

GOD DELIVERS BELIEVERS FROM THE POWER OF LAW

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction: Paul has shown in this letter that a person who receives Jesus Christ by faith as Savior from sin is declared righteous by God (3:21 - 5:21). This positional truth guarantees eternal life, but it is not sufficient in itself to produce a day-by-day holy life. So, in chapters 6-8, Paul tells Christians how they can have victory over their sin nature that draws them into sin. He shows them that faith in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection not only saves them, but it sanctifies them so they can live holy lives. He begins to handle this problem by asking two questions in chapter six. (1) Can Christians practice sin, so God's grace may abound (6:1)? And (2) Can Christians allow for some sin in their lives, because they are not under Law, but under grace? (6:15)? In both cases the answer is, "God forbid" (6:2, 15). God makes no exceptions for the Christian to sin. Sin must not be tolerated in our lives. If we do sin, we must not cover up sin in our lives, or we will not prosper and produce good fruit in our lives. So, we must confess our sin immediately and forsake it (Pro 28:13). Paul gives us four clear reasons for not allowing any sin to remain in our lives (6:1 - 7:25).

First, we should not continue in sin because we died to sin when we were spiritually united with Christ on the cross for our salvation (6:2-3, 6-7, 11). Second, we have been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life (6:4-5, 8-11). Third, we must serve God, our new Master by our new nature, and no longer serve Satan, our old master, by the sin nature (6:15-23). Fourth, we are married to Christ to produce holy fruit that pleases God (6:22; 7:4).

Paul's statement that believers were no longer under the Law, but under grace needed further clarification (6:14-15; cf. 7:1-6). First, Paul explained the purpose of the Law of God was to reveal the wickedness of sin in us (7:7, 13). Second, Paul explained the nature of the Law is weak and cannot deliver us from our fleshly desires, (7:8-11, 15-25). but it is spiritual, holy, just and good (7:12, 14). Third, Paul found the answer for overcoming his sin nature that corrupted his spiritual life: it was the grace of God through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (7:25). Faith in God's grace not only saved him from the penalty of his sin in salvation, but it also delivered him from the power of sin in sanctification so he could live a new life of holiness. We cannot overcome sin by the Law of God (7:8-11); we must overcome sin by the grace of God through His Son (6:8-11, 14).

I. The Believer's Relationship to the Law — 7:1-6

A. The Principle Stated — 7:1

7:1 — "Know you not" - Paul begins his discussion on the relationship of the believer to the Law by asking a question: "Do you not know that the Law has dominion over a person as long as he lives?" The believers in Rome no doubt knew the answer, but Paul used that question to introduce to these believers the truth on how they can be delivered from the dominance of sin (the sin nature) in their lives.

NOTE: When "sin" is mentioned in Romans 7, sometimes it refers to the sin nature that causes the sin. The sin nature has been crucified by our union with Christ, but it can be "resurrected in our life," if we yield to the temptations of the sin nature.

"The law" — This probably refers to the Mosaic Law, but it would apply to Roman law or to any other law as well. The law has dominion (authority) over a person so long as he lives. It is obvious that no law has authority over a dead person.

B. The Principle Illustrated — 7:2-3

7:2-3 — Paul uses marriage to illustrate the principle of God's Law. His Law states the conditions of marriage and the violations of it. God's Law in marriage is valid until the death of either the man or the

woman. Death of the man or woman releases the living spouse from the law of marriage. He or she is free to marry again without committing adultery.

C. The Principle Applied — 7:4-6

7:4 — Death in the law of marriage is the primary point of Paul's illustration and it is the primary point in his application. The law of marriage demands that the man and his wife are bound to each other until one of them dies. When one dies, the living spouse is released from the demands of that law; he or she is dead to that law. So, we were bound to our sinful self (the old man received from Adam) until we were crucified with Christ when the body of sin was destroyed (6:6). We were set free from our union to our old self "by the body of Christ" (His death on the cross). Now we are free to be married to the living Christ and produce holy fruit for God (cf. 6:22; Jn 15:1-16).

7:5-6 — Paul contrasts our fruit before and after salvation. Before salvation we produced the poisonous fruit of sin unto death (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Our sinful passions were "by the Law." Paul explains how our sin nature uses the Law to produce these sinful passions (7:8, 11, 13). Our sinful nature wants to do what the Law forbids and the Law has no power to stop it.

"But now" — These two words indicate that Paul made a contrast between the position of a believer before and after salvation. Before salvation the Law revealed our sin, judged us and sentenced us to death, but after salvation we were "delivered" (discharged, loosed) from the Law. As a result, the Law no longer rules over us. Our death to the Law opened the way for a new relationship with Christ so that we might serve in newness of Spirit. This newness is either the presence of the Spirit or the power of the Spirit. The oldness of the letter refers to the legalist practice of the Law which had no power to enable a person to obey its demands from the heart. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, produces the righteous fruit in believers who walk with Him (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:23-24).

II. The Believer's Respect for the Law — 7:7-25

A. It Reveals the Sinfulness of Sin — 7:7-13

1. It produces a consciousness of sin — 7:7-11

There is some disagreement concerning the entire section from 7:7-25. Some believe it is Paul's actual experience while others believe it is only a hypothetical or an ideal struggle. It seems best to understand this was the actual experience of Paul, if we let 7:7-13 represent his pre-conversion experience and 7:14-25 his post-conversion experience. There are several strong arguments for this. First, there is a significant change of verb tenses at verse 14 from the past to the present. Second, Paul would have naturally had such an experience in that he was a devout Jew (Phil 3:4-6). Third, this is more or less the natural experience of any believer (Gal 3:3; 5:17).

In chapter 7 Paul clears up some misconceptions that some may have gotten from chapter 6. The Christian life is not a straight line upward to maturity. We sin and it hinders our spiritual growth until it is confessed and overcome. A believer must learn that Christian maturity is a work in progress by the Spirit of God until we see Christ in Heaven. This chapter prepares us for our blessings that are revealed in chapter 8.

7:7a — Because of what Paul had said about the Law, specifically that Law and sin are so closely related (5:20; 6:14), some might have thought that the Law was sin (sinful). This entire section, then, is designed to show that the law is good in itself (7:7-13), but it does not have the power to deliver us from the work of our sin nature (7:14-25).

7:7b — Paul resoundingly indicated that the Law was not sinful. He then introduced the purpose of the Law – it is to make sinners conscious of their sins, but it cannot justify them. Paul testifies that apart from the Law, he did not come to know sin as it is known by God. It does not mean he did not previously commit any sins before the Law convicted him. There are two different Greek words translated "known" in verse 7. The first has reference to a growing knowledge of sin by the Law, while the second refers to

a certain knowledge of sin by the Law. Paul was made fully conscious of many kinds of sins in his life by the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet."

7:8 — Paul described his past experience indicating that apart from the Law, sin was dead. This means that before the tenth commandment against coveting became real to him; his mind did not comprehend the potency of his sin nature. He is not saying that before this time, sin did not exist in his life, but that before this time, he did not recognize it. So, Paul's sin nature took the Law as an occasion (a military term for a base of operations) to work in him all kinds of sinful deeds in his mind and body. When the Law said, "Do not covet," Paul's sin nature took that commandment to provoke him to covet. Tell a person not to use drugs for a euphoric experience and a person's sin nature will give him or her a craving to do it. Our sin nature will use the Law to stir up all sorts of perversion against God's holy standard. We must preach the Gospel of Christ to counteract the misuse of the Law by our sin nature.

7:9 — "Alive" — Paul explains his own experience with the Law as it related to his life in the past. It does not refer to Paul's spiritual life, but rather to his respectable life as a self-righteous Pharisee (Phil 3:4-6). He was complacent and self-assured regarding his relationship with God. He was not personally aware of the sinfulness of his sin, though he had memorized the Law.

"Sin revived and I died" — This does not refer to his physical life, but to his spiritual life. At some point in his life, this tenth commandment convicted him of his sinfulness and he died. He realized the depravity of his life (cf. Mk 10:20). He saw himself as a sinful, condemned person before God, deserving eternal death (cp. 6:21, 23).

7:10 — The commandment, not to covet, could not give Paul spiritual life because he could not obey that command. We, like Paul, are born in sin and cannot keep God's commands. The Law was designed to direct us in the way of righteousness, but because of our sin nature, we are unable to follow His directions. So, it gives rise to sin and causes death instead of life. The sin nature causes us to rebel against the Law because it is holy and we are sinful. The rich young ruler is a good example. He came to Jesus to ask Him what he had to do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. Jesus knew that no one can keep the commandments, but that is what he and most Jews were doing to have eternal life, so Jesus used that approach to convict him. When he asked which commandments he should keep, Jesus named all the commandments that would show his love for others, except the one not to covet. He claimed that he kept all those commands. Then Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor and follow Him. Why did Jesus tell him to do that? He wanted to show him that he coveted his riches. He was like Paul; both were convicted by the tenth commandment.

7:11 — It was not the Law (tenth commandment), but sin that deceived and killed Paul. The commandment was the instrument which brought forth the potency of his sin nature. His sin nature (and acts of sin) deceived him as it always does (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14; Tit 3:3). Our sin nature makes the things we desire look good, but once it is attained, it proves to be evil (James 1:14; Eph 4:22; Heb 3:13) and all hope is gone and we die (v. 9).

2. It presents a standard of righteousness — 7:12-13

7:12 — "Wherefore" — This word indicates a logical deduction from verses 7-11. The Law is not sinful because it exposed Paul's sin nature; it was his sin nature that caused his death. The instrument that detects a deadly virus attacking our body is not hostile to our body; it is the virus that is attacking our body. The Law is the instrument to expose our sinful nature. So, the Law is "holy" (indicative of God's moral character), "just" (gives righteous judgment), and "good" (promises life if we would obey it).

7:13 — The Law then is not in anywise sinful. It is the sin nature that uses the Law to arouse the evil desires in believers (and in unbelievers) that is sinful. The sin nature is in rebellion against God and it brings death to those it deceives. On the other hand, it is God that uses the Law as His instrument to expose the exceeding wickedness of our sin nature and the depravity of sinners (cf. 1 Tim 1:8-10).

B. It Reveals the Sinfulness of Self — 7:14-25

Paul has shown why believers are not able to control sin in their lives by the Law. The Law gives an occasion for their sin nature to demonstrate its power in their lives. In this section, Paul tells his personal experience in trying to live a sanctified, holy life. Paul uses three lines of reasoning in the last section of this chapter that finally brought him to the right conclusion (cf. Alva J McClain, *Romans*, pp. 156-157). Each line of reasoning begins with a similar phrase: "We know" (v. 14); "I know" (v.18); "I find" (v. 21). For each line of reasoning, Paul states a fact, then proves the fact, and finally gives his conclusion.

1. The Law is spiritual, but the sinning believer is carnal — 7:14-17

7:14 — "We know" – The first **fact** that Paul reveals is the contrast between the Law and the sinful believer. The Law is spiritual; it is from God. The sinning believer is unspiritual; is carnal, a slave of fleshly desires. The Law is God's word of truth that directs us to the path of life. The rule of our sin nature is deceptive and it pulls us down the road to despair and disaster.

7:15-16 — Paul gives his **proof** that the Law is spiritual and he is carnal. He says that he does what he does not want to do and does not do what he wants to do. This is evidence that the Law is stabbing his conscience, but he cannot obey it. This is the dilemma of all carnal believers. How do believers become carnal? They yield to some sin that pleases the flesh and refuse to repent and confess it. This arouses their sin nature and it becomes the master of their lives. Their sin nature keeps them from obeying God, hardens their hearts, and takes them deeper into sin.

7:17 — Paul comes to this **conclusion**: "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." Paul is not excusing himself from his responsibility for committing sins. He is simply identifying the culprit as his sin nature. He is to blame for letting his sin nature take control of his life.

2. No good thing dwells in the flesh of a believer — 7:18-20

7:18 — "I know" – Paul discovers that in him (that is, in his flesh,) dwells no good thing. This is the second **fact** that Paul reveals about himself. Paul is not saying that the Holy Spirit no longer dwells in him; he is identifying his sin nature that is dwelling in him as the "no good thing." The sin nature that controlled him before he was converted, lost its power when he received Christ as his Savior. The Holy Spirit took control of his body until he quenched Him by sin (cf. 1 Thess 5:19). This allowed his sin nature to take quick control of his life. Believers may not think that one deliberate sin to satisfy their fleshly desire, an act of disobedience, could prevent him or her from living a life of victory over sin, but it will. And this was Paul's experience.

7:18-19 — Paul's **proof** that no good thing dwelt in his sin nature was his inability to do the good deeds that he wanted to do and to stop the bad deeds that he did not want to do. Jesus said no one can serve two masters (Mt 6:24). We will serve one or the other, but cannot serve both at the same time. The two masters in believers are the Holy Spirit and the sin nature (the flesh). The master we choose is known by the fruit in our lives. If the sin nature is our master, the fruit is disastrous (Gal 5:19-21). If the Spirit is our Master, the fruit is delightful (Gal 5:22-23).

7:20 — Paul's **conclusion** to his second line of reasoning is identical to his first line of reasoning in verses 14-17. The reason he cannot do the good that he wants to do and stop doing the evil that he does not want to do is the sin nature that is in control of his life. Believers will have this problem. They must not cover up their sin. They must identify the sin that they have done, repent, confess, and forsake it. This will remove the power of their sin nature (Prov 28:13). This must be done any time that they sin.

3. Good is desired by the believer, but evil is present with him — 7:21-25

7:21 — "I find" – Paul found a law that when he wanted to do good, evil is present with him. This is the third **fact** that Paul reveals to us. Evil was working against the law of his mind (his spiritual

desires). This evil law brought him as a captive to be ruled by his sin nature. He was taken captive by some unconfessed past sin, so he was unable to do the good thing that he wanted to do.

7:22, 23 — The **proof** of the above fact is now given. Paul delighted (had deep joy) in the Law of God in his inward man, which is proof he was a believer at this time in his life. But he discovered another law in his members that was at war with the law of his mind, his inward man. The inward man was Paul's mind (compare v. 22 with v. 25), which was his moral faculty enabling him to perform good or evil deeds.

7:24 — "Who shall deliver me?" – The result of this fierce battle between Paul's mind and his sin nature for the control of his life tormented his soul. He called himself a wretched man and cried out for deliverance. It was not a pessimistic cry of despair, for in the next verse he makes it clear that he was seeking help from the Lord to deliver him from his sin nature, this body of death.

7:25 — Paul thanked God through the Lord Jesus Christ for deliverance from his wretched condition. This was the only power that could deliver him from the captivity of his sin nature. Ultimately his hope for complete sanctification in his body would occur at his resurrection and rapture to Heaven (1 Cor 15:57; Phil 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2).

At the end of verse 25, Paul gives the **conclusion** to his third line of reasoning. He said that he can serve the Law of God with his mind, that is, keeping his mind on the Word of God by obeying it. That would keep him from becoming a slave to his sin nature. But he also can be a slave to his sin nature by yielding to his fleshly desires. Believers have a choice to be free from sin by loving the Word of God and obeying it (Ps 119:9, 11). Or they can be bound by their sin nature by yielding to the desires of their flesh.

NOTE: It is significant to notice the realms in which law and grace operate. The Law is holy even though it operates in the realm of sin, old nature, Hell, etc. Its purpose is to reveal sin and to condemn sinners, not to justify them (3:19-20). Believers no longer operate in the realm of Law, but operate in the realm of grace through Jesus Christ as their Savior (cf. 6:14; 7:4).

Realm of Law

Sin
Sinner
Old Nature
Old Man
Oldness of Letter
Condemnation
Hell

Realm of Grace

Righteousness
Saint
New Nature
New Man
Newness of Spirit
Justification
Heaven