

# The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

## **Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness** (6:1 - 8:39)

Paul knew that the Jewish believers would have many questions about the relationship between the law and their faith, so he dedicated the next section of Scripture <sup>Romans 7:1-8:4</sup> to expanding on his earlier explanation of this issue <sup>Romans 6:14-15</sup>. Paul taught that the law: (1) cannot condemn a believer <sup>7:1-6</sup>, (2) convicts both unbelievers and believers of sin <sup>7:7-13</sup>, (3) cannot deliver a believer from sin <sup>7:14-25</sup>, (4) can be fulfilled by Spirit-filled believers <sup>8:1-4</sup>.

**7:1-3 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? 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. 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.** The only time mankind is capable of violating the letter or the heart of the worldly or Biblical laws is during their life on Earth. Paul then decided to illustrate his point <sup>v.1</sup> with a simple analogy using the Biblical law concerning marriage <sup>Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-12, 1 Corinthians 7:</sup> in the case of her husband's death, a married woman is no longer held accountable by the law to her dead husband <sup>1 Corinthians 7:39</sup>.

**7:4 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.**

At salvation, a believer transitions from captivity ('marriage') under ("died to") the law <sup>v.6</sup> to "[belonging] to another" (becoming a bride to Christ <sup>Isaiah 62:5, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:21-32</sup>). This transformed life results in a change of attitudes <sup>Galatians 2:19-20</sup> and behavior <sup>Philippians 1:9-11</sup>.

It can be determined from the Greek that the verb "died" (*thanatoō*) implies two things: (1) death was at a moment in time, and was complete and final, and (2) someone else (God) initiated the death (literally: "you were made to die"). So, in response to faith in Jesus, the believer is made forever dead (i.e., free <sup>Colossians 1:22</sup>) to the condemnation of the law <sup>Romans 8:1</sup>.

**7:5 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.** Paul reminded his readers that everyone begins life by being “controlled by the [flesh]”. Life “in the flesh” is characterized by irresistible urges (“passions”) to think and do evil <sup>Ephesians 2:3</sup>. These actions are fueled (“aroused”) by the law, which defines the “forbidden fruit” (that which must be left alone as a test of man’s resolve <sup>Leviticus 19:23-25</sup>) attractive to the fallen nature, but leads to a harvest of eternal death <sup>Galatians 6:7-8</sup> (bearing “fruit for death”). Saints “[crucify] the flesh” <sup>Galatians 5:24</sup>.

The Greek word for “sinful nature” (*sarx*: flesh) refers to both (1) man’s physical (non-moral) being <sup>John 1:14</sup> and (2) man’s unredeemable (morally-evil) humanness <sup>Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 2:1-3</sup>.

**7:6 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.** Continuing the theme of the relationship between law and believer, Paul spoke of (being “released from”) “dying to...the law”, which does not permit freedom to sin without consequence <sup>Romans 6:1-2,15</sup>. The death refers to the association with Christ’s death, thus eliminating the condemnation of the law <sup>Galatians 3:13-14</sup>. The “new way of the Spirit” specifies a new state of mind produced by the Spirit that is manifested by a desire and ability to keep God’s law, unlike the “old way”.

Paul’s use of the phrase “serve in the new way of the Spirit” here is equivalent to his earlier reference to being a “slave to righteousness” <sup>Romans 6:18,19,22</sup>, indicating the genuine believer not only has an ability to do what is right, but they will actually do what is right <sup>1 Corinthians 1:8</sup>.

Paul used himself (“I”) as an example of unredeemed mankind <sup>v.7-12</sup> and true Christians <sup>v.13-25</sup>.

**7:7-12 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.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.** Paul made sure no one concluded that the Law of Moses was evil, but reiterated the principle of sin being revealed “through the law” <sup>Romans 3:20</sup>. The revelation of

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sin can produce two results: (1) in an unredeemed person, the law creates an “opportunity” to begin and enjoy sinning that comes naturally to a rebellious sinner and (2) in a Christian, the law reminds them of the standard they’re called to by God. Without the law, sin exists, but it is much less active (“dead”) <sup>Romans 4:15</sup>; however, when the law (“commandment”) “came”, then sinful actions (rebellion against God <sup>Genesis 3:1-6</sup>) became obvious, thus producing “death” <sup>Genesis 2:15-17</sup>. Paul’s ‘dying’ was in stark contrast to his previous self-righteous perspective <sup>Philippians 3:3-9</sup> and made him fully aware of his wicked condition <sup>1 Timothy 1:15</sup>.

In theory, perfect obedience to the law would result in eternal life, but it can only bring death because no one can attain that perfection; however, Paul concluded that this does not make the Law evil <sup>1 Timothy 1:8</sup>, but “holy, righteous and good” <sup>Psalms 19:7-11</sup>, since the law is a perfect expression of God’s “holy, righteous and good” character <sup>Isaiah 5:16</sup>. Once saved, God expects saints to live by His Law <sup>Matthew 5:17-20</sup>, in the power of the Holy Spirit <sup>Acts 1:8, Ephesians 3:16-19</sup>.

The sinner wishes to live in their 'self-will'; the believer desires to live in 'God's-will' <sup>Mark 3:35</sup>.

The concept of the 'law coming' means a sudden understanding of the law's true requirements.

**7:13 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.** In summary, Paul reemphasized that sin, and not the good law, is the cause of death, and the purpose of the law is to make mankind aware of the true nature of sin <sup>Romans 3:20</sup> and their resulting need for salvation <sup>Galatians 3:19-22</sup>.

Scholars disagree on Paul's perspective in the remaining chapter text <sup>v.14-25</sup>: Did he describe his life prior to and following salvation or just during his time as a believer? In these notes, the latter viewpoint will be embraced, while addressing Paul's many confusing statements.

**7:14-20 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 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. 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. 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.** The Greek word translated “unspiritual” (*sarkinos* : worldly, carnal) seems to indicate Paul might have been describing

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a time before his conversion; however, in this study it will be assumed he is conveying the struggle of believers, because until physical death, they all carry around their unredeemable flesh <sup>Romans 8:3-8</sup>. Paul's flesh still desired sin, and was frustrating his inner desire to be obedient to God's will. What Paul described here is the battle between the flesh and the spirit for control of the soul <sup>James 4:1, 1 Peter 2:11</sup> – with the flesh constantly pushing him toward sin and the spirit always drawing him (and all Christians) toward righteousness <sup>Galatians 5:16-18</sup>.

If Christians will make a definitive decision to seek righteousness in their life style/behavior, guided by an intimate relationship with the Lord (through prayer, Biblical study and service), then God will provide His blessings in abundance <sup>Matthew 5:6, 6:33</sup>.

Some have suggested Paul promoted dualism (later Gnosticism), which placed all responsibility for sin on the flesh and none on the soul, but this is clearly not true of Paul <sup>v.14, 1 John 1:8-10</sup>.

**7:21-25a So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.**

**For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 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. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Four of the five references to "law" spoke of spiritual principles (the "law at work", "another law" and "law of sin" all point to wickedness, but the "law of my mind" denoting the believer's new inner self dedicated to righteousness <sup>2 Corinthians 5:17</sup>), with only one reference to God's law. As a follower of Jesus, Paul had "delight in God's law" <sup>Psalms 1:2, 40:8, 119:47</sup>, because the law is a comfort <sup>Psalms 119:52</sup> and a trusted guide <sup>Psalms 119:105</sup>. In agonizing over his sins <sup>Psalms 31:10</sup> from his pre-redeemed life, as well as his life at that time that still occasionally fell into sin, Paul harshly entitled himself a "wretched man", and rhetorically asked the question: "Who will rescue me...?". Paul called his flesh the "body of death", because his body will die even though his spirit and soul will not. He concluded this text by answering his question: Who? <sup>Revelation 5:2</sup> "Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul's question/answer point to a Biblical principle often overlooked: the physical death of the Christian is a blessing, because it separates them from their "body of death". <sup>1 Corinthians 15:50-57</sup>

**7:25b 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.** Paul concludes by summarizing the struggle he has been describing <sup>v.14-24</sup>:

Christians are both "a slave to God's law" (spirit), as well as a "slave to the law of sin" (flesh).

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