

ROMANS 7:1-25 (selected verses)**SERVE THE LORD FROM THE HEART, NOT FROM THE LETTER!
LAW AND GOSPEL**

This text will not be read aloud prior to the sermon, but in sections, as below, as the sermon proceeds.

⁶We have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. ⁷What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." ⁸But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. . . . ¹³so that sin, through the commandment, might become exceedingly sinful. . . . ¹⁸I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. . . . ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

What are the two main teachings of the Bible? Note, I'm not asking what are the six chief parts of Christian doctrine which Martin Luther put into his catechism. They are the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Keys & Christian Confession, and Sacrament of Holy Communion. I mean the two great doctrines/teachings into which even those six chief parts can be divided. Answer: The Law and The Gospel. The "Law" is the entirety of God's rules—summarized in the Ten Commandments. The "Gospel" is the "Good News" of forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation in Christ—of which John 3:16 is a good summary: *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life!* The Law and The Gospel have very different purposes. The Law does not open heaven for the sinner. It is not a ladder to get to heaven. It only makes demands that sinners cannot meet; and, as a result, it condemns. The Gospel, on the other hand, is the wondrous message that the door of heaven is already open! Jesus, God's eternal Son, has kept all the demands of the Law, for you as well as for every sinner, and already suffered the Law's condemnation! Through Jesus, the Father's arms, and heaven's doors, are open for you! The Law and the Gospel are very different. In this text Paul addresses how the two affect the sinner's heart. Our text begins:

⁶We have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by; so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

Jesus has saved you from the death-sentence of the Law. By faith in His life and death for you, you are granted His righteousness and given freedom from slavishly trying, and trying, and failing, to win the Father's approval on your own. Through Christ you have *died to the Law* that bear-hugs you to death. Therefore, the Law has no hold on you. You serve and obey God, not because you "must", as if to win His pardon. Rather, you serve Him willingly, because you "want to," for all that He has done for you. Therefore, Paul says *We should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*. The new spirit in your heart leads you to serve him gladly. No longer do you strive, and strive, to keep the letter of the law with hope against hope that you'll make it. Rather, you keep the law with a willing heart. You keep the law "in spirit." Be aware that our expression "to keep the law in spirit / to keep the spirit of the law" is not what this verse is describing. Our expression means (example): "He didn't exactly stop at the stop sign, but he kept the spirit of the law by driving through very slowly and carefully. He got through safely." In the Bible, keeping the law "in spirit" means to keep the Law willingly, from the heart. It's an action of the New Man of faith in the heart, not an action of the Old Adam who only serves because he "must." Well, then: Is that the Law really necessary? Is the Law a bad thing?

⁷What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

No Christian has the right to discard or disregard the rules and laws of God as if worthless and counterproductive to salvation—"After all, we have Christ." The Law shows us our sin! *I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."* Paul also writes, "*By the Law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20)*. Without the Law to show you that you are breaking God's rules, without the Law "breathing down your neck," you would have little use for Jesus and forgiveness, because you wouldn't think you need them! Bad deal. ----In addition, the Law does something else.

⁸ *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire, . . .* ¹³ [so that] *sin, through the commandment, might become exceedingly sinful. . . .*

The Law also shows you how deep sin's infection runs in your veins. Example: You entered the church this morning and found a sign at the inside doors saying, "Do not touch. Wet finish." How long would it have taken before you touch one of them? whether in curiosity or "rebellion"? *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. . . .* Tell a child, or anyone, not to do something, and sin in the heart quickly blossoms into an action: "I'll do it anyway, regardless what you say." "I'll find out for myself." *Sin, through the commandment, becomes exceedingly sinful.* The Law causes sin hiding within you to blossom forth and show itself. You are indeed a sinner! And the problem is not with the rules / the Laws of God. The problem is with you and your sinful heart!

¹⁸ *I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.* ¹⁹ *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*

Sin has deeply corrupted human nature. The conscience tells you what is right and wrong, and you know you should do right, but you do just the opposite! Sometimes you don't do things you should do—like helping someone pick up their fallen packages. Such a failure is called a sin of omission—"omitting," or "not doing," something that you should. At other times you do what you shouldn't do—knocking someone's packages out of their hand! Such is a sin of commission—"committing" a wrong, doing something that you shouldn't. Whether the sins are done in weakness, ignorance, spite, rebellion, etc., it doesn't matter. Sins of omission and sins of commission are wrong. Scripture says, "*The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).*" Big trouble! Is there an out?

²⁰ *Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. . . .* This sounds like you have an out, doesn't it? "I knew better; I didn't want to do it; it was sin living in me." Sorry. You are guilty even if you knew better and even if you didn't "wan" to do it. You are guilty in body and in mind—in body and in soul. Consider, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Your "spirit" or "heart" or "mind" are sinful and guilty, not just your "body" or "flesh." It's like carrying around an allergy in your system. You may not even know you have it. Then something triggers it, and you break out! Whose problem is it? Not the allergy's. It's your problem. You have the problem. ---- It is that same with sin. When you sin, you have the problem. The sin is your problem. There is no out.

²⁴ *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵ *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

O wretched man! Indeed! "I am beset by big troubles. There's not a snowball's chance in the fires of hell for me. How can I get free from condemnation by the Law? How can I get free from the dead-end road I am on? I am about to meet God's wrath? It's bad enough when some person is angry with me. What about God?!" *Who will deliver me from this body of death?* Sinners are "done for," sunk, "Out!" But . . . ²⁵ *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* In Jesus there is forgiveness and freedom! In Christ Jesus your Lord, you are safe and are saved. Sin cannot sink you, hell cannot scorch you! *Thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* This is the Gospel. It's a whole new outlook!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Jesus has fixed your sin problem. You have been redeemed—rescued at a price—a very high price, at the cross. His Holy Spirit has given you a new heart with new life for now and forever. Serve the Lord in the New Man, with the new heart, the new mind, which you have been given. Joyfully and willingly keep His commands. You will still be beset by the Old Adam—your sinful flesh—as long as you live. The Old Adam, led by Satan, leads you to serve sin and become a slave to the "letter of the Law" to save yourself. But with the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Gospel of Jesus, you are free. Fight on! even against those sins for which the devil thinks he "has you." You are no longer serving the letter of the Law. You, the forgiven sinner, serving the Gospel and Jesus—from the heart!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---