

# Romans

## Chapter 7

### I. The Doctrine of Sanctification (continued)

In Romans 7 we find Paul continuing his teaching on the doctrine of sanctification. He does this by analyzing the role of the law in the life of one who has been justified by faith, the role of the law in general, and the constant struggle in the life of a believer between the flesh and the spirit.

### C. Sanctification Implies We Are Dead to the Law - Romans 7:1-6

Paul continues his discussion in Romans 7 of the foundations of the doctrine of sanctification by showing that we are dead to the law. In Romans chapter 6 he has already shown that sanctification begins with a realization that we are dead to the sin principle (verses 1-14) and as a direct result we have been freed from the bondage of sin to serve a new master, Christ (verses 15-23). He now continues by showing that we are also dead to the requirements and penalty of the law.

#### 1. The Axiom - Romans 7:1

**7:1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?**

Paul is very good at strengthening his arguments with axiomatic truths. He does this in Romans 6:16 and again in Romans 7:1. Briefly stated, the axiom in Romans 7:1 is this, "the law holds power over a man only as long as a man is alive." If you are witness to a shoot-out where the assailant is killed by the police, you do not see them reading the man his rights. Nor is he handcuffed and driven away in a paddy-wagon. The reason is that the law has no power over a dead criminal however heinous his crimes might be. Adolf Hitler was never tried in the Nuremburg war trials since he was dead. God's law is no different, it has power over a man only as long as the man is alive.

Before we can analyze the rest of this chapter, we need to define what Paul means when he speaks of the law. Basically, the law has three major components: 1) the ceremonial law, 2) the judicial law, and 3) the moral law. The ceremonial and judicial law was given to Moses on Sinai to define the various sacrifices required to cover sin and the legal code that was to be used to govern the nation of Israel. These two components of the law are no longer valid since the ceremonial law was rendered inoperative by Christ's once-for-all death on the cross (see Hebrews 9-10), and the judicial law was rendered inoperative by the cessation of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. The third component, however, remains since it is not based in the need for pictures or in the existence of a nation, but in the unchanging character of God. It is this component of the law that is best understood as being meant by Paul in this passage. For Paul to be referring to the ceremonial or judicial law would be incomprehensible, especially when his audience is made up of a

majority of Gentiles and the fact that the ceremonial and judicial law have been superseded in the church.

## 2. The Analogy - Romans 7:2-3

**7:2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. 7:3 So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.**

Paul now supports the axiom by presenting a real-life situation, that of marriage. He states that a woman is bound in marriage to her husband only as long as he lives. Once he is dead, she is freed from that union, which enables her to marry again without being called an adulteress. This application of the law was evident to all. The Sadducees themselves tried to corner Christ in Matthew 22 by showing the seeming absurdity of a resurrection in which a woman could wind up with seven different husbands. Although their understanding of the resurrection was in error, they did correctly understand that the death of a partner in a marriage dissolves the marriage bond and thus freed the surviving partner to marry again.

Contrary to what many teach, this passage is not dealing with divorce and remarriage. Many would have us think that Paul is teaching that death is the only way out of a marriage bond. What we must be careful to see is that Paul's main theme in this passage is not marriage, it is the law. By asserting that Paul is teaching against divorce in this passage is to miss the point of the entire passage. We must never make the mistake of making obtuse interpretations of passages that contradict the rest of the Scripture where the same idea is taught more clearly.

## 3. The Application - Romans 7:4-5

**7:4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.**

Paul now takes his analogy in verses 2-3 and applies them to the lives of believers by showing that we have become dead to the law. In making this analogy, Paul reiterates the concept of Romans 6:2-4, that being our identification with Christ. Because in God's sight we have been crucified with Christ, we have been freed from the demands of the law since the law only has power over the living. The word translated "are become dead" is the Greek word *ethanatouthate* which carries the idea of being violently put to death by an outside force. In other words, our identification with Christ "violently killed" our former self of sin. Additionally, the law demanded death for sin. Since we have been identified in Christ's death, we have paid the penalty for sin thus satisfying the requirements of the law.

Note further that it is we who have become dead to the law, not the law which has become dead to us. In other words, Paul could have accomplished

the same argument by stating that the law was "put to death." He does not do this, however, because the law is not dead, to us or to anyone else. It is we who have become dead to the demands and penalty of the law. Remember that "death" carries the idea of separation. We have been separated from the legal demands and hence legal penalties of the law through our death with Christ.

This death has two results. One, we have been released from the demands of the law to be married to Christ. This mirrors closely the analogy in the last part of Romans chapter 6 where we find that we have been freed from slavery to sin to become free to serve Christ. Secondly, because of our freedom from the law, we are able to bring forth fruit unto God. We must understand that it is only because of our new life in Christ that we have the capacity to truly bear eternal fruit. The reason for this is simple, the fruit of the Spirit is internal attitudes which were unattainable while we were in sin.

Paul continues in verse 5, by stating that while we were in sin, the passions within us brought forth fruit unto death. This is precisely where many people get fouled up in their thinking. They think that they can please God apart from Christ. The truth of the matter is nothing they do can merit one brownie point with God. They lack the capacity to bear any kind of true fruit. Even the good that they do is not done from Godly attitudes produced by the Spirit, but from selfish motives. It is only under the power of the Spirit that eternal fruit can be produced.

#### 4. The Affirmation - Romans 7:6

**7:6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.**

Because of our identification with Christ, we are delivered from the law. Note that we are not delivered from the law in the sense we are under no obligation to obey it, but we are delivered from the penalties and bondage of trying to keep the law to merit the favor of God. The word translated "delivered" is the Greek word *katargathamen* which comes from the root word *katargeo*. This word carries the idea of annulment, voidance, release from the requirements of. It is the same word used in Romans 3:31 and translated "make void." We have been discharged from the penalty and bondage of the law.

Not only have we been released from the law, but we are dead to our former bondage. We are dead to the sin principle which ruled us in our former life.

Why have we been released? It is to serve God in the newness of spirit, not in the oldness of the letter. It is imperative that we understand that God is not interested in purely external righteousness. He is, and always has been, interested in the internal attitudes of the heart. A cursory reading of the Psalms will reveal that David was a man who longed for the inward attitudes of righteousness. It is on this issue the Pharisees missed the whole point of the Old Testament. Paul asserts that it is our death to the law that frees us for the first time to truly serve God the way He wants us to, from a heart of love. The people of Isaiah's time served God with their mouths and honored him with their lips, but their hearts were far from him. God longs

for us to serve him out of love, not bondage, out of a heart of gratitude, not obligation.

#### D. The Role of the Law - Romans 7:7-13

Paul now turns his attention to the primary question in the minds of his readers at this point. That question is this, "Since the law cannot save then what is the purpose of the law?" This is no trivial question since the Jew had been taught all their life of the importance of the law. The entire life of the average Pharisee revolved around studying the law and applying it to the many situations of life. The Jewish commentaries on the law, produced many years after the New Testament period, consisted of thousands of pages of laws and interpretations. Paul must answer this question regarding the law or else all of his logic to this point will come tumbling down. He does this by 1) showing that the law reveals sin, 2) the law wakens sin, 3) the law destroys the sinner, and 4) the law reveals the true character of sin.

##### 1. The Law Reveals Sin - Romans 7:7

**7:7 What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.**

Paul begins his discussion on the place of the law by asking the obvious question at this point, "Is the law sin?" In other words, is the law a bad thing or a good thing? His immediate reply is the strongest negative expression in the Greek, *me genoita*, or "God forbid." To have said that the law is sin would be to contradict the multitudinous passages in the Old Testament, most prominently Psalms 119, which held the law in highest esteem.

The reason that the law is not sin immediately follows this question. The law only reveals sin, it is not in and of itself sin. The same idea can be said of light. When we turn on the light in a darkened room and see the dirt, we do not say that the light is evil, the dirt is. All the light has done is to reveal the dirt that was always there and not seen. The same holds true of the law. It is not sin in and of itself, it only reveals sin.

In illustrating this, Paul uses the tenth commandment regarding coveting. He probably does this because of all the commandments, this was probably the most difficult to keep and the most internal. Coveting is a sin of the attitude that is very difficult to control. We may be able to cover external manifestations of coveting, but we cannot overcome the internal attitudes apart from the Holy Spirit. Paul then uses this specific commandment to show the dormancy of sin until the light of the law reveals sin for what it really is.

Remember the verse back in Romans 5:13 where Paul states "**For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**" What Paul is saying in that verse is that sin existed with or without the existence of the law. Before the giving of the law men still murdered, lied, stole, and committed other acts of sin. However, these acts were not imputed to them since they did not have possession of God's standard. When the law did come, however, sin was revealed and imputed to men since men now understood the expectations of God.

We must also make the distinction between the sinful nature of man and sin. Acts of sin are not the primary cause of death, the nature of sin is. In chapter 5 Paul notes that even though there was no law from Adam to Moses, death still reigned. Why? Because death does not need the law to first condemn a man since it is the sinful nature of man that results in death.

## 2. The Law Wakens Sin - Romans 7:8

**7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.**

The second thing that the law does is to awaken sin in the lives of men. The word translated "concupiscence" is *epithumiea* which means "lust." In other words, Paul is saying that the commandment "Thou shalt not covet" was revealed in the law (verse 7) and as a result awakened all manner of lusts in his heart. It can be likened unto a sign placed on a lawn that says "Stay off the Grass." In most places, it would be better to place a sign that said "Please Step on the Grass" since the existence of a standard arouses the desire to trespass that standard. It goes back to the root of sin which is self. Sin starts with the idea that we make the standard. Satan sinned when he exalted himself above God and by the same token we sin when we exalt our desires above the desires of God.

Paul goes on to say that without the law, sin is dead. In other words, the strength of sin is the existence of the law, or, sin is defined by the existence of the law. Without a sign informing us to travel 55 miles an hour we can go any speed we wish. However, once we see the posted sign we are obligated to abide by it. Paul is not saying here that the "sin principle" is dead. The mere fact of our being born is in and of itself sufficient to condemn us to hell for eternity. Paul is saying that the specific sins we commit are dead without a standard that defines them.

## 3. The Law Kills the Sinner - Romans 7:9-11

**7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 7:10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.**

The third thing that the law does is to kill the sinner. When there is no law we can rest assured that we have done nothing wrong. However, once the law is revealed we have no excuse for our actions. Paul continues his use of coveting by stating that without the revealed law, coveting was all right. There is no standard therefore there is no transgression. Once the commandment came, though, sin was brought to life and killed him.

Note the result of the entrance of the law in verse 10, death! The very standard that was given to bring life by obedience to it brought death because of the transgression. Paul repeats the point he made in verse 7 which is that the law is not sin, the law reveals sin and demands the necessary payment. Further, sin awakened and killed the sinner once God's requirements were known.

#### 4. The Law Reveals the True Character of Sin - Romans 7:12-13

**7:12 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. 7:13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.**

Lest anyone be confused regarding the law at this point, Paul makes a specific statement showing that the law is good. A cursory reading of Psalms 119 will prove this beyond any question. The problem is not the law, the problem is the sin.

Verse 13 shows that the ultimate result of the law is to show the true nature and depth of sin. It is like the light we mentioned earlier. Light is not evil in and of itself, light merely shows the existence and location of the dirt. Man is condemned with or without the law, this is amply attested to in Romans 5:13 and Romans 1:18-32. The existence of light does not change the fact that dirt exists in a dirty room. All the light does is to show the extent and location of that dirt. The law works the same way with men. It shows the extent and location of sin and forces man to come to grips with the fact of his sinfulness and force him to turn to God for answers. It is at this point the grace of God is activated in the sinner's life and salvation is made available through the acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ.

#### E. The Believer and Sin - Romans 7:14-25

This section of Romans contains one of the great controversies of Scripture, namely, "Who is Paul talking about?" There are three basic answers to this question: 1) he is talking about unbelievers, 2) he is talking about carnal believers, 3) he is talking about mature believers. A full analysis of this question is far beyond our consideration at this point, but it is safe to say with a tremendous amount of evidence, that Paul is talking about mature believers. The reasons for this are 1) he speaks in such a manner as to be describing himself, 2) the mature believer idea fits the context of this passage, and 3) the closer a person walks with God the more sensitive they are to sin. In analyzing this passage we will look at the struggle and the solution.

##### 1. The Struggle - Romans 7:14-23

The struggle between sin and the believer takes the form of three woes or laments. These three laments start with "For we know" (verse 14), "For I know" (verse 18), and "I find then" (verse 21). In each of the three woes we find a condition, a proof of that condition, and a resultant struggle with that condition.

##### a. Woe Number 1 - Sold Under Sin - Romans 7:14-17

**7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. 7:16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. 7:17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.**

The first woe described by Paul is the fact of his own carnality. Carnality is used to refer to the fact that all believers still retain the sinful flesh from which springs all manner of evil. At first, this concept may sound like it contradicts Romans 6, in which Paul proves that we are dead to the sin principle, but in actuality it does not.

The reason for this is that although we have indeed become dead to the sin principle, we still reside in our physical bodies with all of its sinful desires and habits. Although we have been freed from the obligation to serve it, we still must say "no" whenever it makes demands on us. This is the paradox of the Christian life. Although God has given us power over the flesh, we must choose to obey God instead of the flesh. This is the struggle Paul mentions in verses 15-16. He knows what he is to do, the problem is that he does not always do it. Verse 16 states that his failure to do that which is right does not make the law bad, it just shows his own evil. The source of that evil is found in verse 17, the sin that dwells in Paul.

How can that be! Paul spent a whole chapter, (chapter 6), showing that we are dead to sin and have been freed from its bondage to serve Christ. How can he turn around in chapter 7 and state that sin still dwells in us? The answer to this is to understand the difference between the sin principle, the new life of the believer, and the flesh.

When we were justified before God, the sin principle within us was crucified with Christ. This can be understood as the old man. 2 Corinthians 5:17 specifically states that **"if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."** In other words, the sin principle in the life of a believer has been rendered inoperative. On the other hand, anyone who is in Christ has had a new life created within them. This can be understood as the new man. Lastly, the flesh is that part of us in which the sin principle held sway and as a result is still under the influence of the what it finds natural, that is, sin.

By understanding these differences, we can understand verse 17. Paul, the new Paul created in Christ, does not nor cannot sin. However, the part of Paul consisting of his flesh can do nothing but sin. It is here where we find the struggle. It is not between an old nature and a new nature within us, instead it is between the flesh and our spirit. Perhaps this concept can be seen more clearly in the following quote from *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Ephesians*, page 164.

Why, then, do we continue to sin after we become Christians? As Paul explains in Romans 7, "No longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not" (vv. 17-18; cf. 20). Sin is still resident in the flesh, so that we are inhibited and restrained from being able to give full and perfect expression to the new nature. Possessing the fullness of the divine nature without the corruption of our unredeemed flesh is a promise we will realize only in the future (cf. Rom 8:23; Phil 3:20-21; 2 Pet 1:3-4). Biblical terminology, then, does not say that a Christian has two different natures. He has but one nature, the new nature in Christ. The old self dies and

the new self lives; they do not coexist. It is not a remaining old nature but the remaining garment of sinful flesh that causes Christians to sin. The Christian is a single new person, a totally new creation, not a spiritual schizophrenic. It is the filthy coat of remaining humanness in which the new creation dwells that continues to hinder and contaminate his living. The believer as a total person is transformed but not yet wholly perfect. He has residing sin but no longer reigning sin (cf. Rom 6:14). He is no longer the old man corrupted but is the new man created in righteousness and holiness, awaiting full salvation (cf. Rom. 13:11).

**b. Woe Number 2 - The Garment of Flesh - Romans 7:18-20**

**7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 7:19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.**

The second woe is the filthy garment of sinful flesh that we reside in. Paul states very specifically that it is his flesh in which no good thing dwells. His spirit desires righteousness, but his humanness hinders the expression of that desire. We will not say more about this since the preceding quote pretty much explains the fact that our flesh is the real culprit in our sin, not our spirit.

**c. Woe Number 3 - The Principle of Sin in Our Flesh - Romans 7:21-23**

**7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.**

The third woe is the principle of sin which resides in our members. This fits with our previous assertion that the source of sin in our lives is the flesh in which we reside, not the sin principle which was nailed to the cross. The word "law" in these verses can be best translated "principle." Paul finds two principles, the principle of sin in his members, and the principle of the spirit in his mind.

Paul describes the condition of his life that whenever he would do good, evil was close at hand. We have the same problem. Evil is not very far from us in word, deed, or action. Verse 22 shows Paul's true attitude towards the law, that of delight. For the true Christian the law of God is something that is eagerly obeyed from a heart of love, not obligation. Unfortunately, we have the principle of sin which wars against this desire and it is here where the conflict is joined.

**2. The Solution - Romans 7:24-25**

**7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then**



**with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.**

The climax of this passage is found in verse 24, "**O wretched man that I am!**" Paul eagerly longed to live in accordance with God's law out of a heart of love but was constantly faced with the realization of the sin in his flesh that fought him all the way.

Verse 24 could be referring to an ancient form of punishment in which the body of a murder victim was tied to the body of the murderer. As the murder victim's body decayed, the decay ate its way into the body of the murderer thus killing him. This is a vivid picture of the body of sin that we carry around which is full of rottenness and decay.

If that was the end of the passage, the life of a Christian would be bleak indeed. However, the wonderful truth of the matter is that Jesus Christ has delivered us from the body of sin. Some day we will put off this body of sin and receive a new and glorified body in which there is no sin principle. It is like someone delivering the murderer from the body of his victim. The sad thing, though, is that without Christ there is no deliverance and the decay and sin of the flesh will someday kill the unbeliever and condemn them to an eternity apart from God. We will constantly struggle with sin in our flesh, but someday we will be delivered and presented holy before the Lord to spend eternity with him.