you are. He loves you just as much when you are doing "lesser things" as when you are doing "greater things." His love never changes and it is not conditioned on your performance. If I'm reading Romans 1-8 correctly, it's in the freedom of grace that we find our place of blessing. Trusting him in this time of feeling fatigued, as you are doing, is such a beautiful thing.

### Discussion/Reflection

Have you gone through periods when you felt disconnected from God even though you were engaging in the usual activities that had brought you close to him? What was your experience? Have you found your way back to being able to enjoy him?

What do you think about the differences between living under law and living in freedom under grace?



Where do you feel the pull to “keep the rules” of the Christian life (What are those rules)? How might those same activities become legalistic (if you think that God accepts you because you are doing those activities and would reject you if you stopped) or grace-filled (if you are motivated to do those things because you love Jesus) depending on your mindset?

What questions do you have after reading this lesson?

If you are interested in reading more about the ways I found to draw near to God when I began to feel disconnected and my usual activities ceased to be life-giving, read my book, [All Creation Sings](#).