

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 7:1–13

Sermon: “Freedom”

Paul, the author of our epistle from Romans, was once called Saul of Tarsus, the young man at whose feet were laid the clothes of those who stoned Stephen. Thus, Saul gave approval to his being stoned to death for the crime of preaching Christ (Acts 7:58). Once the Pharisee of Pharisees, the blasphemer and the persecutor of the Church (Philippians 3:5–6), Saul’s story changed when he came face-to-face with the grace of God, the crucified and resurrected Christ.

At the revelation of this grace, Paul could no longer value the works of the flesh he had previously held in high esteem. He now reckoned them as garbage in comparison to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

For the grace of God had revealed to him a much more precious and perfect way of being made righteous before God, a way that does not depend upon man's works or our obedience but on the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God (Phil 3:7–11). ***"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous"*** (Romans 5:19).

This was the kind of righteousness that Saul had sought with all his might but never attained, just as his fellow Jews were seeking but always stumbling, never attaining. ***"But that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law"*** (Romans 9:31). Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. Likewise, we never will succeed in keeping the Law. Thanks be to God, therefore, that Christ is our freedom from the Law.

Paul is confronted by legalists who opposed the Gospel and held works righteousness produced by the Law in high esteem, as Paul himself had previously done. As we read and study Romans we see that Paul does not despise the Law nor invalidate it; rather, he upholds it by expounding the importance of the Law both to the Jews and Gentiles. In matters of salvation, he reaffirms that the Law cannot save; it can only show us our need to be saved and by a redeemer separate from ourselves.

The Law makes us conscious of sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7), magnifies sin (Romans 7:13), condemns sin, and kills the sinner (Romans 6:23). Therefore, the righteous Law of God for the sinner becomes a Law of death! As long as we are still under the Law, the Law will continuously work in us by awakening desires that are contrary to its demands.

If the Law cannot impart life, then it was never given in the first place to save, and no one can be declared righteous by observing it.

For any deliverance from the Law to occur, a death must precede the proclamation. In our pericope, Paul uses the analogy of marriage: ***“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? 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. 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. 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" (vs 1–4).

By this one man's obedience, our relationship to the Law and to God, the author of the Law, has changed drastically and forever. By his obedience to the Father, Jesus has undone what the first Adam did in Eden and passed on as an inheritance to his offspring. Jesus Christ, who was without sin, did not deserve to die, for death has no authority over him. Yet he allowed himself to be subjected to our humanness, be identified with our sinfulness.

He placed himself under the Law that he wrote by his own finger, was condemned by its demands by the evil that is in human hearts, and died as a punishment as the Law demands! But he did all this taking the place of all sinners and, by so doing, set all free from the Law's demands and accusations forever (Colossians 2:13–15)!

Then, to demonstrate the power of this sacrificial death, God raised Jesus back to life on the third day, validating publicly all he had done. God the Father is pleased with the sacrifice of the Son. This death atoned for all the sin of the world, once and for all. In addition, the Law no longer condemns those who are in Christ, because in him the Law has been fulfilled! This is the Good News of our salvation, that by one man's obedience, we have been made right with God once and for all.

How can we be a partaker of such glorious news? ***“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children”*** (Acts 2:38–39). We partake of the saving work of Christ by repenting; that is, the Holy Spirit moving us away from sin to the cross of Christ.

When asked on his deathbed where his hope of salvation rested, Dr. Luther did not say, "Because I translated the entire Bible into German." He did not speak of anything he had done for God. Instead, Luther replied simply, **"I am baptized!"** Baptism is a Means of Grace through which God distributes the merits of the cross unto you individually. In Baptism, a death occurs that frees from the lordship of Law, sin, and death.

In Romans 6, Paul openly shows how, through your Baptism, we are joined to Christ's death—signifying that, we, too, through Baptism, die to sin once and for all and are raised up with Christ to newness of life. As Luther puts it, **"in Baptism sin is taken away by spiritual means, that is, the will to commit sin is put to death."**

Now, in chapter 7, he shows the logical sequence: once freed from sin, the Law can no longer accuse us, for it has no ground to do so. We have already died with Christ and been raised again to the newness of life, which is not after the first order (Adam) after the flesh, but an entirely new creation. This is life lived in and under the grace of God and led by the Spirit of God beneath the lordship of Jesus Christ, the new Adam. ***“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”*** (v 6).

Through Baptism, God delivers us from sin, death, and the devil and receives us into Christ’s kingdom (John 3:5). Baptism is not our work but a work of God, commanded by him with his promise attached to it (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16).

It includes all sinners, even infants, for they, too, are born in sin under the Law, subjected to death and off course beneath the wrath of God. Baptism of infants is pleasing to Christ, for it takes all the merit from man and ascribes it to Christ alone. Luther, while teaching on infant Baptism, had this to say: ***“When the word is added to the water, baptism is valid, even though faith is lacking. For my faith does not make baptism”*** (LC IV).

Our Baptism is bound to God’s Word and not to us. However, even in infants, the Word of God still creates and sustains Spirit-given faith, because God’s Word does what it says!

So, do we, as baptized believers, still need the Law? And for what purpose? Indeed, we still need the Law, but not as the means of acquiring salvation. For Christ is the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness to all who believe (Romans 10:4).

Yet the Law remains as a mirror that constantly reminds us of who we are apart from Christ. V 7: ***“If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.”*** The Law actually makes us appreciate grace even more as we see how much we are indebted to Christ: ***“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”*** (v 13).

Christ’s love seeks the unworthy, those who can offer no merit of their own but only and always need him in every aspect of their lives. For redeemed sinners are still entirely dependent on him. The old Adam still clings to us and daily needs to be washed away in repentance.

Our daily lives are nothing but living the rhythm of daily dying to sin and daily rising to newness of life in Christ. This is the baptismal life. Poor beggars who need to be clothed and fed daily by the Gospel.

That's why he gathers us on every Lord's Day. He gathers us around the Word and Sacraments. He himself comes bodily in our midst in accordance with his promise. He comes to unite heaven and earth and then gives unto us a foretaste of the glory to be celebrated soon in the heavenly kingdom.

Christ comes with the precious gifts he bestows on his beloved ones who have been joined to him through Baptism, and we feed on his body and blood orally at the altar and also spiritually by faith. This kind of feeding nourishes, strengthens, and bestows power and blessings without bounds upon us.

Under the slavery of the Law, we were not free to serve. But now, having been freed from the Law, we are free to serve joyfully. We are free because he loved us and freed us by his precious blood so that in him we may always have life, serving him as a kingdom of priests. Glory be to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore.

Amen