

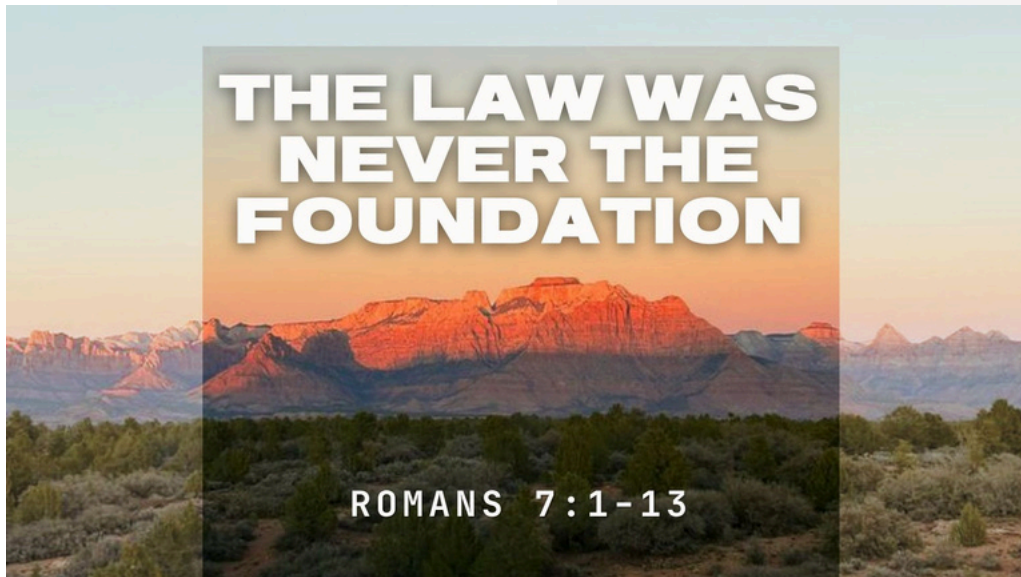
CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 13, 2026
ROMANS 7:1-13

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THE LAW WAS NEVER THE FOUNDATION



Here is the question Romans 7 asks: if we belong to Christ, does the Law still have rule over us? Paul's answer is NO! Through our union with Jesus we have died to sin's mastery and to the Law's mastery, so that we now belong to Christ and serve God in the new way of the Spirit. And Paul does not just add that answer on at the end. He builds it, layer by layer, on one foundation: Jesus Christ.

When I started building my chicken coop, I wasn't thinking about a foundation. We had been using a little chicken house on wheels – you move it footprint by footprint around the yard so the chickens can scratch for grass and bugs. I'm stubborn, so I moved it a good long while. But it got old. The chickens tore holes in the yard, the little house was poorly designed, the eggs usually had chicken poop on them, and watering the birds was a pain.

So, I let the chickens out in the yard during the day, and they came back to the pen to roost at night. They were happy, and endlessly entertaining. I loved those chickens – I even named them after players on my favorite team, Chelsea.



Then our yard wasn't enough, and they started wandering the neighborhood. When it was time to come in, I would call and they would come running for their favorite treats – nightcrawlers and mealworms.

One neighbor many doors down decided chicken poop on his driveway and car was more neighborly than he cared to be – and that's when a police officer reminded me that township ordinances do matter! Party pooper!!

So, I had to build a permanent coop. Then they needed somewhere to roost and lay, so I built a little house inside it with clean laying boxes. Then the ground turned to mud, so I put a roof over the whole thing.

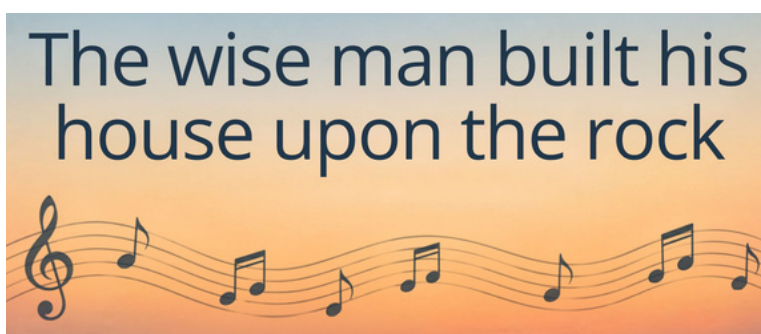


The problem: I never planned for a roof, so I never built a foundation to anchor it to. Think of an unanchored pop-up tent – vulnerable and wobbly.

We stopped keeping chickens a while ago, and now we are converting the coop into a gazebo. For that to be done right, what will it need? A foundation!



What did Jesus say about a strong foundation? In **Matthew 7:24-27**, the wise person hears Jesus' teaching and does it. That person is like a house built on solid rock. The storms still come, but the house stands, because it is built on bedrock.



Now, the apostle Paul is a far better builder than I am. He is not building a physical structure in Rome; in his letter to the Christ followers there, he is building an argument. And he lays his foundation from the start, back in **chapter 5** – not adding one after the fact, like me. Paul's foundation goes down layer by layer, and who does it rest on? Jesus Christ! Solid Rock.

What is Paul building and why does this matter to me?

He is showing divided Jews and Gentiles that they are one covenant family, one new humanity, built on Jesus Christ.

In **Romans 5**, Paul lays the first layer: we are made right with God by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, and we stand in his undeserved grace. The Christian life does not begin with our effort or our law-keeping. It begins with Jesus Christ, the solid ground God gives us.

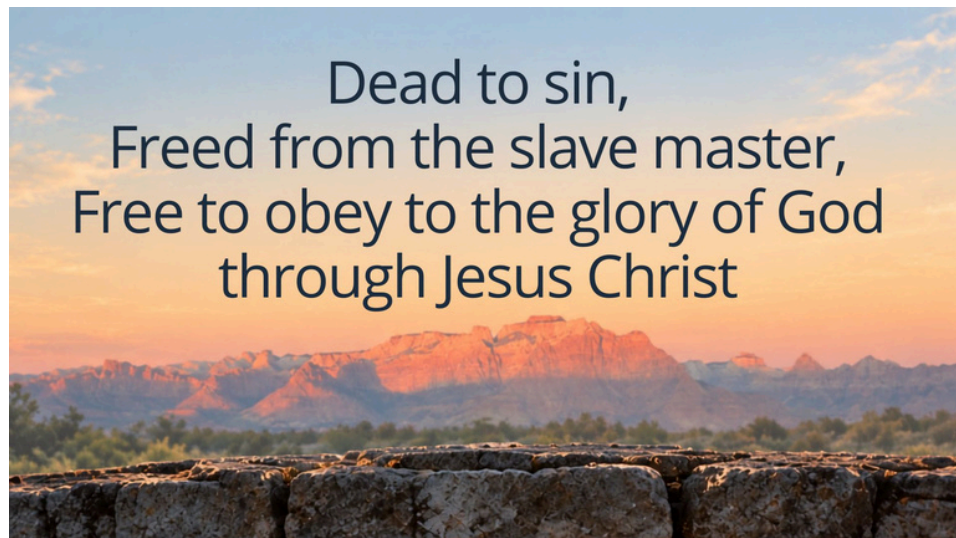
In **chapters 6, 7, and 8** Paul will take up sin, the Law, the believer's struggle, and life in the Spirit. But first he makes sure the whole structure rests on Jesus Christ.

That matters. Without grace underneath, everything above it wobbles. We either try to earn what Jesus already gave us – that's law-keeping – or we see how deep our sin runs and walk away. So Paul starts with bedrock: God's abundant grace through Jesus Christ.

In **Romans 6** Paul lays the next layer and he uses two metaphors. First, baptism: we are baptized into Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to new life for the glory of God. We died with Christ, so sin is no longer our master. Grace is not permission to keep sinning; grace gives us a new life to live for God.

Second, slavery: a slave set free from his master – and our master was sin. To free a slave, a payment must be made. Christ paid it on the cross. The wages of sin have been paid, we are no longer slaves to sin, and now we belong to him.

So, both metaphors together: dead to sin, freed from the slave master, free to obey to the glory of God – through Jesus Christ. And again, it all rests on the foundation of Jesus Christ.



So **Romans 6** answers the question about sin: sin no longer has dominion over us, and we are no longer obligated to obey it. But that raises the next question: what about the Law? If we died with Christ and were raised to new life for God, does the Law still rule over us? Paul answers that question in **chapter 7**, and this layer of the argument also rests on Jesus Christ. Let's look at it.

Romans 7:1. Think about laws of the land that govern most everything in life. Paying taxes, speed limits, building permits, criminal activity, etc... the reality is that the law is for the living.

Would a police officer go to a graveyard, try to arrest a corpse, read it its rights? “You have the right to remain silent...”. Of course not. If a person is dead, the law no longer applies. The law governs the living.

The illustration Paul uses to explain this is a married woman. **Verse 3-4**. Sometimes this illustration is mistakenly used as a theology of divorce and remarriage. It is not, and that misreading clutters Paul’s argument – so let’s deal with it first.

To make **verse 2 & 3** into a theology of divorce and remarriage misses two things. First, Paul says “married woman” and “husband,” not “divorcee” or “ex.” And second, it uses Paul’s illustration to answer a question he never intended it to answer.

So push divorce-and-remarriage theology aside and read the illustration as Paul intended it – to show that “...the law applies only while a person is living.”

So let’s look at it again. **Verse 2-3**

Note the alive-dies-free sequence in the highlighted words. If the husband is alive and the wife gives herself to another man, the law applies – there is a consequence.

But if the husband is dead, the law no longer applies to the wife; she is free to give herself, in marriage, to another man.

Here is why this illustration matters. In **verse 4** Paul is addressing his spiritual family – both Jews and Gentiles.

This ties back to **Romans 6:4** and nearly repeats it. And although it does not yet explain why the law applies only to the living, it does tell us the outcome: all believers will produce a “harvest of good deeds for God.”

Picture two farm fields side by side, endless, running all the way to the horizon like the huge farms in the Midwest. The field on the left is growing a harvest of sinful deeds resulting in death. Sinful deeds – bad fruit – like what Paul describes in **Galatians 5:19-21**: envy, quarreling, jealousy, divisions, hostility, idolatry, lustful pleasures... you get the point.



The field on the right is very different – it is supernatural. It is growing a harvest of good deeds – good fruit – for God. **Galatians 5:22-23** describes those fruit as: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...

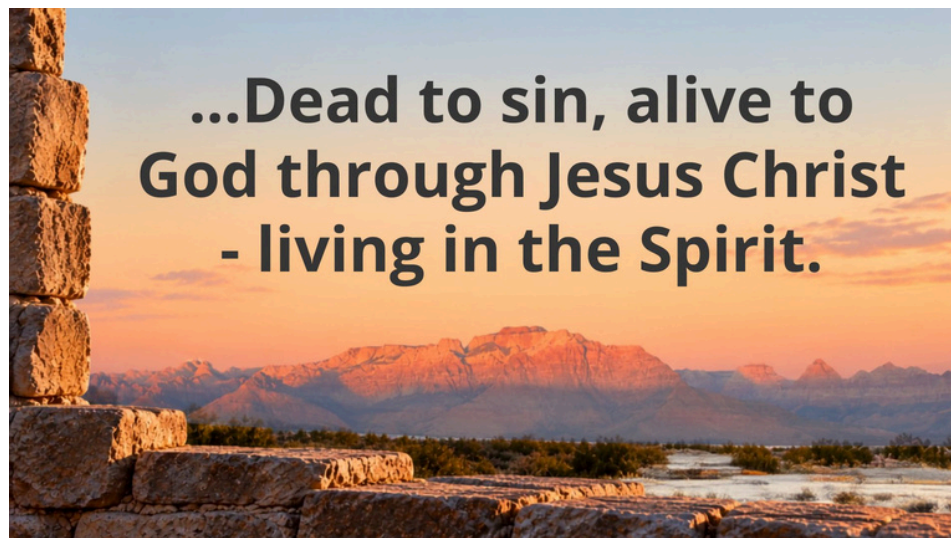
Two fields, side by side, both producing an abundant harvest. Here is the question that connects us to that scene: what determines which field you are in? More specifically, what determines the fruit your life produces?

Paul tells us in **Romans 7:5-6a**. So those in the field on the right, bearing good fruit for God, are the ones who have been set free from the law. How? Through death! Their union with Christ, baptized with Christ in his death, sets them free from the law.

Why? Because the rule, back in **verse 1**, says “the law applies only while a person is living.”

verse 6b says “Now we can serve God, not in the ...”

The new way of living in the Spirit... So Paul adds to the equation of chapter **Romans 6:11** “... dead to sin, alive to God through Jesus Christ...”, and Paul adds **Romans 7:6** “living in the Spirit.” That sounds beautiful, serene, exciting!



And it would seem that Paul would launch next into what life in the Spirit means, but alas, he doesn't. That's chapter eight. Paul says hold your horses, there is still more related to the law we have to deal with.

Hey, if you can't restrain yourself and you just have to read chapter eight, go ahead — it's awesome! Just wait till after the service.

Before we get to **chapter 8** and the amazing life in the Spirit, Paul has one more thing to settle about the law — its nature. If the only way to move from the field that produces a harvest of sin and death is to be set free from the law through death, then Paul addresses the question in **verse 7a** Is the Law of God sinful?

And he responds emphatically: “Of course not! It was the law that showed me my sin.”



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Note the relationship between Law and sin: Paul says plainly that the Law showed him his sin.

When I was younger, I was in a traveling singing group and our music instructor would make us sing a lot of a cappella to teach us to listen to notes better. He would give us the first note on the piano, our starting place, and then we would sing a bit, then he would play us another note to see how far we drifted off key. The piano showed us how far off we were from the correct note. How far we missed.

The Law showed Paul how far he had missed the mark. He says it in **verse 7**: "...the law showed me my sin."

To show how this was true in his own life, Paul reaches for the 10th commandment, **Exodus 20:17a**: "You must not covet..." Paul continues in **Romans 7:7b** "I would never have known..."
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But what happens when we are told not to do something? We ask questions in our head like, "Why not?" "What does it matter?" "Will there really be consequences?" And if so, "Who cares?" All of that self-talk erodes our obedience to the "don't do it" and we end up doing it.

My mom used to make homemade bread and when she was letting it rise, she would always say, "don't touch it". You know how tempting touching rising bread is? I still would have been a little tempted to touch before she said "don't" but once she said it, wow...

Here is another one. Have you ever walked by a bench or a wall with a sign that says, "Wet Paint—Do Not Touch"? Before you saw the sign, you probably were not thinking about touching it. You may not have even cared. But the moment the sign says, "Do not touch," something inside starts asking, "Is it really wet? How wet? What would happen if I just tapped it with one finger?"

And that scene is usually followed by someone saying – "You just had to touch it, didn't you?"

Now the sign did not create the wet paint, and the sign is not bad. The sign is good. It tells the truth, it serves as a warning, it sets the boundary. But something inside us reacts to the "do not."

Listen: the rule, the law – "do not" – exposes what was already in our hearts, a desire to cross the line, to transgress, simply because the line is there.

Paul says the commandment, "You must not covet," is good. But sin grabbed hold of that command and used it to stir up all kinds of coveting in him. The Law showed Paul the line not to cross, but the sin in his heart wanted him to step over it.

So the Law is like the wet-paint sign – it's a good sign, and it tells me where the line is. But sin is what makes me want to touch it.

Commentator David Guzik says: "Because of our fallen nature, the law can actually work like an invitation to sin."

Paul describes it this way in **verse 9-10a**. "The power of sin came to life and I died..." The Law gave sin its power, and sin came to life. Friends, this is resurrection language, except that it's applied to sin!!! Wait- what? So when sin came to life because of the Law, what happened to me? **verse 10** "And I died". Sobering words, but so powerful a picture.



Of course, Paul is talking about spiritual death. He goes on in the rest of **verse 10b-11**: "So I discovered..."

Verse 11 describes the heinous nature of sin – how evil it really is.

If you saw those words – "took advantage," "deceive me," "kill me" – describing a person, you would think predator, or serial killer, or both. Pure evil. It stirs up everything inside us: anger, fear, a demand for justice. And the truth is, those words describe sin. That is what sin does: sin takes advantage, sin deceives, sin kills. God described sin this way in **Genesis 4:7** "...Sin is crouching at the door eager to control you..."

So the law and sin are connected, but does that relationship between the law and sin make the law bad? No. This answers the question Paul asks **verse 7** "is the law sinful?"

Here is how Paul explains it **verse 12-13**. So what does sin do?



So here is why all this matters to you and I. If we died with Christ, then sin is no longer the master standing over us, and the Law is no longer the covenant holding us there.

The old life really ended. Like a marriage covenant that ends at death, our old relationship to the Law has ended so that we can belong to another. And this is not theology; this is freedom. You do not have to build your life on your ability to do better, try harder, or finally become good enough. You belong to the risen Jesus Christ, and he is not a shaky foundation. He is solid rock.

Paul then asks: if we had to die to the Law, is the Law the problem? No! The Law is good because it exposes sin. But sin uses the Law, even God's good commandments, to reveal just how rebellious the human heart really is. And before we keep that at a safe distance, we need to say it plainly: not just Paul's heart, not just the world's heart, but my heart and your heart. The Law shows us the truth we would rather not see.

So **chapter 7** is not Paul tearing down the Law, the Law has its place, but Paul shows us that law could never be the foundation we need. We need our foundation to be Jesus Christ. And that my friends is next week's passage, and you'll just have to come back next week.

Now, we are not quite done. **verse 6b** said, "Now we can serve God... living in the Spirit." And I said that reminds me of another kid's song 🎵 about the fruit of the Spirit that we might just have to sing.

BONUS

CONTENT:

What does verse nine “at one time I lived without understanding the law” mean?

Three scholarly answers:

1. Paul's boyhood, before accountability. On this older reading, Paul recalls the years before he was held responsible to the commandments — a Jewish boy before the age of accountability. He “lived” in the sense that the law had not yet pressed its claim on him; when it did, sin sprang to life and he died. Strength: it takes the “I” at face value as Paul's own story.

Weakness: Paul elsewhere argues that death reigns over everyone from Adam onward (**Romans 5:12-14**), and he shows no interest anywhere else in an age of accountability.

2. Paul the confident Pharisee. “Alive” describes how Paul felt while thriving under law-keeping — “as for righteousness under the law, blameless” (**Philippians 3:4-6**). “The commandment came” is the moment the tenth commandment's inward reach — coveting, which no one else can see — exposed what external obedience never touched, and his self-confidence collapsed. Strength: it explains why Paul reaches for the one commandment that indicts the heart rather than the hands (**verse 7**). Weakness: “and I died” is heavier language than disillusionment.

3. A representative “I” — Adam, and Israel. Many modern commentators (Dunn, Käsemann, Wright, and in varying forms Moo and Schreiner) hear Paul using the ancient rhetorical “I,” speaking in character to tell a story larger than his own. “Alive apart from the law” is Adam in the garden before the one prohibition, or Israel before Sinai; “the commandment came” is **Genesis 2:17** or **Exodus 20**; “sin deceived me” echoes Eve's words in **Genesis 3:13**; “and I died” is expulsion, exile, death entering the world. Strength: it accounts for the deception-and-death vocabulary and links **chapter 7** back to **Romans 5:12-21**. Weakness: **verses 7-11** sound intensely personal.

What all three hold in common: whatever “alive” means, it was not real life — it was life before the law exposed the truth. The commandment did not create the sin; it revealed it. That is the point Paul is making, and it stands regardless of which reading you take.