

Romans 7
March 15, 2015

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: If you had to put together a “Top 10” list of what you value most in life, what would be on your list? [Record answers on dry erase board. Let people give knee-jerk reactions, e.g. Christ, Family, friends, safety, health, happiness, education, love, success, peace, etc...]

Q: Just for fun, let’s make a “Top 10” list of things that would never make the “things I most value” list! [Sickness, suffering, pain, misbehaving kids, difficult bosses, etc, etc]

Let’s be honest. It’s hard to find value things like suffering and pain. Let’s suppose that you were raised as an Israelite, and on your “most valued” list was the Law. Suppose you found great value in the Law because it was your compass. Now imagine learning that you could have a brand new life in Christ, but you had to die to the Law. You learned that by being under the Law, you were condemned, and the verdict was death.

Transition: So how does the Law fit in our lives? Paul puts the Law in perspective for us. The Law may not make it to your “most valued” list, but he will show us how the Law serves an important role in our walk with the Lord. ***It is my hope that all of us can find value in the Law by understanding how the Law FUNCTIONS in our lives as Christians who are under grace.***

As we study Romans 7, I invite you to look for the **FUNCTIONS** of the Law. By the end of today’s lesson, maybe the Law will make it to your “Top 10” List!

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Rom 7:1-6]

V.1:

- 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

V.2:

- 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.

V.3:

- 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.

V.4:

- So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

V.5:

- 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.

V.6:

- But now, 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Background: This short section continues the discussion that Paul began in Romans 6:15, answering the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under the Law, but under grace?” He used the illustration of a master and servant to explain how the Christian should yield himself to God. In this passage he used the illustration of a husband and wife to show that the believer has a new relationship to the Law because of his union with Jesus Christ.

So Paul is beginning to lay out the right perspective for the Law as believers. In summary:

- Just because we are not “under the Law” doesn’t mean we become “lawless” as if the Law evaporated off the books and there was nothing to follow.
- Just because we are not “under the Law, but under grace” doesn’t mean we have a license to sin all the more because grace abounds all the more.
- Therefore, it begs the question: So if the Law didn’t go anywhere, and we’re under grace, then how does a believer relate to the Law?
- A: Paul decides to give us an analogy to show what spiritually happened to us when we believed in Christ. Paul says “We died to the Law and was set free from it.” But what does that look like?! Let’s explore his marriage analogy.

Q v.1-3: What is the practical application of the Law as it relates to marriage?

- The law of marriage has authority over the husband and wife as long as they live.
- Q: What is the trigger event that releases a husband or wife from the law of marriage? [Death – So you are under the Law until “death do us part.”]
- V.3 – A person is not “set free from the law of marriage” by finding a different partner while married! Think again!!
- The point Paul makes is simple: The only way a spouse is released and set free from the law of marriage is when the death of a spouse occurs.

Transition: Now that he has set this analogy up, let’s look at how it applies to us. He’s going to walk us through the spiritual process we went through when we believed upon Jesus.

Q v.4-6:

- Q v.4: When we professed Christ, what spiritually happened, especially in relation to the Law? [We died to the Law in order to be “married” or united with Christ. We are under His authority, characterized by grace. Notice that WE DIED to the Law. The Law did not die!]
- Q: Before we knew Christ, what were we under? [The Law that condemned us. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Rom 3:23]
- Q: According to v.4, what did God have in mind once we were united with Christ? [We are to bear fruit for God.]
- Q: Were we able to bear fruit before we knew Christ? [NO! The only way we can produce fruit is through Christ.]
- X-Ref John 15:1-8

- V.5 – If we remain in Christ and yield to His authority, what are we able to do? [bear “much” fruit]
- V.5 – If we try to produce good works for God in our flesh, what will happen? [No fruit will occur because apart from Him, we can do *nothing*]
- V.8 – What glorifies God? [That we bear “much” fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples]
- Observation: God is interested in results, but those results, which Paul calls “fruit” can only happen by remaining in Christ. Our new life in Christ was not only about being set free from the Law, but to enjoy our “marriage” or union to Christ by producing much fruit that glorifies God.
- Q v.5: The unsaved person is controlled by what? [His sinful nature. The operative word is *controlled* by. Just because we are saved doesn’t mean the sinful nature is gone!]
- Q: In the life of an unsaved person, how does the Law function? [It *arouses* our sinful passions]
- Q v.6: Again, once we “died to the Law,” what did that free us to do? [To serve in a new way with the help of the Spirit.]
- Notice: Before we knew Christ, here’s what our relationship to the Law looked like:
 - we were bound/enslaved to the Law
 - the law aroused our sinful desires
 - we tried to uphold the law in our flesh, which we could never do.
 - Because of our failure to keep the law in our flesh, the Law condemned us to death. That was the *old way of the written code*.

Transition: So here we go again. We can see our relationship to the Law before knowing Christ, but we still need to answer the question of what our relationship to the Law now looks like while we are under the Lordship of Jesus. Let’s see if we can find how the Law FUNCTIONS for us as believers. Paul knows his readers want to know what good is the Law if we “died” to the Law!

[Read Rom 7:7-14]

V.7:

- What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.”

V.8:

- But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

V.9:

- Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

V.10:

- I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

V.11:

- For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

V.12:

- So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

V.13:

- Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

V.14:

- We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Process Observations/Questions:

- Observation v.7: Paul answers an anticipated question – If the Law arouses our sinful passions that lead us to death, then is the Law itself sin or evil??! [No!!]
- Q v.7: So what is one function of the Law that Paul tells us? [The Law reveals sin. It acts like a mirror]
- X-Ref Mark 10:17-27 to illustrate how Christ uses the Law to reveal our sin.
- Q v.8-9: What function does the Law have in these two verses? [Paul emphasizes that the Law “arouses” our sinful passions. So all we have to do is see the Law, and our sinful nature is already activated to draw us toward the very thing we’re not to do!]
- Q v.8: What do you think Paul means when he says, “For apart from Law, sin is dead?” [This does not mean that sin has no existence without the Law (cf. 5:13), but that without the Law sin is less active, for the Law arouses “sinful passions” (7:5)]
- Q V.9: Paul shares his personal testimony about how the Law functioned for him. When he says “Once I was alive apart from the Law,” he’s speaking of his personal experience as a child and perhaps a youth – prior to his awareness and understanding of God’s commandments. Then he mentions “when the commandment came,” he’s not referring to the Mosaic Law, but the significance of the commandment “Thou shall not covet.” And as soon as he understood the commandment, what sprang to life and then what followed? [Sin and then death]
- Q v.10: Can anyone relate to Paul? Have you ever heard a commandment, only to discover that it is stirring up resistance to do the right thing. And then before you know it, you are ensnared to the very sin you were trying to avoid.
- Q v.11: What is another function of the Law? [Death. The Law kills]
- Q v.12: What value does the Law have? [It’s holy, righteous, and good]
- Q v.13: There is another function of the Law. What do you see? [The Law shows how sin is “utterly sinful”]
- V.14 – What does it mean that the Law is “spiritual?” [It means that the Law deals with the inner man, the spiritual part of man, as well as with the outer actions]

Transition: Paul now shares his own struggle with sin. As you read it, you will be nodding your heads because you will most likely resonate with his story!

Read Rom 7:15-25

V.15:

- I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

V.16:

- And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

V.17:

- As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

V.18:

- I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

V.19:

- For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

V.20:

- Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

V.21:

- So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

V.22:

- For in my inner being I delight in God's law;

V.23:

- but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

V.24:

- What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

V.25:

- Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!
- So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q v.15-20: Paul has our number! I would be shocked if there was someone who didn't identify with his struggle!

- Q v.15: What is Paul's view of the Law? [It's "good"]
- Q v.17: Is Paul saying in a roundabout way "The devil made me do it?" [No. He's still has personal responsibility. Paul was saying that of *himself* he could not obey God's Law; and that even when he did, evil was still present with him. No matter what he did, his deeds were tainted by sin.]
- Observation: We need to make sure we're understanding in these verses that Paul was saying that in *himself* he could not obey God's Law, and even when he did, evil was still present with him because of his sinful nature.

Q v.21-25:

- Q: What's the "law at work" according to Paul? Feel free to paraphrase. [In our hearts, the inward man delight's in God's Law and wants to obey it, but our sinful nature delights in breaking God's Law. That battle is ongoing.]
- Q: So who came to the rescue?! [Jesus Christ!]

Transition: Don't think Paul is going to leave us hanging here! If you come back next week, Romans 8 explains the work of the Holy Spirit in overcoming the bad and producing the good fruit.

LOOK:

I may have been a bit facetious that the Law would make it to our “Top 10” list of things we most value in life. However, after having studied this chapter, how does the Law fit in the life of a believer? How does it fit for you?

Offer a word picture: The Law is a mirror that is held up by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit uses the Law to give us feedback in our walk with Christ. When we’re missing the mark, the Spirit uses the Law to convict us that we’re yielding to the flesh. Because we’re under grace, the Spirit gives us the feedback we need to move toward transformation, and it’s up to us to yield to the work of the Spirit to do just that.

In the end, we can find value in the Law if we embrace that the Spirit uses it to give us feedback for the purpose of transformation. Without the Law it’s hard to grow and mature spiritually.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 535–560). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Authority of the Law (Rom. 7:1–6)

These verses actually continue the discussion that Paul began in Romans 6:15, answering the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under the Law, but under grace?” He used the illustration of a master and servant to explain how the Christian should yield himself to God. In this passage he used the illustration of a husband and wife to show that the believer has a new relationship to the Law because of his union with Jesus Christ.

The illustration is a simple one, but it has a profound application. When a man and woman marry, they are united for life. Marriage is a physical union (“They two shall be one flesh” Gen. 2:24) and can only be broken by a physical cause. One such cause is *death*. (Matt. 5:31–34; 19:1–12 indicate that unfaithfulness also breaks the marriage bond, but Paul does not bring this up. He is not discussing marriage and divorce; he is using marriage to illustrate a point.)

As long as they live, the husband and wife are under the authority of the law of marriage. If the woman leaves the man and marries another man, she commits adultery. But if the husband dies, she is free to remarry because she is no longer a wife. It is death that has broken the marriage relationship and set her free.

Paul’s *application* in Romans 7:4–6 clinches the argument. He states two marvelous facts that explain the believer’s relationship to the Law.

We died to the Law (vv. 4–5). It appears that Paul has confused his illustration, but he has not. When we were unsaved (“in the flesh,” Rom. 7:5), we were under the authority of God’s Law. We were condemned by that Law. When we trusted Christ and were united to Him, *we died to the Law* just as we died to the flesh (Rom. 6:1–10). The Law did not die; *we* died.

But in Paul’s illustration from marriage, it was the *husband* who died and the wife who married again. If you and I are represented by the wife, and the Law is represented by the husband, then the application does not follow the illustration. If the wife died in the illustration, the only way she could marry again would be to come back from the dead. But that is exactly what Paul wants to teach! When we trusted Christ, we died to the Law; but in Christ, we arose from the dead and now are “married” (united) to Christ to live a new kind of life!

The Law did not die, because God’s Law still rules over men. We died to the Law, and it no longer has dominion over us. But we are not “lawless”; we are united to Christ, sharing His life, and thus walking “in newness of life.” Romans 8:4 climaxes the argument: “That the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” In the old life of sin, we brought forth fruit “unto death,” but in the new life of grace, we “bring forth fruit unto God.” To be “dead to the Law” does not mean that we lead lawless lives. It simply means that the *motivation* and *dynamic* of our lives does not come from the Law: it comes from God’s grace through our union with Christ.

We are delivered from Law (v. 6). This is the logical conclusion: the Law cannot exercise authority over a dead person. The *Authorized Version* reads as though the Law died; but Paul wrote, “We having died to that wherein we were held.” Death means deliverance (note Rom. 6:9–10). But we were delivered that we might serve. The Christian life is not one of independence and rebellion. We died to the Law that we might be “married to Christ.” We were

delivered from the Law that we might serve Christ. This truth refutes the false accusation that Paul taught lawlessness.

What is different about Christian service as opposed to our old life of sin? To begin with, the Holy Spirit of God energizes us as we seek to obey and serve the Lord. (The word spirit ought to be capitalized in Romans 7:6—“newness of Spirit.”) Under Law, no enablement was given. God’s commandments were written on stones and read to the people. But under grace, God’s Word is written in our hearts (2 Cor. 3:1–3). We “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) and serve “in newness of Spirit.” The believer, then, is no longer under the authority of the Law.

The Ministry of the Law (Rom. 7:7–13)

Paul’s objectors were ready! “What good is the Law if we don’t need it anymore? Why, a teaching such as yours turns the Law into sin!” In answering that objection, Paul explained the ministries of the Law, ministries that function even today.

The Law reveals sin (v. 7). “By the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). “Where no Law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). The Law is a mirror that reveals the inner man and shows us how dirty we are (James 1:22–25). Note that Paul did not use murder, stealing, or adultery in his discussion; he uses *coveting*. This is the last of the Ten Commandments, and it differs from the other nine in that it is an inward attitude, not an outward action. Covetousness leads to the breaking of the other commandments! It is an insidious sin that most people never recognize in their own lives, but God’s Law reveals it.

The rich ruler in Mark 10:17–27 is a good example of the use of the Law to reveal sin and show a man his need for a Saviour. The young man was very moral outwardly, but he had never faced the sins within. Jesus did not tell him about the Law because the Law would save him; He told him about the Law because the young man did not realize his own sinfulness. True, he had never committed adultery, robbed anyone, given false witness, or dishonored his parents; but what about covetousness? When Jesus told him to sell his goods and give to the poor, the man went away in great sorrow. The commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,” had revealed to him what a sinner he really was! Instead of admitting his sin, he rejected Christ and went away unconverted.

The Law arouses sin (vv. 8–9). Since Paul was a devout Pharisee, seeking to obey the Law before his conversion, it is easier to understand these verses. (Read Phil. 3:1–11 and Gal. 1 for other autobiographical data on Paul’s relationship to the Law in his unconverted days.) Keep in mind too that “the strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor. 15:56). Since we have a sinful nature, the Law is bound to arouse that nature the way a magnet draws steel.

Something in human nature wants to rebel whenever a law is given. I was standing in Lincoln Park in Chicago, looking at the newly painted benches; and I noticed a sign on each bench: “Do Not Touch.” As I watched, I saw numbers of people deliberately reach out and touch the wet paint! Why? Because the sign told them not to! Instruct a child not to go near the water, and that is the very thing he will do! Why? “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

Believers who try to live by rules and regulations discover that their legalistic system only arouses more sin and creates more problems. The churches in Galatia were very legalistic, and they experienced all kinds of trouble. “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Their legalism did not make them more spiritual; it made them more sinful! Why? Because the Law arouses sin in our nature.

The Law kills (vv. 10–11). “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law” (Gal. 3:21). But the Law cannot give life: it can only show the sinner that he is guilty and condemned. This explains why legalistic Christians and churches do not grow and bear spiritual fruit. They are living by Law, and the Law always kills. Few things are more dead than an orthodox church that is proud of its “high standards” and tries to live up to them in its own energy. Often the members of such a church start to judge and condemn one another, and the sad result is a church fight and then a church split that leaves members—or former members—angry and bitter.

As the new Christian grows, he comes into contact with various philosophies of the Christian life. He can read books, attend seminars, listen to tapes, and get a great deal of information. If he is not careful, he will start following a human leader and accept his teachings as Law. This practice is a very subtle form of legalism, and it kills spiritual growth. No human teacher can take the place of Christ; no book can take the place of the Bible. Men can give us information, but only the Spirit can give us illumination and help us understand spiritual truths. The Spirit enlightens us and enables us; no human leader can do that.

The Law shows the sinfulness of sin (vv. 12–13). Unsaved people know that there is such a thing as sin; but they do not realize the sinfulness of sin. Many Christians do not realize the true nature of sin. We excuse our sins with words like “mistakes” or “weaknesses”; but God condemns our sins and tries to get us to see that they are “exceedingly sinful.” Until we realize how wicked sin really is, we will never want to oppose it and live in victory.

Paul’s argument here is tremendous: (1) the Law is not sinful—it is holy, just, and good; (2) but the Law reveals sin, arouses sin, and then uses sin to slay us; if something as good as the Law accomplishes these results, then something is radically wrong somewhere; (3) conclusion: see how sinful sin is when it can use something good like the Law to produce such tragic results. Sin is indeed “exceedingly sinful.” The problem is not with the Law; the problem is with my sinful nature. This prepares the way for the third topic in this chapter.

The Inability of the Law (Rom. 7:14–25)

Having explained what the Law is supposed to do, Paul now explains what the Law cannot do.

The Law cannot change you (v. 14). The character of the Law is described in four words: holy, just, good, and spiritual. That the Law is holy and just, nobody can deny, because it came from the holy God who is perfectly just in all that He says and does. The Law is good. It reveals God’s holiness to us and helps us to see our need for a Saviour.

What does it mean that the Law is “spiritual”? It means that the Law deals with the inner man, the spiritual part of man, as well as with the outer actions. In the original giving of the Law in Exodus, the emphasis was on the outward actions. But when Moses restated the Law in Deuteronomy, he emphasized the inner quality of the Law as it relates to man’s heart. This spiritual emphasis is stated clearly in Deuteronomy 10:12–13. The repetition of the word “love” in Deuteronomy also shows that the deeper interpretation of the Law relates to the inner man (Deut. 4:37; 6:4–6; 10:12; 11:1; 30:6, 16, 20).

Our nature is carnal (fleshly); but the Law’s nature is spiritual. This explains why the old nature responds as it does to the Law. It has well been said, “The old nature knows no Law, the new nature needs no Law.” The Law cannot transform the old nature; it can only reveal how sinful that old nature is. The believer who tries to live under Law will only *activate* the old nature; he will not eradicate it.

The Law cannot enable you to do good (vv. 15–21). Three times in this passage Paul stated that sin dwells in us (Rom. 7:14, 18, 20). He was referring, of course, to the old nature. It is also true that the Holy Spirit dwells in us; and in Romans 8, Paul explained how the Spirit of God enables us to live in victory, something the Law cannot help us do.

The many pronouns in this section indicate that the writer is having a problem with *self*. This is not to say that the Christian is a split personality, because he is not. Salvation makes a man whole. But it does indicate that the believer's mind, will, and body can be controlled either by the old nature or the new nature, either by the flesh or the Spirit. The statements here indicate that the believer has two serious problems: (1) he cannot do the good he wants to do, and (2) he does the evil that he does not want to do.

Does this mean that Paul could not stop himself from breaking God's Law, that he was a liar and thief and murderer? Of course not! Paul was saying that of *himself* he could not obey God's Law; and that even when he did, evil was still present with him. No matter what he did, his deeds were tainted by sin. Even after he had done his best, he had to admit that he was "an unprofitable servant" (Luke 17:10). "So I find this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me" (Rom. 7:21, NIV). This, of course, is a different problem from that in Romans 6. The problem there was, "How can I stop doing bad things?" while the problem here is, "How can I ever do anything good?"

The legalist says, "Obey the Law and you will do good and live a good life." But the Law only reveals and arouses sin, showing how sinful it is! It is impossible for me to obey the Law because I have a sinful nature that rebels against the Law. Even if I think I have done good, I know that evil is present. The Law is good, but by nature, I am bad! So, the legalist is wrong: the Law cannot enable us to do good.

The Law cannot set you free (vv. 21–25). The believer has an old nature that wants to keep him in bondage; "I will get free from these old sins!" the Christian says to himself. "I determine here and now that I will not do this any longer." What happens? He exerts all his willpower and energy, and for a time succeeds; but then when he least expects it, he falls again. Why? Because he tried to overcome his old nature with Law, and the Law cannot deliver us from the old nature. When you move under the Law, you are only making the old nature stronger; because "the strength of sin is the Law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Instead of being a dynamo that gives us power to overcome, the Law is a magnet that draws out of us all kinds of sin and corruption. The inward man may delight in the Law of God (Ps. 119:35), but the old nature delights in breaking the Law of God. No wonder the believer under Law becomes tired and discouraged, and eventually gives up! He is a captive, and his condition is "wretched." (The Greek word indicates a person who is exhausted after a battle.) What could be more wretched than exerting all your energy to try to live a good life, only to discover that the best you do is still not good enough!

Is there any deliverance? Of course! "I thank God that there is Someone who shall deliver me—Jesus Christ our Lord!" Because the believer is united to Christ, he is dead to the Law and no longer under its authority. But he is alive to God and able to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit. The explanation of this victory is given in Romans 8.

The final sentence in the chapter does not teach that the believer lives a divided life: sinning with his flesh but serving God with his mind. This would mean that his body was being used in two different ways *at the same time*, and this is impossible. The believer realizes that there is a struggle within him between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–18), but he knows that one or the other must be in control.

By “the mind” Paul meant “the inward man” (Rom. 7:22) as opposed to “the flesh” (Rom. 7:18). He amplified this thought in Romans 8:5–8. The old nature cannot do anything good. Everything the Bible says about the old nature is negative: “no good thing” (Rom. 7:18); “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63); “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). If we depend on the energy of the flesh, we cannot serve God, please God, or do any good thing. But if we yield to the Holy Spirit, then we have the power needed to obey His will. The flesh will never serve the Law of God because the flesh is at war with God. But the Spirit can only obey the Law of God! Therefore, the secret of doing good is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

Paul hinted at this in the early verses of this chapter when he wrote, “That we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4). Just as we are dead to the old nature, so we are dead to the Law. But we are united to Christ and alive in Christ, and therefore can bring forth fruit unto God. It is our union with Christ that enables us to serve God acceptably. “For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). That solved Paul’s problem in Romans 7:18: “For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”

The old nature knows no law and the new nature needs no law. Legalism makes a believer wretched because it grieves the new nature and aggravates the old nature! The legalist becomes a Pharisee whose outward actions are acceptable, but whose inward attitudes are despicable. No wonder Jesus called them “whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matt. 23:27). How wretched can you get!

The best is yet to come! Romans 8 explains the work of the Holy Spirit in overcoming the bad and producing the good.

Witmer, J. A. (1985). Romans. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 466–480). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

C. Conflict in sanctification (chap. 7)

It is one thing for a believer to understand that his identification with Jesus Christ means that he has died to sin (6:2) and to count or reckon that to be true (6:11). But it is something else for him to deal with the sin nature that remains within and its efforts to express itself in his thoughts and actions. This is the internal conflict in the area of sanctification that every believer faces.

1. THE BELIEVER AND THE LAW (7:1–6).

7:1–3. Verses 1–6 relate to 6:14, the intervening verses (6:15–23) being a digression raised by the question in 6:15. The statement that a believer identified with Jesus Christ in His death is no longer “under Law” (6:14) should not have surprised Paul’s readers because they were **men who know the Law**. This statement should not be restricted to Jewish believers in the church at Rome because Gentiles also knew the principle **that the Law has authority** (*kyrieuei*, “rules as lord”; cf. 6:9; 14) **over a man only as long as he lives**. This is a self-evident truth, which Paul then illustrated by marriage. **A married woman** (lit., “the under-a-man woman”) **is bound** (perf. tense, “has been bound and stands bound”) **to her husband as long as he is alive. But if her husband dies** (in Gr., a third-class condition indicating a real possibility) **she is released** (perf. tense, “has been and stands discharged”) **from the law of marriage** (lit., “from the law of the

man”). She is bound to him by marriage as her husband while he lives, and obviously his death frees her from that marriage.

Then Paul continued the illustration, pointing out that **if a wife marries** (lit., “if she comes to”) **another man while her husband is still alive she is called** (future tense, “shall be publicly known as”) **an adulteress**. Conversely, on the death of her **husband** she is free from that marriage (cf. 7:2). So she **is not an adulteress** if **she marries** (lit., “**even though** she comes to”) **another man**. A widow who marries again is not guilty of adultery.

7:4–6. In these verses Paul applied his illustration of marriage to a believer and the Law. He said, **You also died** (lit., “you were put to death,” as was true of Jesus) **to the Law**. Just as a believer “died to sin” (6:2) and so is “set free from sin” (6:18, 22), so he also died to the Law and is separated and set free from it (6:14; cf. Gal. 2:19). As a wife is no longer married to her husband when he dies, so a Christian is no longer under the Law. This separation was **through the body of Christ**, that is, because of Christ’s death on the cross.

As a result Christians **belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead** (cf. Rom. 6:4, 9). This One of course is the Lord Jesus Christ. In a sense believers are united to Him as His bride (Eph. 5:25). God’s purpose in all this is **in order that we might bear fruit to God** (cf. Rom. 6:22; Gal. 5:22–23; Phil. 1:11). Only a person who is spiritually alive can bear spiritual fruit, that is, holy living (cf. John 15:4–5). A person who is married to Christ can bear spiritual progeny. Paul moved from the second person plural (**you**) to the first person plural (**we**), including himself along with his readers.

The apostle continued, **For when we were controlled by the sinful nature** (lit., “For when we were in the flesh”; *sarx* often means sin nature; cf. Rom. 7:18, 25) **the sinful passions aroused by the Law were at work in our bodies**. This describes a believer before he was saved (cf. 6:19). The Law by its prohibitions aroused sinful passions, as explained in 7:7–13. In that sense unsaved Gentiles were “under” the Law. Consequently their progeny was not “fruit to God” (v. 4) but **fruit for death**. Sin, Paul repeatedly affirmed, leads to death (5:15, 17, 21; 6:16, 21, 23; 7:10–11, 13; 8:2, 6, 10, 13).

But now, being identified with Christ, believers are dead to the Law. Like a widow released from marital obligations, so believers are **released from the Law** and its arousal to sin. The purpose of this release “from the Law” is **so that they may serve** (a better rendering is “be slaves”; cf. “slave[s]” in 6:6, 16 [thrice], 17–18, 20, 22) **in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code**. The word “Spirit” may be “spirit” (lowercase “s”) to contrast with the written document, the Law. The thought then is that believers do not live by the “oldness” of the Law but by the “newness” of a regenerated spirit. Or “Spirit” may refer to the Holy Spirit, the Source of new life. (Cf. comments on “the Spirit” and “the letter,” 2 Cor. 3:6.)

2. THE LAW AND SIN (7:7–13)

The involvement of the Mosaic Law in the discussion of a believer’s identification with Christ and death to sin raises a question about the Law’s relationship to sin.

7:7–8. **Is the Law sin?** Paul’s response again was a vehement denial. **Certainly not!** (*mē genoito*; cf. comments on 3:4) The Law arouses sin (7:5) but that does not mean the Law itself is sin. In fact, Paul said later, the Law is holy (v. 12) and spiritual (v. 14). Paul went on to explain that the Law made sin **known** (cf. 3:19–20). Then to be specific, he mentioned coveting. The Law’s prohibition, **Do not covet** (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21), makes people want **to covet** all the more. Paul knew **sin** as a principle and specifically, covetousness as an expression of it, and that knowledge came **through the Law**. Paul described how it worked. The indwelling principle of

sin, seizing the opportunity (lit., “taking a start point” [*aphormēn*, a base for military operations or for an expedition]) **afforded by the commandment** (cf. Rom. 7:11), **produced in me every kind of covetous desire**. The Law is not the cause of the act of sin; the principle or nature of sin within an individual is. But the Law’s specific commandments stimulate the sin principle into acts that violate the commandments and give those acts the character of transgression (4:15; cf. 3:20; 5:13b, 20a). As Paul concluded, **Apart from Law, sin is dead**. This does not mean that sin has no existence without the Law (cf. 5:13), but that without the Law sin is less active, for the Law arouses “sinful passions” (7:5).

It is significant that, beginning with verse 7 and continuing through this chapter, the Apostle Paul turned to the first person singular, presenting his personal experience. Up to this point he had used the third person, the second person, and even the first person plural. But now he described his own experience, allowing the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to his readers.

7:9–12. Some generalize the words, **Once I was alive apart from Law**, to refer to the experience of mankind in the period between the Fall and the giving of the Mosaic Law. But there is no basis for this. Evidently the apostle was speaking of his personal experience as a child and perhaps even a youth prior to his awareness and understanding of the full impact of God’s commandments. The clause, **but when the commandment came**, does not speak of the giving of the Mosaic Law, but the dawning of the significance of the commandment (“Do not covet”) on Paul’s mind and heart before his conversion. The result was that the principle of **sin** within made its presence and power known (it **sprang to life**) in his violations of the **commandment**. As a result Paul **died** spiritually (cf. 6:23a) under the sentence of judgment by the Law he had broken. The commandment not to covet was given to help people see how to live, but it actually produced **death** because of the sin in human hearts.

Repeating from 7:8 his description of sin’s relationship to the commandment, Paul declared that **sin ... deceived me**. Apart from the Law, the principle of sin was dormant and inactive; but using the commandments of the Law, it demonstrated its controlling force over one’s actions. So this sin deceived him (*exēpatēsen*, “led [him] astray”; cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14) and **put him to death** (lit., “killed” him), not physically but spiritually. Sin is like a personal enemy within (cf. Gen. 4:7). **The Law**, instead of being sin (Rom. 7:7), **is holy, and the commandment** not to covet (which, as a part of the Law, represents the whole) **is holy, righteous, and good**.

7:13. Paul then considered still another possible misunderstanding in his effort to clarify the relationship of sin and the Law. Taking the last-mentioned quality of the commandment (“good”), he asked, **Did that which is good, then, become death to me?** Once again his immediate response was a vehement denial (**By no means!** *mē genoito*; cf. comments on 3:4), followed by an explanation. The principle of **sin**, not the Law, becomes **death** to an individual (5:12). But **sin** uses **the commandment**, the **good** thing, as an agent or instrument to keep on producing **death in** a person and thereby **sin** is seen as **utterly** (lit., “exceedingly”) **sinful**. The internal principle or nature of sin uses the specific commandments of the Law of God—in part and in the whole; a “holy, righteous, and good” thing in itself—to manifest its true nature as opposed to God and to demonstrate its power within individuals.

3. THE BELIEVER AND SIN (7:14–25).

7:14. Understanding the conflict in personal sanctification involves seeing the relationship between a believer and his indwelling sin. In verse 14 Paul made a transition from the previous subject (vv. 7–13) to the next one. The statement, **The Law is spiritual** (cf. v. 12), is not only the conclusion of Paul’s previous argument but also an accepted fact among people. The Law

comes from God who is Spirit (John 4:24) and expresses God's will for human living. Paul, using himself as the example, said the problem is that **I am unspiritual** (*sarkinos*, "fleshy, made of flesh"). In addition he was **sold as a slave** (perf. tense, "had been sold and remained in that state") **to sin** (lit. "under the sin"; cf. "under sin" in Rom. 3:9).

In relating his personal experience in 7:14–25 Paul consistently used the present tense whereas he had used the imperfect and aorist tenses. Obviously he was describing his present conflict as a Christian with indwelling sin and its continuing efforts to control his daily life. The clause, "sold under sin" (KJV), describes an unregenerate person; but sin also resides in a believer, who is still subject to sin's penalty of physical death. As a result, indwelling sin continues to seek to claim what it considers its property even after one has become a Christian.

7:15–17. At the start Paul confessed, **I do not understand what I do** (lit., "what I am producing I do not know"). He was like a little boy whose honest answer to why he did something wrong is, "I don't know." A person's actions are at the dictate of someone or something besides himself that he really does not understand and cannot explain. Paul continued to present this quandary he faced: **For what I want to do I do not do** (lit., "For what I am wishing, that I am not doing," *prassō*) and conversely, **What I hate I do** (lit., "What I am hating that I am doing," *poiō*). No difference of emphasis can be put in this verse on the two Greek verbs translated "do" (even though such difference is significant elsewhere), because the occurrence of those two verbs is reversed in verse 19. This statement can be made by an unregenerate person in his highest moral and ethical moments, but it can also be said by a regenerate person. There is no reason to conclude that Paul was not describing his experience as a believer at that time. Paul said, **I agree that the Law is good**. Here the Greek word for "good" is *kalos*, "beautiful, noble, excellent," whereas in verse 12 it is *agathē*, "useful, upright." Because of this evidence, Paul concluded, **It is no longer I myself who do it** (lit., "no longer am I myself producing it"; cf. v. 15) **but it is sin living in me** (lit., "but the dwelling-in-me sin"). This does not mean Paul was avoiding personal responsibility for his actions; he was speaking of the conflict between his desires and the sin within him.

7:18–20. Paul's experience convinced him that "the Law is good" (v. 16). But he also concluded, **I know that nothing good lives in me**. Then he hastened to explain that by the phrase "in me" he meant **in my sinful nature** (*sarki*, "flesh"; cf. vv. 5, 25). This is not literal physical or material flesh, but the principle of sin that expresses itself through one's mind and body.

As support for this conclusion Paul explained, **For I have the desire to do what is good** ("For to wish is present with me" [or "is lying beside me"]), **but I cannot carry it out** (lit., "but to produce the good is not"). Paul then repeated in slightly different words the statement of verse 15b, and then in verse 20 he repeated in effect his statement in verse 17. Paul recognized that even as a believer he had an indwelling principle of **sin** that once owned him as a slave and that still expressed itself through him to do things he did **not want to do** and not to do things he desired to do. This is a problem common to all believers.

7:21–23. Paul was a person who tried to learn from his experiences, **so** now he concluded, **I find this law at work**. This is not the Mosaic Law, of course, but a principle drawn from experience. Also in 8:2 "law" (*nomos*) means principle. This law or principle is the reality of ever-present **evil** in an individual whenever he wants **to do good**. Paul held fast to the fact that, as he said, **In my inner being I delight in God's Law** (cf. 7:25). "In my inner being" is literally, "according to the inner man." (The "inner man" is used in the Gr. NT also in 2 Cor. 4:16 and Eph. 3:16.) Delight in God's Law was the psalmist's response, stated repeatedly in Psalm 119

(e.g., vv. 16, 24, 47; cf. Ps. 1:2). Because of regeneration, a believer has a new nature or capacity for loving spiritual truths. Yet, recognizing the facts of experience, Paul said he saw **another law** or principle **at work** within him. This is the principle of sin. Paul called it “sin living in me” (Rom. 7:17, 20), “evil” **right there with me** (v. 21), and “the sinful nature” (vv. 5, 18, 25).

This principle is continually doing two things: **waging war against the law** of the believer’s **mind and making him a prisoner of the law of sin at work within his members**. The indwelling principle of sin is constantly mounting a military campaign against the new nature, trying to gain victory and control (cf. “slave” in vv. 14, 25 and “slaves” in 6:17, 19–20), of a believer and his actions. The new nature is called “the law” of the “mind” (*noos*; cf. 7:25) because it has the capacity for perceiving and making moral judgments. Further, despite a believer’s identification with Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection and his efforts to have Christ-honoring attitudes and actions, he cannot in his own power resist his indwelling sin nature. In and of himself he repeatedly experiences defeat and frustration.

7:24–25. Paul expressed that frustration in his exclamation, **What a wretched man I am!** Significantly Paul’s description of himself is part of John’s picture of the church of Laodicea—“wretched” (Rev. 3:17). The apostle then asked, **Who will rescue me from this body of death?** Paul recognized that as long as he was in his mortal body he would face the conflict with the indwelling sin principle and would have defeat in his own strength. Here he wrote of the “body of death”; in Romans 6:6 he wrote of the “body of sin.” These mean that sin works through one’s human body (cf. 6:6, 12–13, 19; 7:5, 23), bringing death (6:16, 21, 23; 7:10–11, 13; 8:10). Paul’s answer to this question was triumphant and immediate: **Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Paul in this answer was looking to the final triumph of Jesus Christ for His people. Just as believers are identified with Him in His death and resurrection by faith here and now, so they will join their resurrected and exalted Lord for all eternity in new bodies, free forever from the presence of sin (8:23; Phil. 3:20–21). Meanwhile, in this life, Paul concluded, **I myself in my mind** (*noi*; cf. *noos* in Rom. 7:23) **am a slave** (lit., “am serving as a slave”) **to God’s Law, but in the sinful nature** (*sarki*, “flesh”; cf. vv. 5, 18, where *sarki*, from *sarx*, is also trans. “sinful nature”) **a slave to the law of sin** (cf. “slave to sin,” v. 14). While awaiting freedom from the presence of sin, believers still face conflicts between their regenerated minds (or new natures or capacities) and their sin natures or capacities.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1700). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

7:15–25 This section is hotly debated. In one view, the internal struggle was Paul’s (and others’) personal Christian experience. In Christ, all Christians want to do what pleases God (vv. 18, 22) but find themselves frustrated in their efforts because of the lingering presence of sin’s power within (vv. 17, 20, 23). The struggle continues in this age, with progress and victory possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit (8:2, 5, 11) and ultimately when Christ returns (8:23). Alternatively, some scholars argue that here Paul spoke of the position of Jewish people (and thus of himself as a formerly unbelieving Jew) living in frustration under the law. In this view Paul described the unbeliever’s struggle, experiencing defeat apart from Christ. He was a slave to the law of sin (cp. 7:25 and 8:2) and struggled with the body of death (cp. 7:24 and 6:6).