

**The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**  
**Episode 29**  
**Romans, Part 12 (Rom 7)**  
**August 22, 2023**

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**Episode Summary:**

This episode builds upon the previous one, which outlined the ways in which Paul retells the Exodus story in Romans 6 in light of his christological convictions. It was there where Paul contextualized Christian baptism as an "exodus." In this episode, Matt explores Romans 7, where Paul continues with that same line of thinking. Paul argues that only Christ can rescue people out of their spiritual Egypt. Torah-keeping, he says, can't rescue anyone. In fact, Torah actually intensifies the problem of sin and, hence, one's spiritual enslavement (in the metaphorical Egypt). Does this mean the Torah is flawed? The answer for Paul is a resounding "no." The Torah is holy, just, and good. So how does Paul conceptualize all this -- namely, the relationship between Torah, Christology, and human sinfulness? Listen to find out!

[Episodes | The Naked Bible Podcast](#) - episodes 411 – 422; *Paul's use of the Old Testament*

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**Transcript:**

0:00 Hey everybody! Welcome back to another episode of The Bible Unmuted! My name is Matt Halsted. And it is a privilege to be with you once again as we journey through Paul's letter to the churches at Rome, the house churches at Rome. This is the thing we call the Book of Romans. And it's been a lot of fun. I can't tell you just how enjoyable it is to go through this text with you. It brings me a lot of joy. And especially this past episode that we did on Romans 6, the one that we are doing today on Romans 7, and of course the next one on Romans 8. They all kind of go together. So I'm sure you have listened to the other episodes so far, but if you have not done so, if you haven't listened to Romans 6 – that is such a foundational one that you really need to listen to it in order to make sense of and appreciate and make observations about the things we'll be looking at today.

So just to recap where we've been... we talked about last time how in Romans 6, Paul's mentioning of baptism was an illusion back to the Old Testament story of the exodus. Just like Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea, coming out of their bondage, their slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, in that same way Paul is contextualizing the Christian life within that old Jewish paradigm within the exodus story. In doing so he is bringing a strong sense of continuity between the Jewish people and the people of Israel leaving Egypt at the exodus.

We talked about how N.T. Wright, especially, has given this idea some prominence in his writings and his commentary and in some of his articles. That in Romans 6, Paul is alluding to and talking about building upon that narrative of the Jewish exodus, of leaving, going through the waters,

leaving enslavement and coming into the Promised Land. And that's the Christian story - Romans 6; baptism, leaving enslavement, not looking behind, looking ahead, leaving behind the life of sin (which brings enslavement), so that we can be married to a new master in Jesus himself.

And of course now we are in Romans 7 today, but you know the story of the exodus. When Israel leaves Egypt, they go through the Red Sea, what happens next? Well, the visit Sinai and they receive the Torah, the law. So interestingly enough, in Romans 7, that is what Paul talks about too. The Torah and the role of Torah in this whole salvation narrative. Paul is going to visit Sinai for us and lead us back to Sinai. He is going to help us through the purpose of the Torah and the things that Torah can and cannot do. So this is an important conversation that we are going to be having today which will build upon that same idea in Romans chapter 6 of the exodus motif.

Interestingly again, when we get to Romans chapter 8, Paul will be talking about being led by the Spirit. And that leading of the Spirit will eventually lead into the resurrection, the new life, which is deliberately mirroring the exodus story itself; leaving behind Egypt for the Promised Land. A land flowing with milk and honey that promises new life.

So what you have here in Romans chapter 6, 7, and 8 is a retelling of the exodus story. It's a Christological retelling of the exodus story and I talked a lot about that in the last episode. So be sure to go back and check that out and then come back to this episode if you have listened to that episode already. So important of a theme there.

Now I want to rehash this one thing, too. It's not the case that Paul is merely christologizing the exodus story. He is not only retelling the exodus story in light of Christ. There is another side of the coin. Paul is doing what I call, "exodusizing" the Christian story. He is situating the exodus story within the Christological paradigm, but he is also taking the Christological paradigm and the Christian community and contextualizing it in the story of Israel. This is a great example of how Paul is not, and never has envisioned separating himself from the story of Israel. No, in Paul's mind, he is operating within the story of Israel. He doesn't think he is founding a new religion called Christianity. No, no, no. He is fulfilling, in his mind, he has found the completion of, the Jewish story in Jesus. His Damascus Road experience of Jesus, a radical experience which you can read about in Act 9, Act, 22, and Acts 26. There are three re-tellings there. And you can read a little bit in Galatians 1:16 where he is talking about his experience, the revelation, he calls it, of Jesus Christ. He understands the Jesus story as one that is connected to the Jewish redemption story. So its both/and. Its not just that Paul is reading the exodus story in light of Christ, he is also understanding the Christ experience he had on the Damascus Road in light of the Jewish story.

This is why I say that hermeneutics is dialogical. It's a back and forth. Its conversation. You encounter the text and the text encounters you. That is what Paul is doing with the Old Testament stories here. If you have read my book, *Paul and the Meaning of Scripture*, I go through this. I say, in Romans 6-8 I think a case can be made that Paul is retelling the Jewish story and he is doing it in a way that is faithful to the Jewish story. But he is also shedding fresh light upon it in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. I call it dialogical. Technically I call it dialogical re-authoring because he is giving it fresh meaning. But its not something that he is doing willy-nilly. He is not just playing with the text and making the text mean something that he wants it to mean. No, no, no. His re-authoring of the text is dialogical and constrained (I guess you could say), within the canvas of the Old Testament stories.

And by the way, all of Paul's Christological beliefs have categories within the Old Testament itself. That takes us too far afield, but I have spoken about that before. I encourage everyone to go back and listen to the 12-part series on The Naked Bible Podcast that I did with Dr. Heiser a while back (episodes 411 – 422). That series is called *Paul's use of the Old Testament*. It's a 12-part series so you would have to commit at least 12 hours to listen to it, but I think it outlines what I just said

that within the Old Testament there are categories for how to think about Christology or Paul's messianism, his messianic hopes and expectations. Dr. Heiser and I talk a lot about that. Go back and check that out. I think, I hope you would find that helpful.

7:58 So let's just set aside Romans stuff for just a moment and I want to share with you a few new things that have been going on with Patreon. First, thank you so much to our Patreon member for supporting the show. I so very much appreciate you all for that help and that encouragement. And thank you to everyone who prays for this show. And if you don't, please do pray for this show. Pray for me as I prep. Pray that I don't say stupid stuff (laughing). Which by the way, one of the cool things about having a podcast is that I get to say a lot of cool things, and I get to talk. The bad thing about having a podcast is that I get to talk and sometimes I say...well I fear that I will say something totally stupid that I don't realize at the time is totally stupid, but later on I get an email or I go back and listen myself and think, did I say that? So prayers appreciated. Prayers are needed. As it turns out, Matt doesn't always say what he wants to say. Anyway, its just a fear. Putting your stuff out there whether its writing a book, writing an article, or doing a podcast, it's very scary. If you have ever written something and put it out there, its kind of like bearing your soul. Hopefully I don't come across as sounding nervous, but the truth is that I am pretty nervous every time I do this.

On Patreon, I am excited to announce, that I've put in a new benefit for all of our Patreon members no matter what tier you sign up for, you get an invitation to come to a regular book club. I think the book club will go once a month or once every two months, I'm not sure it just depends on how big and thick the book is and how long it takes us to get through it. It will be a fun time. I haven't announced the book yet, but I look forward to reading the book and then getting together with folks on a live zoom and chatting about it. So if that interests you, check out Patreon. You can go to <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> and I think there is even a way to do a free trial. It's a 7-day free trial. So you can go back and listen to episodes that are Patreon only and just check it out and see if that is something you want to do. For Patreon members you get depending on the tier you sign up for, but everyone gets a bonus episode every month and now everyone will get an invitation to the book club. Depending upon what tier you sign up for, you get other things like book give aways every month somebody wins a book (sometimes I give out two books), and for cohort plus members we get together once a month on zoom and chat about a biblical or theological topic. So it's so much fun. It's also a way to support the podcast if you feel led. That's a way to do it. So go and check it out. But most of all pray! I so need prayer.

I have a couple of episodes coming out on The Naked Bible Podcast. I think I have one coming out the week of August 28<sup>th</sup>. There is going to be a couple episodes that I've done; 1 Samuel 29, then I close it out the 1 Samuel series that is going on at The Naked Bible Podcast. So check those out.

I'll be interviewing a couple of authors on this show in a couple of weeks. I'll be interviewing Dan Wilt in a couple of weeks it will drop. His book on the Holy Spirit, so I am excited about that and have a lot of fun questions teed up for that interview. Then I will be interviewing Nijay Gupta, a New Testament scholar, about his new book. Its called, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught and Ministered in the Early Church*. It's published by IBP and it came out this year. I am really excited about talking with him about this. If you don't follow Professor Gupta's stuff, you need to. He is on Twitter, Facebook and all that. Go buy his books! Then I will be interviewing Matthew Bates about his new book, *Why the Gospel: Living the Good News with King Jesus with Purpose*. Its published by Eerdmans and it came out this year, too. But I will be doing that interview on The Naked Bible Podcast. So, I don't know when its going to come out. I will record it in mid-September and it will probably come out in October. Not 100% sure yet, but have it on your radar. Three awesome interviews – I'm really excited about that.

Other things to talk about – I’m gearing up for the fall semester. Some of my classes are, or one of my classes starts this week and the others start next week. That will be a lot of fun. Pray for me on that. Pray that I keep my sanity as things get busy. I think that’s it.

Let’s get into Romans chapter 7.

14:00 Romans 7 can be divided up into three sections. That’s how I divide it up in my book because I think it helps us understand what’s happening in that chapter. The first part is verse 1-6, the second part is 7-24, and the last part is just verse 25. Now let me say something about these three parts and how they relate to one another. The first part, verses 1-6, and the last part, verse 25, they sort of act as bookends of this entire chapter. So if you have a book shelf you have a bookend on the left and a bookend on the right, which kind of hold everything in the middle together. I am looking at a book shelf now that my bookends are not doing a very good job (chuckles). But that is the idea with this passage, that verses 1-6 kicks things off and serves as an initial bookend for all the stuff in the middle. Then at the very end you have the last book end, verse 25. What I call these first and third parts, these bookends, I call them the framing section of the whole passage. I think that there is some logic to that.

In the first section and then in the last section you have this emphasis on Christology, and Christ and what Christ has done for us, and how Christ has helped us with respect to our relationship with sin, our relationship with works of the Torah and so forth. Its sort of a – well, I don’t have another way of describing it other than to say they are bookends. So in the middle of those bookends you have a chunk of text, verses 7-24. This is what I will call perhaps loosely, Paul’s *reductio ad absurdum*, or his argument. That is what logicians would call a reductio argument. All that means is reducing to absurdity. I think that is what captures what’s going on here.

And so let me explain what a reductio argument is. In logic, if you take logic, you learn different ways to argue. You learn how to build arguments all sorts of different ways. There is modus ponens, modus tollens, and all these sorts of things. You learn about fallacies, such as begging the question and all that kind of stuff. You also learn about reductio ad absurdum or reducing an argument to absurdity. So, whenever you are arguing with someone, one way to argue against them is to assume their view, to assume their initial premises and to follow it out to its logical consequence. And when you are right, when your opponent is wrong, if you follow their premises out to its logical consequence it will defeat itself and lead to absurdity because their premises and argument is not built upon very strong foundation. When you build an argument on shoddy premises, it will collapse. This is a way of showing your opponent that their argument won’t hold out when you follow it all the through to its natural consequences, or when you tease out some of their views. And to some extent, I think Paul might be doing that here. At least that’s what I say in my book.

And by the way, let me just say this about argumentation. When it comes to reductio arguments, I think they are very charitable. Because what you are doing is (I mean it can be done uncharitably like any argument can be), but when you assume that the person’s premises and when you hear them out, you are showing them, “let me just assume what you’re thinking here. Let’s tease it out and see where that road leads us.” It’s a pretty charitable position because you are saying, “lets pretend you are right, lets see what happens.” So, you might want to put a reductio argument in your back pocket next time you talk to somebody. They are a lot of fun to do.

What is Paul’s reductio argument here? The reductio happens in verse 7-24, in the middle of those bookend passages. I think his reductio argument is that you can’t rely upon Torah to save you. You can’t rely upon Torah to redeem you. You can’t rely on works of Torah to bring about your perfection one day. It just won’t work. So, lets pretend that we rely on Torah, let’s pretend that we receive a commandment. Where does that lead us in light of our sinful state? Paul is going

to say it leads us nowhere good. We need something else to help us. So in that sense, Paul is following out the logic of Torah keeping, for those who insist on Torah keeping. He is saying, “what actually happens you rely on the Torah in that way?” As you will see in a moment, what happens is not good.

If I can give this some perspective, in light of Paul’s earlier discussion in Romans, I would turn to chapter 3:20-21. It says, *for “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed (or manifested), and is attested by the law and the prophets.* It’s really that part in verse 20 that really Paul is going to be talking a lot about. How no man will be justified in God’s sight by deeds prescribed by Torah. Because through Torah comes the knowledge of sin.

20:09 Now he sort of left that back in chapter 3 and we’ve already been through chapter 3 quite a bit. But he is going to expound on that here in Romans 7 and he is going to build upon it. And this is just classic Paul. He will say something in one part of his letter and then leave it hanging. Then he will talk about something else, then something else, then talk about something else, and then revisit that thing again. And you will have to go back and refresh yourself as to how it all connects. But at the end, if you are willing to do the work, reading Paul is very rewarding because he is a very systematic and coherent thinker. He is a deep thinker. And he is a complex thinker. I am thinking of all these adjectives to describe Paul, and I don’t think any of them do sufficient justice. But needless to say, when you read Paul think about that the thing you are reading can connect to other writings of his. And once you build those connections, you have this beautiful spider web that is connected in every which way.

It reminds me of a couple of nights ago, I was letting our do out to go to the bathroom, our ritual every evening before going to bed. I let her out, she comes back in and goes to bed. So, I walked outside and it was really dark out. I barely saw this but it was this huge spider web, a near perfect circle. It was so intricate. If I hadn’t noticed it, I would’ve walked right into it and screamed really high pitched or something...because I don’t like spiders (chuckling). But looking at it from a distance, it was beautiful. And it reminded me of Paul, because if you aren’t careful, you will run into the web of text that is his writings and you will be all confused. But if you step back and you pay close attention to how everything is connected so intricately. You just have to fall on your knees and praise the Lord, because its really beautiful. I don’t say that as an apologist for Paul. I just observe this. I don’t know how else to put it. I am just observing the way he is reading this text.

In Romans 7, Paul is going to build upon that passage in Romans 3 that we just built. That a) that the law cannot suffice and it cannot do the job, and b) the law brings knowledge of sin, not rescue from sin. One thing I want to mention is in Romans 7 as we begin to read it, we need to pay attention that Paul begins his deliberations and discussions already assuming the truth of Christology. Already assuming the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. In other words, he is coming into this believing that Jesus truly is the Messiah. Where did he get that idea? Well, the Damascus Road and the events associated with that. So we need to keep that in mind. Christology for Paul is Paul’s working pre-judgement. Its his working assumption. He brings that conviction to bear upon his discussion about the Torah in chapter 7.

I bring this up because sometimes we’re tempted to read this text and other texts in the following way: by reading as if Paul is going from plight to solution. So the idea is that, lets talk about how bad people are, how sinful people are, and that will lead us to searching for another answer other than Torah keeping. Where is that other answer? Oh, goodness! Well, there is Christ right there! That’s a plight to solution argument. And in some sense that is what is going on. I don’t deny that.

That is going on in some respects. But the opposite is going on too. And I think this is something people miss.

24:30 Paul is arguing from solution to plight. So in other words he is able to look back on the Torah. He is able to look backward on the situation that Israel was in, her exile for example. That which was definitely a plight, a problem. And he is able to look back on that in light of Christ and in doing so can come to different conclusions about Torah keeping than the conclusions he had pre-Damascus Road experience. I hope that makes sense. So in other words, after the Damascus Road experience that Paul had with Jesus. And after that whole event, he is able to look backwards to the plight of Israel, to the exile of Israel, to the problems of Israel with new light and see how those problems can be answered in Christ, who is the solution to the plight. But he would never get there if he didn't already have the Jesus lens through which he could read and understand the Jewish story, the plight part. So its like solution to plight, plight to solution. And its this back and forth. It's what we might call, what philosophers would call the hermeneutical circle. The idea is that before you can understand the part, you have to understand the whole. And before you understand the whole, you have to understand the part. So it's like this back-and-forth thing.

Think of it like reading a book. You don't understand what the individual words mean until you get the context of the sentence, or the context of the chapter. So by knowing the whole, you can understand the part. And of course the opposite is true too. You will never understand the whole unless you have a basic understanding of the part. And really what happens is that you jump into a text with a lot of ignorance. I don't understand everything I need to know about Scripture. I just don't. I am ignorant about certain things. But by jumping into the text, even if it can be daunting, my knowledge is filled up a little bit. I think that it's helpful, I think that its something that give us a way to conceptualize the hermeneutic process. So all of that is operative in Romans chapter 7. So I think we will be seeing that.

27:13 One thing I want to point out before we jump into the text, is that Paul is going to be criticizing and has been criticizing this whole idea of Torah keeping. And its important that we really understand what Paul is actually doing. He is not saying that Torah is bad. He is not saying, don't do Torah because is Torah is unholy. He is not saying that at all. He would never say that. In fact, you will notice in this passage that we will read, Paul will make a point to say, a couple of times, how Torah is good. Torah is holy. So we need to keep that in mind as we read this text, because it is an emphasis that Paul wants us to have. And if Paul wants us to have it, we need to have it so that we can understand him. So with all of that in the background, let's just jump into the text and start reading.

28:05 Let's read verses 1-6, the first framing section.

*1 Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person's lifetime? 2 Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. 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 In the same way, my friends, you 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 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 discharged from the law, dead to that which held us*

*captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.*

29:10 this is a very important text in the sense that it frames the entire discussion. Let me just mention something really quick to connect it back to the last episode. So you notice in verse 1 when he is introducing this text he says, *do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime?* That word ‘binding’ is the word for lordship. And we have seen that before in Romans chapter six in respect of sin having lordship over us. This is a very important connector back to the discussion in Romans chapter 6 in that as Paul will show that the law, not because it is bad, will nonetheless hold us down in the sense, according to Paul, leads to our slavery.

Now that raises a whole bunch of questions. How can Paul say that? The law is leading us into slavery? In a sense, I think that’s very important thing to point out. In Romans chapter 6 he is talking about freedom from slavery. He equated that with sin, and now he is bring the torah in on this. Do you see how controversial this can be? I will read you a couple of quotes from commentators on that notion, but before we do that notice how controversial this could be. This whole discussion can be very controversial to his fellow Jewish readers. It’s the idea of binding. In this verse, it wouldn’t be controversial in that sense, but in the way that Paul is going to unpack all this, it will cause some controversy down the road. So just keep that in the back of your mind because as we get down later it will be important.

So in the past, in previous chapters, Paul has talked a lot about Torah. He has talked a lot about circumcision – its mentioned a lot in Romans 4, for example and in Romans 2. Here in this section, chapters 6 – 8, those things are mentioned, but they aren’t mentioned a lot. We can’t let that lead us to think that it’s not important, just because Paul doesn’t mention torah a lot in this section. It doesn’t mean that its still not at the forefront of his attention. It very much so is. And I think that’s a very important point to make here.

He begins, just as I read, with an analogy for marriage. He is talking about essentially that once a spouse has died then you are free. The law is no longer binding upon you and you can marry somebody else. He is using that as an analogy for our relationship between Torah keeping, Christ, and what does Christ do for us. The point here is that because Christ has died, we have died too. And because there has been a death introduced, that means that the law which bound us to our previous covenant, we have been set free from that. So verse 4, *you have died to the law through the body of Christ.* And that’s what he is wanting to say. The whole analogy here is a bit awkward but we get what Paul is saying. Its not like a one for one analogy that he is giving, but his point is that when a death is introduced into a covenant it is no longer bound. And because we are united with Christ, (Romans 6 – our baptism is in union with Christ), we have died to the law. And because of that, we are free to be married to another. That is how the analogy here is working.

Again, notice in light of what I just said about the Christology analogy (the death of Christ), notice from the get-go Paul’s assumption is Christology. From the outset of his entire discussion in chapter 7, it’s all about Christology. That is his working assumption. So the death of Christ allows us out of the performing of the works of Torah. Mysteriously, and he will go into more detail about this, Torah brings enslavement. Not because Torah is bad or unholy, but because it arouses the sin within us. Now this is a very important point to make because previously in Romans 6 we need rescuing from our slavery and here he is tying Torah into that which we need rescuing from. Again, he is not saying that Torah is bad, but he is saying that Torah plays a role in our enslavement.

So let me read again verses 5 and 6. *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. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code*

*but in the new life of the Spirit.* So Paul thinks that due to human sinfulness, Torah becomes an unwitting agent of bondage, I guess you could say. Torah is good, holy, just, righteous, its wonderful, its glorious, but because of the sin that lives within us, our sin uses the Torah as an opportunity for defeating us as it were. Again, notice here controversially no doubt, how Torah is being tied in to this whole slavery motif. So think of how this works in the narrative of the Old Testament. In Exodus, you have freedom from slavery in Egypt, then you receive the Torah as a gift. What Paul is saying here is that somehow Torah plays a role in the enslavement process itself. An enslavement from which we need rescuing.

Here in Romans this isn't the only isolated place where Paul associates the old covenant and Torah keeping with bondage. If you look at Galatians chapter 4 starting at verse 21. So let me just read it here because I think its helpful. He says, *tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem,*

Let me stop here for just a moment. Those are fighting words. He is equating Hagar with Mount Sinai and he says that is the present Jerusalem. That is interesting.

He goes on to say that, *she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,* then he quotes a verse here and I'll skip down here to verse 28.... He says, *now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman."* So then, *friends we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.* Then chapter 5 verse 1 says this, *for freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

So here in that context, he is definitely talking against the Judaizers, those who want to insist on Torah keeping. He says, no, we are not submitting to slavery. Bring that to bear upon Romans 7 and things begin to make more sense in terms of understanding Paul's mindset. So what Paul is doing here in this Romans 7 passage is saying quite explicitly that Christ's death releases us from our sin, and since we are free from sin, we don't need any longer a law. We are set free from law as well.

If you go back to verse 1 of chapter 7, you notice that lordship idea. So he says, *do you not know, brothers and sisters...that the law is binding (or exercises a lordship) on a person only during that person's lifetime?* So likewise he is saying that we are free from Torah's oversight. How? Why? Because Jesus has died. The Messiah has come, taking care of the sin problem. And if he has taken care of the sin problem, we don't need Torah because Torah, as he will show in a moment, just points out sin. So we don't need that anymore.

Of course there are those, Paul knows of them, there are those people who are going to insist on Torah keeping. They insist that Torah must be followed. And its at this point where he has to deconstruct that idea. He has to launch his reductio argument. He has got to follow out the process of those who insist on Torah keeping. Where does that lead you? What happens when you insist on Torah keeping? When a sinner insists on that, what ends up happening? So what he is going to show is that how Torah, because of human sin, has contributed to the slavery issue. It has



contributed to the plight, the problem. Torah has not solved humanity's most basic problem. It hasn't solved the problem of enslavement. In fact, it has made it worse.

39:25 This is where we have to be careful. Torah is not increasing sin because of some defect in Torah. No, it's because of a defect in us. The sin within us, as Paul will say, exploits the commandment. It exploits the commandment as an opportunity for its own growth and further rebellion. We need to keep reading here because this is where Paul's *reductio* argument is launched. In verses 5 and 6 that we just read, that is where he begins to launch his *reductio* argument, but its in verses 7-24 where that *reductio* is outlined even further.

I want to read from my book, page 153, to give us an overview. I don't want us to get lost in the thicket of each tree, that we miss the forest. This is out of my book, page 153,

"He, Paul, immediately follows up with a question, *what then shall we say that the law is sin? By no means*. The reason Paul speaks of the Torah in such provocative terms is because he wants to Christologically retell the exodus story. He wants to re-read the old story which spoke of slavery and rescue. The story of Israel being freed from bondage and subsequently given the law as the prized gift. Earlier, Paul had taken an issue with those who hypocritically "rely on the law" as the supreme source of revelation and enlightenment, the "embodiment of knowledge and the truth". In Romans 7 that issue is once more revisited, though with more flair. Paul not only wants to reinforce his earlier claim that the law is not the definitive revelation of the righteousness of God, but also that the law, despite being a good thing, has itself contributed to the problem of enslavement. He needs to enter the discussion at precisely at this point because of all that he has said in Romans 6 where Paul interpreted baptism as the solution to slavery. As the new exodus from a different sort of Egypt. Thus by the time he gets to Romans 7, Paul assumes he needs to say a thing or two about the giving of the law at Sinai, the next major event after Israel left Egypt through their passing through the waters of the Red Sea. This is narrative in which Paul is working. But he also knows that in order to advance his larger argument, (i.e. that works of law are not the path to righteousness), he needs to discuss the events at Sinai, (i.e. the giving of the law) in such a way that after his discussion is finished, all appeals to the law into law keeping will be rendered unintelligible. And in order to do that, he shows that Sinai was an event that actually contributed to the problem of enslavement."

Again, that is the big picture overview. I want to read verses 7-24. This is that section between the bookends. Between the two framing sections. This is the chunk of it. I am just going to read the whole thing and we will go through it like that. I might actually read verses 7-13 and then make comments. So this is the middle section, but I am going to divide it up into two.

*7 What then should 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. 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 in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived 10 and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. 13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working 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.*

A few things I want to point out, briefly, quickly, but hopefully sufficiently. The first thing is that the law brings knowledge of sin. In verse 7, *I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had*

*not said, "You shall not covet."* So the law brings knowledge of sin. That is just a starting point, but it is a very important component of Torah and one of the purposes of Torah.

The second thing he highlights here in verses 8-11 is that law actually intensifies sin. So again, he says, sin seizes an opportunity in the commandment, it produces in me all kinds of covetousness. Not because the torah is bad – it is doing what it does, but because I am so incredibly sinful. I am using it as an occasion for furthering my own sin. And he does on to say the law is holy, just, good and all of that. But nonetheless, the law brings about or intensifies sinfulness. And his is actually pretty interesting that commentators have talked about in their own writings. And I want to read from Douglas Moo's Romans commentary. If you have his second edition commentary it is on page 460. He has some fun comments. I will read the whole thing and I will make a couple of my own comments. He says,

"Paul again personifies sin, picturing it as a power that works actively and purposely. There is a precedent for this in the Old Testament. See, for example, Genesis 4:7, *but if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it.* Paul uses commandment instead of law because he is referring to the single commandment, he cited in verse 7. But the commandment represents the Mosaic law as a whole. Paradoxically, what sin produces by taking advantage of the commandment, is just what the commandment prohibited; all kinds of coveting."

I think that is a very insightful passage there for a couple of reasons. One, Doug Moo here is absolutely correct in that Paul here is personifying sin in the idea of an active agent outside of us doing something. Of course its inside of us, but it's still an agent presented in a sense as independent from us yet united in us at the same time. And Moo is right, I have cited that same passage in Genesis 4:7 in some of my own lectures on this about sin being personified. Often times we think of sin as the sin of commission (the bad things that you do), or the sin of omission (the good things you do not do), or the sin of disposition, a sinful nature for example. But we often forget how sin is personification. It is a force outside of us. And I think you have great precedent for that in the Old Testament and here you have it in the New Testament. So Paul is operating well within the Jewish paradigm on how to think about sin.

The second thing I would say here in light of what Moo mentions is just the irony. Paul is highlighting a really sad irony. Let me read this part again from Moo. He says, "Paradoxically, what sin produces by taking advantage of the commandment, is just what the commandment prohibited; all kinds of coveting." So, that's the irony that Paul is highlighting here. The commandment that says 'do not covet' has produced in me all sorts of covetousness. And Paul wants to get across that you cannot rely on works of Torah. You cannot rely on this. Why? Because you are so incredibly sinful that it just makes things worse. It has nothing to do with the Torah in the sense of being bad. The Torah is holy, just and good. It has everything to do with our own problem. Our own disposition.

There is another quote I want to read from Thomas Schreiner's Romans commentary second edition. This is on page 366 and 367. Its just a short but very important quote I want to throw out there. I think it helps us understand what is going on. He says,

"Paul's words here strike hard against the Jewish conception that the Torah curbs sin and diminishes its power of human beings. Paul's analysis would have been shocking to his Jewish contemporaries since he claims that the Torah doesn't prevent sin, but augments it."

I think that's an important point to make – just the controversial aspect of all this. So do with that what you will. I think it highlights the thought process behind this text for Paul.

The idea here, to keep us on track, is that Paul's abduction absurdum argument is working. He is making his case at least. Another observation is that the law is not bad. We have talked about that over an abundance. And the law points out sin. That is one of its purposes. He says this in verse 13, *it was sin, working 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.* Just the idea that one of the purposes of the law is to point out sin and to highlight it. A very important piece.

I want to move on because I see that I am going way too long. At least, longer than I had anticipated. I want to read verses 14-24. This is that second part of that middle part of that middle section. And this on one of the more famous parts of Romans 7 that we often look at and I think that we often misinterpret. So we will read the whole thing and then make some quick comments and wrap things up. It says this,

**14** For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. **15** 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 that the law is good. **17** But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. **18** For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

**21** So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. **22** For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, **23** but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. **24** Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

50:55 I'm going to stop right there. Notice that idea of being captive to the law of sin. I think that is an important piece here. Again, he is...you have to think in terms of slavery from Egypt and being captive in Egypt. And somehow Torah has been contributing to our enslavement and we need another rescuer. Torah simply cannot rescue us because there is nothing good that lives within us. Now when we get to that verse 15 passage where it says, *I do not understand my own actions. I do not do what I want*, a lot of people interpret that as Paul's struggle with sin and he is just having a moment. Or he is saying, 'I have a heart to do that which is good, but I can't do it because I am filled with that which is evil.' Is that what Paul is doing? Is this a struggle with his sanctification? Is this a transparent moment that he is offering us about his struggle? No, I don't think so. I do think Paul struggled with sin, don't get me wrong. This just isn't passage to prove it. I think what is happening here, at least in my opinion, (and I am very much open to a different viewpoint, here), but on my reading and best estimation, what he is doing is using himself, the "I" in this passage, his own self as a sort of place holder for the Jew who prior to...ummmm. Well, let me put it this way. As a Jew, he definitely delights in the law. Jews delight in the law. You can read this in the Psalms. And he is talking about someone who is living in a state without Christ, but who loves Torah. Someone who is sincerely devoted to God, but yet someone who realizes their own plight. This is the case for righteous views in the Old Testament. This is the case for someone like Paul, who is working out what it means to follow God, though being a person being filled with sin. And what he is trying to show, and this is the heart of the matter, is that if all you have is Torah, this is the sort of struggle you are going to have. This is sort of problem that you are going to have. You don't have an ultimate solution to the problem of your own sin, the problem of your own heart. Why? Because just as he said earlier, the law arouses sin. So if all you have is law, or Torah, then all you are going to have is this arousal of your sin. But you want to follow God, right? You want to follow him with your whole heart. You want to delight in his law because you know that the law is good. And yet you have the law being used to arouse the sin within you and so forth. So you have this struggle. So all Paul is doing is using himself as this character, this

person to symbolize the whole Jewish story, the Jewish people as a whole, if that makes sense. Lots of commentators have talked about this thing and this whole debate. But that is my reading of this whole text. I think it's the most accurate. It's not Paul struggling with sin as a Christian, even though he did struggle with sin as a Christian, this whole passage has to be kept in its context of Romans 7. That whole reductio argument. He is just trying to show that if all you have is Torah, that is a dead end.

Again, he is doing a reductio argument. He is assuming the premises of his opponents: Let's just pretend that we are going to rely on Torah only. Where does that lead us? Well, that leads to frustration. And that's why you can't do that. And that is why he says in verse 24, *wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?* And then that is where the final piece comes in at verse 25.

55:05 If the Torah is all you have, then you don't have a way out of the problem. But this is where he says in verse 25,

**25** *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!  
So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

The idea is that we don't just have Torah. We have Jesus who fulfills Torah, completes Torah, but rescues us out of our enslavement. Who rescues us out of our sin. The same sin that will seize opportunities given to us by way of Torah and exploit those and make us more sinful. We have a way out of this. And that way out is Jesus. So his reductio argument works because, again, if all you have is Torah you have enslavement, but if you have Jesus, you have a rescue from that enslavement.

Now I said a moment ago that Paul no doubt still struggled with sin as a Christian. Just like you do, just like I do, but that is why he will go on in chapter 8 and begin by saying in chapter 8, *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. So even as you struggle with sin, you can know that I am free from the accusation of Torah, I am free from the accusation of condemnation. I have been set free by who? Not by a works of Torah, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

56:35 I want to remind us of something Paul says at the very end of chapter 3. He asks, *do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means, on the contrary, we uphold the law*. Don't be tempted to think that Paul is using Romans 7 to dogpile on the Torah. My goodness! That is not the case. He has said repeatedly, and I have tried my best to repeatedly say this as well, for Paul the Torah is good. The Torah is holy. The Torah is righteous. So don't think that he is pushing the Torah aside and wants us to disregard it in the sense of not recognizing its place within salvation history. No! it definitely has such an important place. And there is so much we can learn from it. Even today, I think. I teach a class called, Torah. Why? Because I love the Torah. It is just so beautiful. I love it. I think there is a lot, even as Christians we can learn from it. So how do we answer the question? How does Paul uphold the Torah when he is saying don't rely on the Torah for your justification and so forth? How does he uphold the Torah? Well, he is slowly getting to that answer. He is slowly getting to it and his answer is going to culminate in Romans chapter 10. We are a long way off from that but I think it's important for us to look at it really quick. He says this in Romans chapter 10:4. *For Christ is the end of the law so there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*. And actually the better translation is, *for Christ is the culmination of the law*. This is the word, *telos*. Christ is the end of, the culmination, or the telos of the law. Meaning that the law is summed up in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one who is holy, just and righteous. He embodies all that the Torah anticipated. He is the logos. He is the word of God. And so for Paul, he is upholding the Torah. He is not doing away with it. And the way he upholds the

Torah is by recognizing that it's through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ that righteousness of God has been manifested.

And friends, that is wonderful, beautiful news to those of us who need rescuing.

59:10 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.