



The Law Has a Purpose but Lacks Power Romans 7

Introduction

Paul has taught that *by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His (God's) sight* (Romans 3:20). Justification by faith is *apart from the law* (Romans 3:21), as illustrated by the example of Abraham. *Faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness* (Romans 4:9). Furthermore, *the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith* (Romans 4:13). The law brings wrath (Romans 4:15) but peace with God is by faith (Romans 5:1). As in the case of Abraham, sinners receive acceptance with God and the blessings of God by faith in *order that it might be in accordance with grace* (Romans 4:16 and 3:22-23). This is because believers are *not under the law but under grace* (Romans 6:14).

The Jews were under the law and proud of it because the law was *knowledge and truth* (Romans 2:20). It was their heritage and they boasted in it (Romans 2:17, 18 and 23). Even some who had turned to Christ still clung to the law. What Paul has taught about the law thus far, especially Romans 6:14, was like pulling the rug out from under them. Being not under the law but under grace was a drastic change in relationship. People today who have come to Christianity out of legalistic religions tend to understand this very well.

In chapter 7, Paul undertakes to explain the new relationship. He teaches that the law is good and that it has a purpose. However, the power of the law is limited. The law is beneficial in exposing our sins, showing how exceedingly sinful our sins are, and revealing our need for righteousness beyond ourselves. However, just as the law was insufficient to justify sinners, the law is insufficient to sanctify. Therefore, we need God's grace through Jesus Christ. This is shown in the latter half of the chapter where Paul describes the struggle with sin.

Outline of Romans 7

- I. The Law Has No Power Over Those Who Are Christ's - Romans 7:1-6
- II. The Law Exposes and Stimulates Sin - Romans 7:7-13
- III. The Law Has No Power to Sanctify - Romans 7:14-25

I. The Law Has No Power Over Those Who Are Christ's - Romans 7:1-6

This passage explains what Paul has written in Romans 6:14: Christians are *not under law but under grace*. Paul shows that, having died with Christ, believers are no longer under the condemnation of the law.

- A. The law has dominion over the living - Romans 7:1

Those who know anything about law know that it exercises authority over the living. However, the power of law over a person ends at death. The law does not concern a dead person.

1. Illustration of marriage - 7:2-3

Paul uses a simple analogy of marriage to picture the believer as dead to the law. The main point of the analogy is that the death of the husband dissolves the marriage and releases the wife from the bond of marriage. Consequently, she is free to marry another.

2. Believers have become dead to the law through Christ's death - 7:4-5

Notice that Paul writes, *you...have become dead to the law*. It is the believer who has died. We have *died with Christ* (Romans 6:8) and are no longer under the curse and condemnation of the law. Now we have a new life with Christ and are free to bear fruit to God.

- a. *Dead to the law* - 7:4

Believers *have become dead to the law through the body of Christ*. The fact that we have *become dead* shows that the death is not of our own doing. It was God's doing, and He did it through the *body of Christ*, through His bodily death on the cross for our sins, releasing us from the condemnation of the law. In God's sight, we died and were buried with Christ. *We have been united together in the likeness of His death* (Romans 6:5).

- b. Joined (*married*) to Christ - 7:4

The purpose of our having become dead to the law is that we might belong to another, Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. Death was not the end. Christ conquered death and fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17-18). Christ was raised, and we are united with Him *in the likeness of His resurrection* (Romans 6:4-5).

c. Bearing fruit - 7:4-5

Before we were believers, *when we were in the flesh*, sinful passions were aroused by the law. In self-righteousness, self-centeredness, and lust (and all the other manifestations of sin in our *members*) we rebelled against the righteous commands of the law. The result was that we bore fruit to death. See Romans 6:21. But believers are joined to Christ, *that we should bear fruit to God*.

B. Those who have died are delivered from the law - Romans 7:6

To be able to bear fruit to God (Romans 7:4), we had to be set free from the law which encourages us to sin.

1. Delivered from the law and dead to sin - 7:6

When we were joined to Christ, we *died to what we were held by*. We died to sin and this delivered us from the law. The word *delivered* is the same Greek word used in verse 2 which speaks of the woman being released from the law when her husband dies. Here it means that we are "no longer held by the law". There is no link between us and the law. The law has accomplished its work and there is no more work for it to do because *our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin* (Romans 6:6).

2. We serve in *newness of the Spirit* - 7:6

We no longer serve in the *oldness of the letter*, in a spirit of obligation, outward conformity, and legalism, as the Jews came to do under the law. We serve in the *newness of the Spirit*. We are under the influence of the Holy Spirit and we serve freely as God's children with love and gratitude.

II. The Law Exposes and Stimulates Sin - Romans 7:7-13

These verses show the place of the law for the believer. Paul has said that the Jews had broken the law (Romans 2:27), no one is justified by the law (3:20), the law brings wrath (4:15), believers are not under the law (6:14), and sinful passions are aroused by the law (7:5). So how should a believer view the law? Is the law evil or good, is it useful or useless? "Paul shows that it was given to reveal sin, to provoke sin in sinners, and to make clear our hopeless condition apart from Christ" (Romans, Volume 2, James Montgomery Boice). Very clearly, the law was not meant to save anyone.

In this passage, Paul speaks from the first person, using *I*. He describes something that is true not just of

himself, but of mankind in general. The use of *I* makes it much more vivid. Also note that verses 7 through 11 are in the past tense. Paul is speaking of a time before he was a believer in Christ.

A. The law is not sin - Romans 7:7

Paul poses a possible objection and answers it. *Is the law sin? Certainly not!*

B. Sin is alive and known through the law - Romans 7:7-8

Paul says, *I would not have known sin except through the law*, and then gives an example to explain what he means.

1. Example of covetousness - 7:7

He would not have known coveting to be a sin apart from the law. The law, the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17), showed him his covetousness.

2. Evil desire was produced by sin, using the commandment - 7:8

This is sin in action. Sin made the commandment its "base of operations...from which to launch its evil work" (The MacArthur Study Bible, John MacArthur). Sin used the commandment to produce in Paul *all manner of evil desire*. When there was a commandment to resist, Paul coveted all the more because coveting was forbidden. The point is that we may not have much of an urge to sin until we become aware of the command not to sin. Then there is an obstinacy in our human nature that makes us want to sin. Apart from the law, sin lay dormant (*dead*). However, when there is something to sin against, when the law comes and infringes on our freedom, rebelliousness is unleashed.

C. The law is *holy, just, and good* - Romans 7:9-13

The law is not sin and the law is not what causes death to sinners. Paul places the blame where it deserves to be—on sin and not on the law which is holy.

1. The law is unable to bring life - 7:9-11

Paul was once *alive* apart from the law. This refers to a time when he was not convicted by the demands of the law. It was a time before he met Christ on the road to Damascus, a time when he took pride in the things of the flesh and thought that he was living a righteous life. He describes this in Philippians 3:4-6. *If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning*

the law, a Pharisee....concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But then *the commandment came* (7:9). After his conversion, Paul began to understand the law and its meaning and purpose. He came to see that he didn't measure up. It was then that *sin revived* (7:9). It was dormant apart from the law (7:8), but now it *sprang to life* (7:9, NIV). Paul saw his shortcoming. He saw his sin for what it was, and he *died* (7:9).

The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death (7:10). If anyone could faithfully keep the law, it would bring life as it was designed to do. See Leviticus 18:5 and Ezekiel 20:11. But Paul could not keep it perfectly. Nobody can, and the result is death.

But the problem is not with the law. The problem is sin. Again Paul pictures sin as using the law (*the commandment*) as its base of operations. Using the commandment, sin deceives and kills. C.E.B. Cranfield reminds us of how the Jews are an example of this. "Sin deceived them by taking the law and distorting it and imposing a false image of it on their understanding,...in particular making use of it in order to suggest that man is in a position to fulfill it as to put God under an obligation to himself" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary).

2. The law shows sin for what it is - 7:12-13

The law itself is not sin, as suggested in verse 7. The law was used by sin. The law is *holy*, totally set apart from sin. It is holy like God Himself. His commandments are *holy and just and good*.

*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward.*
(Psalm 19:7-11)

The law is good. It is not the law which causes death, but sin uses what is good as a means of evil. Sin is the culprit. *Sin....was producing death in me through what is good* (7:13). But the law shows sin for what it is. It makes us recognize sin as sin and shows us the sinfulness of sin. The commandment came and

convinced Paul that he was a sinner. It convinced him of the awfulness of sin. Have you been convinced of your sin and the awfulness of it?

III. The Law Has No Power to Sanctify - Romans 7:14-25

Paul has shown how the law produces conviction of sin. He continues on to show the result of this conviction. Romans 7:14-25 portrays Paul's struggle with sin. However, the question is whether Paul is describing his struggle before he became a Christian or after. Some believe it describes Paul's struggle with sin as a believer. "Paul is discussing the Christian life. He seems to be answering two related questions: How can I live a triumphant Christian life? How can I achieve victory over sin?" (Romans, Volume 2, James Montgomery Boice). Others see it as Paul's struggle before his conversion, contrasting "the spiritual worthlessness of religious introspection and self-centeredness (count the "I's" and "me's")...with the life of the Spirit by grace in Romans 6 and 8" (The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Craig S. Keener).

Those who see this as Paul's inner conflict before Christ stress that he describes himself as *sold under sin* (7:14), with sin dwelling in him (7:17) *nothing good* dwelling in him (7:17), and a *wretched man* needing deliverance from *this body of death* (7:24). All these seem to contradict Paul's description of a believer in Romans chapter 6. The passage therefore shows that "one must receive righteousness (including the power to live rightly) as a gift of God's grace, not as an achievement by human effort" (The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Craig S. Keener).

Those who see the passage as Paul describing a believer agree that believers have died to sin so that sin may no longer have dominion over them, as Paul wrote in Romans 6:2 and 14. However, Paul is making another point here: sin itself is still alive and lives in them (7:17 and 20). Consequently, the *inward man* or the *mind* strives for obedience, but the *flesh*, in which sin dwells, continues to sin. Therefore, Paul is describing the struggle of every believer. John MacArthur agrees and notes that "the person of Romans 7:14-25 desires to obey God's law and hates his sin; he is humble, recognizing that nothing good dwells in his humanness; he sees sin in himself, but not as all that is there; and he serves Jesus Christ with his mind...Paul must be describing all Christians....who, when they honestly evaluate themselves against the righteous standard of God's law, realize how far short they fall" (The MacArthur Study Bible).

Whichever view one chooses to take, the passage makes it clear that the law has no power to save or to sanctify. Salvation and sanctification come only *through Jesus*

Christ our Lord (7:25). These notes will present the struggle from Paul's viewpoint as a Christian.

c. *It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me* - 7:17

A. *The law is spiritual* - Romans 7:14

Paul says *we know that the law is spiritual*. The law is of divine origin, excellence, and authority. C.E.B. Cranfield (*Romans, A Shorter Commentary*) points out that this must also imply that it "can only be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit."

B. Man is flesh (*carnal*) - Romans 7:14-19

The term *I am carnal*, is the Greek "qua sarx" which means "characterized by the flesh". "The expression points to the weakness of mankind and to the sin we so easily commit because we are weak" (John A.T. Robinson, as quoted in *The Epistle to the Romans*, Leon Morris).

1. *Sold under sin* - 7:14

Due to his weakness, Paul says he is *sold under sin*. This is the same idea that he expresses in verse 23, being brought *into captivity to the law of sin*. It means that he sins in spite of his desire not to sin. John Calvin says, "We are so addicted to sin, that we can do nothing of our own accord but sin" (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Romans and Thessalonians*). This doesn't mean that Paul never does right. He is just expressing what the law reveals to him about himself. Although he desires to obey God's good law all the time, sin is at work, trying to prevent him from doing so.

2. Acting in a manner he does not approve - 7:15-16

These verses further explain what it means to be *sold under sin*.

a. *What I am doing, I do not understand* - 7:15

The Greek word translated *understand* may also mean "approve" or "acknowledge." Paul clearly has an understanding of what he is doing, but he does not condone it. He does not do the thing he wills to do, but instead does the thing he hates. This could be compared to a slave who works for a master against his will. He performs the duty although he does not want to do it.

b. *I agree with the law that it is good* - 7:16

The very fact that this conflict exists within Paul shows that he is in agreement with the goodness and moral beauty of the law.

Paul is not making excuses. He is distinguishing between himself and the sin. Because Paul is on the side of the law, agreeing that it is good and right, then he must not be the one sinning. It is *the sin that dwells in me* that is sinning. As a Christian, sin is out of character for Paul because he desires not to sin. Sin is separate from him, but living in him as an unwelcome, uninvited guest. Leon Morris (*The Epistle to the Romans*) pictures sin as a "squatter". It is not there legitimately, but it is difficult to get rid of.

d. *For I know that...(in my flesh) nothing good dwells* - 7:18-19

This is a confirmation of verse 17. Nothing good dwells in the *flesh* (the same word that was translated *carnal* in verse 14) because the flesh is weak and sin has made its home there (7:17). "The flesh serves as a base camp from which sin operates in the Christian's life" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, John MacArthur). Therefore, although Paul wants to do good, his desires are frustrated by the flesh.

e. Paul sins, even though he wills not to - 7:20

Paul says, *if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*. He is repeating what he said in verse 17, but adding that his will opposes the sin which he does. He now recognizes that sin (which dwells in the flesh) is what makes him act as he does. Sin makes him do what he does not will to do.

C. Delight in the law is overcome by the law of sin - Romans 7:21-23

Paul states the conclusion he has reached. In his mind, he delights in the law of God and wills to do good. But there is a battle raging within him between the law of his mind and the law of sin which is in his *members* (his flesh).

1. Paul's discovery - 7:21

Although Paul is the *one who wills to do good*, he sees clearly that *evil is present with me*. This is a principle or law which Paul has observed to be true.

2. Paul's delight - 7:22

Paul delights in the law. It is a delight which springs from his innermost spirit, the center of his personality. Paul calls it his *inward man*, the *mind* of Romans 7:23 and 25.

3. Paul's dilemma - 7:23-24

Although Paul delights in God's law, obeying it is another matter.

a. The conflict - 7:23

He has found that there is *another law, the law of sin*, at work in his *members*. (Remember from Romans 6:13, that Paul uses *members* to refer to any part of our selves; not just physical parts of the body but also the personality.) The *law of sin* is at war against the law of his mind. There is a struggle going on between sin and mind, and the *law of sin* has a stronghold in his *members* which prevents Paul from doing what he wills. Thus, he sees himself as a prisoner of the *law of sin*.

b. The cry for deliverance - 7:24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? This is Paul's frustrated response to the conflict he has been describing. His cry reflects his misery, but it is not a cry of despair. He asks the question, *who will deliver me...?* because he knows the answer.

Paul longs to be delivered from *this body of death*, which is the physical mortal body and its members through which sin operates to bring death.

"This passage of Paul's is noteworthy in that it serves to destroy all the glory of the flesh. It teaches us that even the most perfect are subject to misery as long as they dwell in the flesh, for they are liable to death. Indeed, when they examine themselves thoroughly, they find nothing in their own nature but wretchedness" (Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Romans and Thessalonians, John Calvin).

D. Deliverance is *through Jesus Christ our Lord* - Romans 7:25

Paul is not complaining against God; rather he says *I thank God* because he knows the answer to his question. God is his deliverer--and that deliverance is *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

In the meantime, Paul realizes that there is a war going on between his mind and flesh. *With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Applications

1. Are you still trying to live under the law even though you have been delivered from the law by Jesus Christ? What needless demands do you place on yourself which you are unable to live up to? What can you do to bring yourself out from under the *oldness of the letter* so you can *serve in the newness of the Spirit*? (Romans 7:6).
2. Do you honor God's law as *holy and just and good* (Romans 7:12)? Have you humbled yourself in the light of the law to confess that you are a sinner? What sin do you need to confess to God right now? *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).
3. Do you understand the deadliness of sin? Do you now understand how sin works in your life to bring you into bondage? Have you experienced the struggle with sin which Paul has described? Do you realize, "The Christian's victory over sin cannot be achieved by the strength of resolutions, nor by the force of moral motives, nor by any resources within himself? He looks to Jesus Christ and conquers in His strength" (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Charles Hodge). Can you say with Paul, *I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 7:25)?

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. a. What did you learn about the law from Romans 7, the notes or the lecture?

b. As a Christian, what is your relationship to the law?
2. Did you learn anything new about sin from this lesson? If so, what did you learn?
3. How were you able to apply Paul's struggle to your life?

Day Two: Read Romans 8:1-17.

4. List the verses where you find the word *Spirit*. What do you learn about the Spirit from these verses?

5. What more do you learn about the Spirit from the following Scripture passages?
John 14:16-17

Romans 8:26-27

1 Corinthians 2:7-14

Day Three: Read Romans 8:1-3.

6. a. What is the good news Paul announces in Romans 8:1?

b. Why is this true? Give verse.
7. a. Why would anyone even need to be concerned about condemnation? Refer back to Romans 5:12 and 18a for your answer.

b. What is the position of those for whom there is now *no condemnation*?
8. a. What is it that makes believers free?

b. What are believers set free from?
9. a. What was the weakness of the law in condemning sin?

b. How did God overcome this obstacle?

- c. Find phrases in Isaiah 53:4-8 which speak of God condemning sin in the flesh of His own Son.
- d. ? (Thought Question) What do you think it means that God sent Jesus *in the likeness of sinful flesh*?

Day Four: Read Romans 8:4-8.

- 10. What was God's purpose in condemning sin through His Son?
- 11. a. What two kinds of people are described in verse 4?
- b. What are the differences between these two kinds of people? Give verses.
- c. From Galatians 5:19-21, list some *things of the flesh*.
- d. From Galatians 5:22-25, what are the *things of the Spirit*?
- 12. Why is the mind set on the flesh *death*? Give verses.
- 13. ♥ (Heart Question) What is your mind set on? Be specific. Is this pleasing to God?

Day Five: Read Romans 8:9-13.

- 14. a. In Romans 8:9, what two kinds of people does Paul distinguish? (He has also made the same distinction in Romans 8:4-5.)
- b. Which of these two kinds of people does the Holy Spirit indwell?
- c. What does Paul say about those who do not have the Holy Spirit?
- 15. a. What is true of you if Christ is in you? Give verse.
- b. How does verse 11 further explain this and also give a future hope?
- c. How does 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 confirm what Paul has said?
- d. Through whom will this work be accomplished? Give verse from Romans.
- 16. a. To what are believers no longer debtors?

- b. What is the fate of those who live according to the flesh?
 - c. How are believers to live? Who or what enables us to do so?
 - d. What is the result?
17. Use the following Scripture passages to explain how Christians *put to death the deeds of the body*.
Psalm 119:11
- Luke 22:40
- Romans 12:1
- Colossians 3:16-17

Day Six: Read Romans 8:14-17.

18. a. What is true of those who are led by the Spirit?
- b. What do you learn about being sons (or children) of God from the following verses?
John 1:12
- Galatians 4:6-7
- 1 John 3:1-2
19. a. From verse 15, what two *spirits* does Paul contrast and what does each lead to?
- b. How does Romans 6:16-18, describe the *spirit of bondage* (or *slavery*, NASB.) Also explain why believers are no longer subject to it?
- c. How can you be confident that you are really a child of God? Give verse.
20. a. If you are a child of God, then what else are you also?
- b. What two things can God's children and heirs expect?
- c. How do 2 Timothy 2:8-12 and 1 Peter 4:12-13 further explain this?
- d. How do the following Scripture passages help explain what is ours as heirs?
Psalm 73:25-26
- Lamentations 3:24
- Titus 3:7
- Revelation 21:1-7