

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity, August 30, 2026

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 286, 237:1, 289, 295, 294:1.

Lessons: Psalm 119:105-130, 2 Corinthians 2:4-11, Mark 7:31-37.

Sermon Text: Romans 7:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our Redeemer:

As children in Catechism instructions we learned the difference between the two main doctrines of the Bible - the Law and the Gospel. We learned that the Law of God tells us the commandments of God and shows us our sin and condemnation. The Gospel tells of the love of God toward sinners and saves us through faith in Jesus Christ.

This simple distinction between Law and Gospel is not just something to be memorized, but it is to be remembered and applied by both pastor and people of the congregation in practice. For example, the pastor must very carefully distinguish between Law and Gospel whenever he writes a sermon. He must know which of these doctrines applies in any given situation. This is important because it involves the salvation of souls. But it is not easy to do. Dr. C.F.W. Walther in his book "Law and Gospel" writes: "Rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience." p. 1

We need the Law of God so that we realize we are sinners who deserve eternal damnation in hell. And we must also realize that we cannot earn our way to heaven by trying to keep the Law's demands. We need the Gospel for three reasons: firstly, that we learn to know of God's grace in Christ our Savior; secondly, that by the power of the Gospel Word we come to faith and trust in Jesus; and thirdly, that by the strength the Holy Spirit gives us through the Gospel we may lead a God-pleasing life.

Today in the sermon we are going to hear both Law and Gospel, but the special emphasis of our text is on:

OUR RELATION TO THE LAW OF GOD.

- 1. Before we come to faith in Christ; and,**
- 2. After we come to faith in Christ.**

We begin with a fact about the Law toward the close of our text. Paul has spoken about dying to the Law and being free from the demands of the Law. He asks: ***"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law."*** What the apostle Paul wants to teach is that the Law of God is in itself good and holy. After all, it comes from the holy God, and it is given for a most noteworthy purpose: It shows us what sin is and shows us that we are sinners. Paul writes: ***"Through the law we become conscious of sin."*** Rom. 3:20 The Law of God gives us commandments to obey. From the Law we learn to know what God wants us to do or not to do. Of ourselves we do not know this. Paul gives an example of this in our text when he says: ***"For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'"*** The Lord commands in his Law: ***"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*** Deuteronomy 5:21. It is not only the sinful deed that the Law condemns, but the sinful desire to do or to have what the Lord forbids.

Before we come to faith in Christ we are controlled by the sinful nature, by our sinful flesh. Paul speaks of that in our text: ***"For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law***

were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.” Before conversion everyone is controlled by his sinful flesh. The Bible says: ***“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”*** Eph. 2:3

The Law not only shows us that by nature, before conversion, we together with all others are controlled by our sinful flesh, but the Law does something more in us. Our text speaks of our ***“sinful passions aroused by the law.”*** Also in the last verses of our text this fact is brought out: ***“Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandments, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from the law, sin is dead.”*** We know what happens when we take a poker and stir up the smoldering fire in a fireplace. It shoots out new flames. Or, think of prodding a sleeping lion with a stick. He will awaken with a roar. So the sinful passions that man has by nature are aroused by the law. When God says: Don’t do that, man by nature wants to do just that! It’s like being told: Don’t go to see a blasphemous or evil movie. Man’s sinful flesh is aroused and he has a desire to see it. When movie-goers are warned of an especially evil movie, the lines of ticket buyers extend around the block.

What happens next our text tells us: ***“The sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.”*** James speaks of this same thing: ***“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*** James 1:15

Paul says: ***“Apart from law, sin is dead.”*** It lies dormant. But when the commandment is spoken, when the Law is heard, then the sinful passions are aroused and the sinful deed is done. The end result is death, for ***“the wages of sin is death.”*** Rom. 6: 23 Unless a person comes to faith in Christ and believes what the Gospel says of his redemptive work, that person remains in his sins and the end is everlasting death in hell. ***“Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*** Mark. 16:16.

Now let us learn what our text says about man’s relation to the Law after he comes to faith in Christ.

2.

Again, we begin with a general truth about law. Paul writes: ***“Do you not know, brothers, - for I am speaking to men who know the law - that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?”*** It is an elementary truth that after death the law has no more jurisdiction over a person. After death a person is free from all demands of the Law.

An example of this is found in marriage. Paul says: ***“For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage.”*** Applying this further, Paul says: ***“So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.”*** A married woman is released from the law which binds her to her husband as soon as her husband dies.

But Paul doesn’t want us to get too involved in thinking about marriage. He wants us to learn about our relation to the law after we come to faith in Christ. ***“So, my brothers, you also died to the law....”*** We became dead to the law of God with all its demands and requirements. Paul is speaking of what has happened in the case of believers in Christ. How is it that we die to the Law? Paul says: ***“through the body of Christ.”*** Jesus’ body was given into death for us and all sinners. He suffered death to redeem sinful mankind. He paid the precious ransom price by suffering and dying innocently and shedding his holy, precious blood. So we were bought back from Satan’s dominion and the slavery of sin. Through Jesus’ work of redemption, then, we are dead to the Law and are no longer bound by its demands.

When we stand before God as justified believers, we are no longer bound by the Law’s demands. Paul says: ***“(We) died to the law through the body of Christ, that (we) might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.”*** In a previous chapter Paul speaks in a similar way about being free from sin, just as he in our text speaks about being free from the law’s demands. He says: ***“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”*** Rom. 6:6 So also, through Christ’s death and resurrection we have been freed from the exacting demands of the Law of God. That’s a precious truth! Jesus kept all the demands of his Father in the Law for us. Paul says: ***“Christ is the end***

of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Rom. 10:4 How comforting this is for us, for it tells us that our salvation is not dependent on what we do or leave undone, but on Christ who did it all for us. The Bible applies this fact: ***“So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”*** Gal. 2:16 This is a most essential truth: The way to eternal salvation is not by the works of the law, but by the work of Christ our Savior. We cannot be saved by our own efforts at trying to keep God’s commandments, but only by faith in Christ who did it all for us. That’s the Gospel truth. We are saved by Christ’s righteousness, not our own. God has declared us righteous in that he counts our sins against us no longer, for Jesus’ sake. This is such an important truth, that Paul says: ***“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”*** Gal. 1:8.

Let us not misunderstand and think that freedom from the Law’s demands is like a license to commit sin. This freedom from the Law’s demands is to have just the opposite result. Paul in our text speaks of being set free from the Law ***“that we might bear fruit to God.”*** Again he says: ***“By dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”*** In other words, as believers in Christ, we are not threatened and told: Do this, or else! We want to do it. The Holy Spirit through the Gospel Word makes our hearts willing so that we want to serve the Lord. As believers in Christ we can say with the psalmist: ***“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.”*** 119:32 Even as the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Jesus, so he also enables us to do good works as a fruit of our faith. Paul says: ***“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*** Eph. 2:10 Jesus tells us: ***“I am The vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*** John 15:5 Jesus also emphasizes that our good works as fruits of faith glorify God. ***“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*** John 15:8

Let us express ourselves, then, in these words of the poet:

“The Law is good; but since the Fall. Its holiness condemns us all:

It dooms us for our sin to die And has no power to justify.

To Jesus we for refuge flee, Who from the curse has set us free,

And humbly worship at His throne, Saved by His grace through faith alone.” Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 295, v. 5-6)

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