

# JUDGES & ROMANS: RUINED TO RIGHTEOUS

## Lesson 12: Righteousness of the Law

Key Verse: So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.~ Romans 7.12

The American Kennel Club (AKC) has the written “standard” and “conformation” of excellence in the body, gait, and breed purpose of purebred dogs. At dog shows, purebred dogs of the highest standard and conformation are judged and then ranked according to the judges’ uncompromising evaluation of conformation excellence. The ultimate reward for a dog (and their handler and owner) is winning “Best in Show” at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show. Likewise, **The Law** is God’s written standard of human moral, physical, and spiritual excellence. God’s standards of excellence, codified in His Law, reveal Him as **Holy**, or set apart as Divine and incomprehensibly perfect (7.12). Sin made it impossible for God to ever award any of us “Best in Show”! Yet through Jesus Christ our Lord we are delivered from “bear[ing] fruit for death.” (7.5) Now, even as we continue to sin, God’s Spirit in us frees us “to bear fruit for God.” (7.4) Truly, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (7.25)

*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where we want to serve God with all our hearts and minds but are pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. Now we are released from the law, no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin! Now we serve in the new way of the Spirit, free to live a new life in the freedom of God. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7.6, 25 ESV & The Message)*

**Romans 7.1-25** 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.

**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.

**Diamonds:** Paul didn’t write this letter using chapters and verses. These were added so that we may study and discuss them. The addition of these divisions literally puts us all on the same page! In consideration of that detail, in Romans 7, Paul continues to answer the question he raised in Roman 6.15: “So, since we are out from the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any way we want? Since we’re free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind?” (The

Message)

Paul answers this question using death's consequences on the binding legality of marriage. Previously, Paul had used slavery to illustrate the impossibility of simultaneously serving two masters (Romans 6.19-23). Paul again uses a mentally tangible illustration to drive home the impossibility of being simultaneously held "captive" by God's Law and "delivered" of it through Jesus Christ (7.4,6).

1. From Romans 7.1-6, how does the death of a spouse followed by remarriage illustrate Paul's legal argument that in Christ, we are free from the Law and its rotten "fruit"? (Please refrain from stretching Paul's illustration too far from his main idea. He isn't speaking into remarriage, widowhood, nor childbearing!)
  
2. It is possible that Paul enjoyed a good fruit stand! What contrasting fruit does Paul explore in Romans 6.16-7.5?

Paul provides us a hint about the regenerating source of our ability to live in God's freedom through Christ in 7.6: "the Spirit". In Romans 8, Paul takes us on a soaring journey about the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Before that, his hint about God's Spirit in Romans 7.6 makes an important distinction.

3. What does "the Spirit" allow for, or make possible, according to Romans 7.6? Why do you think this is important to understand? (*If you want*, read Romans 8 in several translations to go even further in developing your answer.)

Paul asked hard questions in Romans 3. Here in Romans 7, Paul reminds us that there is more danger in not asking questions about God and His Law than in confronting hard truths through good questions.

4. Join Paul in confronting hard truths through good questions! Using an additional Bible translation, "The Message", complete Paul's Q&A in Romans 7 by filling in the blanks:

Paul's Question (The Message)	Paul's Answer
V 7 "If the law code was as bad as all that [oppressive], it's no better than sin itself." (ESV, "What shall we say then? That the law is sin?")	V 7-12
V 13 "Does that mean I can't even trust what is good [that is the law]? Is good just as dangerous as evil?"	V 13

V 14 "I know God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?"	V 14-23
V 24 "Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?"	V 25

5. What did you learn about sin, the law, and/or your contradictory pull (V 25)? How does this strengthen or encourage you?

**Deity: Holy**<sup>1</sup>~ (Romans 7.12) God's holiness is His inherent and absolute greatness, in which He is perfectly distinct above everything outside Himself and is absolutely morally separate from sin.

This definition is centered on the concept of separation, signified by the Greek and Hebrew words for "holy" (Greek: *hosios*, *hagios*; Hebrew: *qadosh*). There are two aspects of God's holiness found in Scripture:

- Majestic Holiness: God is inherently great and resists all compromises of His character and therefore is transcendentally distinct from all His creatures in infinite majesty. He is majestically unique. This sense of God's holiness qualifies all His other attributes, and all these qualify His holiness. In other words, "Holiness is the biblical 'shorthand' for the very essence of God". His majestic holiness is found in both the Testaments:
  - Old Testament: Exodus 15.11; Psalm 71.22, 89.18, 97.10-12; Isaiah 5.16, 54.5, 57.15
  - New Testament: Mark 1.23-24; Luke 1.46-55; John 17; Revelation 15.4
- Ethical, Moral Holiness: Since God is inherently great and therefore transcendentally distinct from everything outside Himself, He is most certainly separate from sin, being morally and ethically perfect, abhorring sin and demanding purity in His moral creatures. (Leviticus 20.26, 22.31-32; Job 34.10; Psalm 5.4-5; Isaiah 1.11-17; Ezekiel 39.7; Zechariah 8.16-17; 1 Peter 1.13-19.)

God's holiness is not independent of His righteousness. To understand the magnitude of Christ's work on the cross, as well as the magnitude of God raising Him from the dead, we must know about His righteousness. God's righteousness is His perfect absolute justice in and toward Himself, His prevention of any violation of the justice of His character, and His revelation of Himself in acts of justice.

A holy and righteous God demands holiness and righteousness of people who would be rightly related to him (Psalm 29.1-2; 1 Peter 1.15-16). God stands in absolute, essential opposition to sin, so He must judge and punish sin. In the salvation of sinners, the holiness and righteousness of God are revealed, because in salvation God effectively judges sin and imputes righteousness to people so that He can accept them as holy without compromising His essential holiness and righteousness.

6. From our study of Romans 1-7, how do you think Paul would explain the difference Jesus has made in making God's people holy?

<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, J. & Mayhue, R., *Biblical Doctrine*, A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017) pp. 60-61, 183-185, 631

### Holy Living

One of the richest blessings of God's grace in salvation is that He attaches His name to His people. He graciously pursues the welfare of His people with the same zeal with which He upholds the honor of His reputation, because they bear His name. As children of God, we bear the "family name" of God, and His name is Holy! (1 Chronicles 29.16; Isaiah 57.15; Psalm 33.21; Isaiah 47.4) If He is our Holy Father, our lives ought to resemble His holiness (Leviticus 11.44-45).

Christians have been saved to be holy and to live holy lives (1 Peter 1.14-16). The phrase "to be holy" appears about 2,000 times in Scripture and means "to be set aside for something special". Thus, God is holy in that He sets Himself apart from creation, humanity, and all pagan gods by the fact of His deity and sinlessness. That is why the angels sing of God, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6.3; Revelation 4.8), and why scripture declares Him to be holy (Psalm 99.9; Isaiah 43.15).

The idea of holiness takes on a spiritual meaning among the people of God based on the holy character of God. For instance, the high priest of God had inscribed across his headpiece "Holy to the LORD" (Exodus 39.30). The high priest was especially set apart by God to intercede on behalf of a sinful nation to a holy God for the forgiveness of their transgressions (Exodus 28.38).

Holiness embodies the very essence of Christianity. The holy Savior has saved sinners to be a holy people (1 Peter 2.9-10). That is why one of the most common biblical names for a believer is "saint", which simply and wonderfully means "saved and set apart" (Romans 1.7; 1 Corinthians 1.2).

When one considers that a holy God saves, it is not surprising to learn that He gives His Holy Spirit to every believer at salvation. The primary purpose of this gift is to equip believers with the power to live a holy life (1 Thessalonians 4.7-8; 1 John 3.24, 4.13).

God wants Christians to share His holiness (Hebrews 12.10) and to present themselves as slaves to righteousness, which will result in holiness (Romans 6.19; 2 Corinthians 7.1). Holiness is the core of a Christian's experience (Hebrews 12.14). The authors of the New Testament epistles constantly reminded their readers, and us, that spiritual maturity springs out of holiness (Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 2.2-3; Hebrews 5.12-14).

Scottish theologian John Brown provides this definition of holiness from his *Expository Discourses on the First Epistle of Peter* (1866): "Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervours, or uncommanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills. God's mind and will are to be known from His word; and, so far as I really understand and believe God's word, God's mind becomes my mind, God's will becomes my will, and according to the measure of my faith, I become holy."

One of Paul's summarizing points in Romans 7 is that all sinners have a power problem. Because of sin, holiness is universally unattainable. This is not God's fault, nor is God's law at fault (Romans 7). Sin disempowers our will to obey God's law, even when we truly desire and work hard to develop the will to remain faithful and obedient to God's law. Thus, we have no ability, nothing within ourselves to empower holiness within us.

7. From our study of Judges 1-10.5, where have you observed God's people completely disempowered by their sin even in moments when they express desire to obey the God who is delivering them from their oppressors?

8. How do you see God's people in Judges responding in rebellion to the oppressive reality of God's Law (Romans 7.5, The Message)

**Doctrine: The Law~** (Romans 7.12) Worship is the theme of salvation history, the supreme purpose for which believers were redeemed (John 4.23), and the occupation to which all will be eternally enthralled (Revelation 19.1-6, 22.3-4).

The laws in Leviticus are the foundation upon which God's people worship God. Every time you read the word "offering", replace it with the word "worship". In other words, *every* offering is an act of worship, making these two unique words interchangeable!

9. In Romans 7.22, Paul shares the same sentiment about God's law as the Psalmist in Psalm 119. Psalm 119's focus is worship through the writer's love of God's "rules", "commandments", "precepts", and "statutes". Which verses in Psalms 119 help you understand Paul's likewise devotion and love for God's law in his "inner being"?

10. If you bumped into Paul at the local grocery store, which verses in Psalm 119 would you share with Paul, uniting you both in shared worship and love of God's commands (Romans 7.22)?

God's laws are "an expression of [God's] values."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Jesus came to fulfill His Father's laws (Matthew 5.17), and offers a deeper understanding of God's heart through His ministry while on earth. Jesus personally addressed, reinforced, and/or fulfilled God's law all while touching the untouchable (Matthew 8.1-4), curing the incurable (Mark 5.25-34), and experiencing overwhelming compassion as He looked upon His helpless people (Matthew 9.36).

### Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

#### **Lecture Outline:**

**Aim:** God designed His law to lead us from ruined to righteous.

- I. Deliverance from the Law (Romans 7.1-6) **T1:** God's law is designed to make us feel the weight of our sin and rejoice in our freedom in Christ.
  - a. How seriously do you take your sin? Do you name them specifically?
  - b. What effect does the weight of your sin have on your day-to-day life? Does it bog you down with guilt and shame? Or does it cause you to rejoice in your freedom in Christ?
- II. Delight in the Law (Romans 7.7-25) **T2:** God's law is designed to be our delight but victory over our sins requires the Holy Spirit's power.
  - a. What strategies do you use to battle against the sins that beset you?
  - b. How successful are you at gaining the victory over them?

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<sup>2</sup> Sklar, p. 57

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