

# The Man of Romans 7




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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Romans 7.*

**Memory Text:** “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” (*Romans 7:6*).

Few chapters in the Bible have created more controversy than has Romans 7. Concerning the issues involved, *The SDA Bible Commentary* says, “The meaning of vs. 14–25 has been one of the most discussed problems in the whole epistle. The main questions have been as to whether the description of such intense moral struggle could be autobiographical, and, if so, whether the passage refers to Paul’s experience before or after his conversion. That Paul is speaking of his own personal struggle with sin seems apparent from the simplest meaning of his words (cf. vs. 7–11; [Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 19; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 475]). It is surely also true that he is describing a conflict that is more or less experienced by every soul confronted by and awakened to the spiritual claims of God’s holy law.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 553.

Bible students differ on whether Romans 7 was Paul’s experience before or after conversion. Whatever position one takes, what’s important is that Jesus’ righteousness covers us and that in His righteousness we stand perfect before God, who promises to sanctify us, to give us victory over sin, and to conform us to “the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29*). These are the crucial points for us to know and experience as we seek to spread “the everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 21.*

## Bound to the Law?

**Read** Romans 7:1–6. What illustration does Paul use here in order to show his readers their relationship to the law, and what point is he making with that illustration?

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Paul’s illustration in Romans 7:1–6 is somewhat involved, but a careful analysis of the passage will help us to follow his reasoning.

In the overall context of the letter, Paul was dealing with the system of worship established at Sinai; that is often what he means by the word *law*. The Jews had difficulty grasping the fact that this system, given to them of God, should end with the coming of the Messiah. This is what Paul was dealing with—Jewish believers still not ready to abandon what had been such an important part of their lives.

In essence, Paul’s illustration is as follows: a woman is married to a man. The law binds her to him as long as he lives. During his lifetime she cannot consort with other men. But when he dies, she is free from the law that bound her to him (*vs. 3*).

**How** does Paul apply the illustration of the law of marriage to the system of Judaism? *Rom. 7:4, 5*.

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As the death of her husband delivers the woman from the law of her husband, so the death of the old life in the flesh, through Jesus Christ, delivers the Jews from the law they had been expected to keep until the Messiah fulfilled its types.

Now the Jews were free to “remarry.” They were invited to marry the risen Messiah and thus bring forth fruit to God. This illustration was one more device Paul used to convince the Jews that they were now free to abandon the ancient system.

Again, given all else that Paul and the Bible say about obedience to the Ten Commandments, it doesn’t make sense to assert here that Paul was telling these Jewish believers that the Ten Commandments were no longer binding. Those who use these texts to try to make that point—that the moral law was done away with—really don’t want to make that point, anyway; what they really want to say is that only the seventh-day Sabbath is gone, not the rest of the law. To read these verses as teaching that the fourth commandment has been abolished or superceded or replaced with Sunday is to give them a meaning that the words were never intended to have.

## *The Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *Romans 7:22, 23*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize that our sinful nature wages war against God’s law and that we must die to the old system of lifeless rules that focus on our work rather than on Christ’s work.

**Feel:** Sense our helplessness in doing good without Christ’s intervention.

**Do:** Die to the old passions aroused by sin in order to live freely in the way of the Spirit.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: War With Our Sinful Nature**

**A** Our sinful nature is at war with the longing we have to live in harmony with God’s law. Why must we die to our natural sinful self in order to live in the Spirit?

**B** What kinds of behaviors, hereditary or habitual, are examples of *doing what comes naturally*? How are these behaviors extensions of our sinful nature?

**II. Feel: Helpless to Do Good**

**A** If we can’t do the good we’d like to do, who or what is really in control of our lives? Discuss.

**B** What is the only remedy for our helpless, out-of-control condition?

**III. Do: Living Freely**

**A** In what way do we *die* to our sinful desires?

**B** How are we *buried* with Christ?

**C** What are the freedoms that a life in the Spirit offers, and what must we do to live this kind of life?

► **Summary:** Only death to our natural, sinful self and its desires makes it possible for a new way of life in Christ.

## Is the Law Sin?

If Paul is talking about the whole law system at Sinai, what about Romans 7:7, in which he specifically mentions one of the Ten Commandments? Doesn't that refute the position, taken yesterday, that Paul was not talking about the abolition of the Ten Commandments?

The answer is No. We must keep in mind, again, that the word *law* for Paul is the *whole* system introduced at Sinai, which included the moral law but wasn't limited to it. Hence, Paul could quote from it, as well as from any other section of the whole Jewish economy, in order to make his points. However, when the system passed away at the death of Christ, that didn't include the moral law, which had existed even before Sinai and exists after Calvary, as well.

**Read** Romans 7:8–11. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between the law and sin?

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God revealed Himself to the Jews, telling them in detail what was right and what was wrong in moral, civil, ceremonial, and health matters. He also explained the penalties for violation of the various laws. Violation of the revealed will of God is here defined as sin.

Thus, Paul explains, he would not have known if it was a sin to covet without having been informed of that fact by the "law." Because sin is the violation of the revealed will of God, where the revealed will is unknown, there is no awareness of sin. When that revealed will is made known to a person, he or she comes to recognize that he or she is a sinner and is under condemnation and death. In this sense, the person dies.

In Paul's line of argument here and throughout this section, he is trying to build a bridge to lead the Jews—who revere the "law"—to see Christ as its fulfillment. He is showing that the law was necessary but that its function was limited. The law was meant to show the need of salvation; it never was meant to be the means of obtaining that salvation.

"The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, 'I was alive without the law once'—he felt no condemnation; 'but when the commandment came,' when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, 'sin revived, and I died.' Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. Mark, it was Paul, and not the law, that died."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1076.

**In what sense have you "died" before the law? How, in that context, can you understand what Jesus has done for you by giving you a new life in Him?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through the law alone we cannot find salvation—it is only through Christ that we can be saved.

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is designed to introduce the following concepts:

- The law shows us the will of God and, thereby, also defines sin. Without the law, we wouldn't know what sin is.
- The law is good and just, but the law alone is not our means to salvation. That comes through the grace of Christ.

**Opening Activity:** The Rules game. You will need pens and note cards, a kitchen timer, and small “rewards” (raisins, cookies, marshmallows, and so on) to give everyone who isn't “out” when the timer rings. You, as the teacher, will be the arbiter of the rules.

Ask each member of your class to write one rule that they think will be very hard for people to obey for the next five minutes (such as, don't blink, don't talk, try to balance on one foot continuously, hold a hymnal in an outstretched hand for the duration).

The game is simple. Obey the rules and receive a reward. Failure to obey eliminates you from the game, and you are ineligible to receive the reward.

Pick two or three rules from the suggestions that are possible to attempt simultaneously. Share those rules with the class. Set the timer for five minutes. Count as *out* everyone who *sins* by failing to adhere to the rules.

You, as the arbiter of the rules, have the ability to *forgive* those who are *out* and send them back to the game, but they still must try to adhere to the rules. Also, keep reminding your class of the rules.

It shouldn't be long before everyone in the class has been *out* at least once, some more than others. Keep your eye on the timer and be sure that everyone has been *forgiven* in time to receive a reward when the time expires. Give everyone in the class a reward.

**Questions for Discussion:** Ask, by show of hands, how many were

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## The Holy Law

**Read** Romans 7:12. How do we understand this text in the context of what Paul has been discussing?

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Because the Jews revered the law, Paul exalts it in every way possible. The law is good for what it does, but it can't do what it was never meant to do—to save us from sin. For that we need Jesus, because the law—whether the entire Jewish system or the moral law in particular—cannot bring salvation. Only Jesus and His righteousness, which comes to us by faith, can.

**Whom** does Paul blame for his condition of “death,” and what does he exonerate? Why is that distinction important? *Rom. 7:13.*

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In this verse, Paul is presenting the “law” in the best sense possible. He chooses to blame sin, not the law, for his terrible sinful condition; that is, his working “all manner of concupiscence [lust]” (*vs. 8*). The law is good, for it is God's standard of conduct, but as a sinner, Paul stood condemned before it.

**Why** was sin so successful in showing up Paul as a terrible sinner? *Rom. 7:14, 15.*

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*Carnal* means “fleshy.” Thus, Paul needed Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ could take away the condemnation (*Rom. 8:1*). Only Jesus Christ could free him from slavery to sin.

Paul describes himself as “sold under sin.” He is a slave to sin. He has no freedom. He can't do what he wants to do. He tries to do what the good law tells him to do, but sin won't let him.

By this illustration, Paul was trying to show the Jews the need of the Messiah. He already had pointed out that victory is possible only under grace (*Rom 6:14*). This same thought is reemphasized in Romans 7. Living under the “law” means enslavement to sin, a merciless master.

**What has been your own experience with how sin enslaves? Have you ever tried to play with sin, thinking you could control it as you wished, only to find yourself under a vicious and merciless taskmaster? Welcome to reality! Why, then, must you surrender to Jesus, and die to self daily?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

*out* at least once. The wages of sin are death. As slaves to the law, they would have been worthy of death, wouldn't they? Were those who were *out* more than the others any more *dead* than those who failed only once or twice? Did those who failed less earn a greater reward? How do the answers help illustrate that we cannot be saved through our own efforts?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** In light of Christ's sacrifice, grace, and forgiveness, what value does the law have? What purpose does it serve today?

**Bible Commentary**

**I. The Purpose of the Law** (Review Romans 7:7 and Romans 7:9–12 with the class.)

God's law is as necessary now as it was in heaven before the creation of humanity. For without the guiding principles of the law, how would humans ever fully know the will and the holy character of God?

Keeping the law, however, cannot save us. Salvation by works is dead-end religion and a burden to the believer. In Acts 15:10, Peter echoes this thought when he refers to the law as “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear” (NIV). Paul takes this idea a step further when he states that “the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death” (Rom. 7:10, NIV), exposing his sin.

So if the law clearly can't save us, then what can it do? First and foremost, the law serves to tell us what is right and wrong. Paul states this point very clearly in Romans 7:7 when he says, “Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’” (NIV).

Second, the law carries a penalty for breaking it and thus implies the need for an Advocate, a Savior, to plead our case in the heavenly court—a Lawyer who can overturn the judgment in our favor. The need for mercy in the face of the penalty of breaking the law cannot be overstated. Civic penalties for breaking individual laws may vary from country to country, but the ultimate penalty of sin is death.

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## The Man of Romans 7

**“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:16, 17). What struggle is presented in these verses?**

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Using the law as a mirror, the Holy Spirit convicts a person that he or she is displeasing God by not fulfilling the requirements of the law. Through efforts to meet those requirements, the sinner shows that he or she agrees that the law is good.

**What points that Paul had already made did he repeat for emphasis?**  
*Rom. 7:18–20.*

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To impress upon a person his or her need of Christ, the Holy Spirit often leads the person through an “old covenant” type of experience. Ellen G. White describes Israel’s experience as follows: “The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. . . . Only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Unfortunately, by failing to renew their dedication to Christ daily, many Christians are, in effect, serving sin, however loathe they may be to admit it. They rationalize that, in reality, they are undergoing the normal experience of sanctification and that they simply still have a long way to go. Thus, instead of taking known sins to Christ and asking Him for victory over them, they hide behind Romans 7, which tells them, they think, that it is impossible to do right. In reality, this chapter is saying that it is impossible to do right when a person is enslaved to sin, but victory is possible in Jesus Christ.

**Are you having the victories over self and sin that Christ promises us? If not, why not? What wrong choices are you, and you alone, making?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

But thank God that Jesus' death paid the penalty of death. He died the death we deserved so that we might have eternal life, and that death fulfilled the righteous demands of His law. Clearly, the law itself was never intended to sanctify us. Nor was it ever meant to be our means to salvation. As such, it is limited in what it can accomplish. Only through the grace of Christ can we be saved.

**Consider This:** Why did God give humans His law? What is the danger of getting so caught up in the letter of the law that you forget the spirit of it?

■ *What are the limitations of the law? With Jesus' death paying the ransom for our sins, what is the purpose of the law?*

■ *Why can't keeping the law save us? Why is Christ's sacrifice our only true means of salvation?*

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Remind your class of the game that they played in the opening activity. Ask them to think about it in the context of trying to follow God's law, yet still falling victim to sin on a daily basis.

All class members would, no doubt, agree that from the outset of the game they wanted to follow the rules, right? Naturally, they wanted to receive the reward. It is highly doubtful that any wanted to enter the game with the goal of being eliminated. We all would live as slaves to the law but for Christ's sacrifice that liberates us.

#### Questions for Discovery:

- 1 How does the law help us define what the will of God is and what sin is?
- 2 Without the law, or if the law remains unknown, does sin exist? Explain your answer.
- 3 Just as in the game, if we do not know the law, how can we know what sin is? Is there any way for God to be a just God without giving us the law? Explain.

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## Delivered From Death

**Read** Romans 7:21–23. How have you experienced this same struggle in your own life, even as a Christian?

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In this passage, Paul equates the law in his members (his body) with the law of sin. “With the flesh,” Paul says, he served “the law of sin” (*Rom. 7:25*). But serving sin and obeying its law means death (*see vs. 10, 11, 13*). Hence, his body—as it was now functioning in obedience to sin—fittingly could be described as “the body of this death.”

The law of the mind is God’s law, God’s revelation of His will. Under conviction of the Holy Spirit, Paul consented to this law. His mind resolved to keep it, but when he tried, he couldn’t, because his body wanted to sin. Who hasn’t felt that same struggle? In your mind you know what you want to do, but your flesh clamors for something else.

**How** can we be rescued from this difficult situation we find ourselves in? *Rom. 7:24, 25.*

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Some have wondered why, after reaching the glorious climax in the expression “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Paul should refer once more to the struggles of the soul from which he apparently had been delivered. Some understand the expression of thanksgiving as a parenthetical exclamation. They believe that such an exclamation follows naturally the cry, “Who shall deliver?” They hold that before proceeding with an extended discussion of the glorious deliverance (*Romans 8*) Paul summarizes what he has said in the preceding verses and confesses once again to the conflict against the forces of sin.

Others suggest that by “I myself,” Paul means, “left to myself, leaving Christ out of the picture.” However these verses are understood, one point should remain clear: left to ourselves, without Christ, we are helpless against sin. With Christ we have a new life in Him, one in which—though self will constantly arise—the promises of victory are ours if we choose to claim them. Just as no one can breathe for you or cough for you or sneeze for you, no one can choose for you to surrender to Christ. You alone can make that choice. There’s no other way to attain for yourself the victories that are promised us in Jesus.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- 4 Just because forgiveness exists, why is that not a license for lawbreaking?
- 5 Discuss whether it was the rules themselves that enabled participants to receive the reward or forgiveness and grace that freed them from the penalty or something else.
- 6 Ask if there are rules they would have been able to follow had they had help from the arbiter. In what ways does this idea help us to understand that it is only through Christ's help that we can overcome sin?
- 7 What steps do we need to take as Christians in order to avoid being caught up in the cycle of legalism and truly embrace Christ's gift of forgiveness and grace?

► **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Romans 7 provides each individual in your class with a starting point for introspection. Encourage them to examine how they personally relate to the law and how Paul's teachings about the law might affect their spiritual lives. Finally, encourage them to think about how they relate to God's plan of salvation.

**Activity:** What are some things that you personally are struggling with that can be used as an illustration of what Paul has said about the law, dying to sin, and to grace?

Think of a couple things that you would like to work on with Christ in this regard. Work these goals into your daily prayer life. Invite God into your life specifically in these areas and ask for His help and daily guidance in achieving them. Ask for God's help to free you from the chains of sin. Ask God to help you daily die to sin and live in grace through Christ's sacrifice, so that with His help you may be free of the condemnation of the law.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Perfect Law,” pp. 212–215; “A Divine Sin Bearer,” pp. 308–310, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Healing of the Soul,” pp. 84, 85; “The Importance of Seeking True Knowledge,” pp. 452–454, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Christ’s Victory as Complete as Adam’s Failure,” p. 323, in *My Life Today*.

“There is no safety nor repose nor justification in transgression of the law. Man cannot hope to stand innocent before God, and at peace with Him through the merits of Christ, while he continues in sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 213.

“Paul desires his brethren to see that the great glory of a sin-pardoning Saviour gave significance to the entire Jewish economy. He desired them to see also that when Christ came to the world, and died as man’s sacrifice, type met antitype.

“After Christ died on the cross as a sin offering the ceremonial law could have no force. Yet it was connected with the moral law, and was glorious. The whole bore the stamp of divinity, and expressed the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God. And if the ministration of the dispensation to be done away was glorious, how much more must the reality be glorious, when Christ was revealed, giving His life-giving, sanctifying, Spirit to all who believe?”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1095.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Who do you think the man of Romans 7 is? Paul, before or after conversion? Or is this chapter talking about something else entirely? What justification do you have for your answer? In class, discuss the answers given.
- ❷ How do we explain the fact that even baptized, born-again Christians struggle with sin? Shouldn’t we automatically overcome everything? Or will we always be sinning? Or is the answer somewhere in between?
- ❸ What potential dangers arise from the view that, as Christians, we will always be sinning, always be falling, always be violating God’s law, no matter what? On the other hand, what potential dangers arise from the view that as Christians we must overcome every wrong thing in our lives, every wrong thought, every wrong tendency—no matter what, or else we are not saved?
- ❹ In the end, regardless of whatever position folk take on the man of Romans 7, what promises can we take from Romans 7 for ourselves that will help us understand what it means to be followers of Jesus?