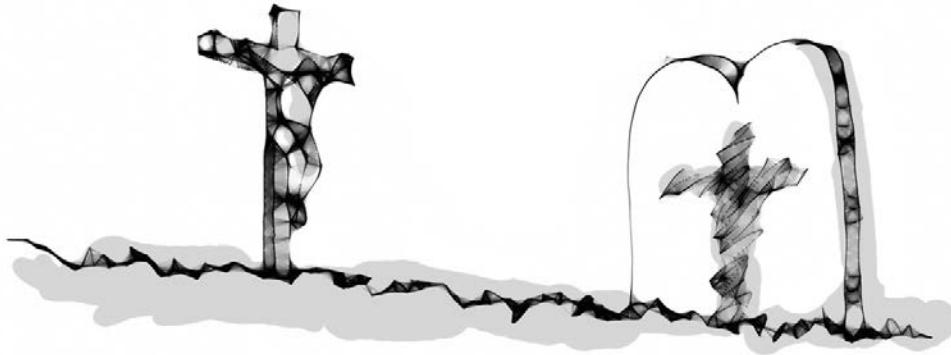


Christ's Death and the Law



SABBATH—MAY 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 7:1–6; Romans 7:7–13; Romans 8:5–8; Romans 4:15; Acts 13:38, 39; Galatians 3:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “My brothers and sisters, when Christ died you also died as far as the law is concerned. Then it became possible for you to belong to him. He was raised from the dead. Now our lives can be useful to God” (Romans 7:4, NIV).

A WOMAN IS DRIVING OVER THE SPEED LIMIT. Suddenly, she sees in her rearview mirror the flashing red-and-blue lights of a police car and hears the familiar sound of the siren. She stops the car, grabs her purse, and takes out her driver's license. The police officer comes to her, takes her license, and returns to his car.

She wonders how much the ticket is going to be. (She was way over the limit). She also worries about how she will be able to pay it. A few minutes later, the police officer comes back and says, “OK, miss, this is what we are going to do. In order for you not to have to face the penalty of the law, we will remove the law. You no longer have to worry about the speed limit.”

The story is foolish. But so is the belief that teaches that after Jesus died, the law (the Ten Commandments) was removed.

This week we will study the death of Jesus and what it means in connection to the law.

DEAD TO THE LAW (Romans 7:1–6)

Carefully study Romans 7:1–6. Then summarize, as well as you can, what Paul is saying. Read it carefully while keeping in mind other Bible verses about the law.



Jesus covers us in His righteousness, freeing us from guilt.

DEFINITIONS

1. adultery—sex outside of marriage.

Some Bible versions wrongly translate Romans 7:1 to read that the law is binding (in force) until a person dies. But a true interpretation is “every living person is under the rule of law.” The point of this verse is not about the dead but about the living.

The example from marriage points out that any married person who has a close relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (wife or husband) has broken the law and is guilty of adultery.¹ Only if his or her spouse dies can he or she enter a relationship with another person without breaking the law.

Also, some people argue that these verses point to the death of the law. But instead, they really point to a person’s death to the law through the body of Christ (Romans 7:4). Romans 6:6 explains that the part of the person that dies is “the old self.” When united to the old self, the person is guilty under the law. So he or she is trapped in a terrible relationship (Romans 7:9–11, 24). After the old self dies, the person is free to enter into a relationship with another—Christ who has risen from the dead (Romans 7:4).

Paul is saying that God’s law must also govern (rule) the new union between Christ and the believer. But because the believer is now married to Christ, this means that the law no longer makes him or her guilty. The believer in Jesus is free from guilt under the law because he or she is covered in the righteousness (holy life) of Jesus.

Paul is not saying that the Ten Commandments, which describe sin, are now removed. That would go against much of the Bible, including his own writings. Instead, Paul is talking about a new relationship one has to the law through faith in Jesus. The law still is binding (in force). But the believer in Jesus is the one who died to self and to sin. So the law no longer holds him or her guilty because he or she belongs to Jesus.

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH (Romans 8:1–8)

Paul points out to the Christian that “those who belong to Christ Jesus are no longer under God’s sentence. I [Paul] am now controlled by the law of the Holy Spirit. That law gives me life because of what Christ Jesus has done. It has set me free from the law of sin that brings death” (Romans 8:1, 2, NlrV). If we read these verses without reading the verses that surround them, it would appear that Paul was talking about two different laws: the law of life and the law of sin and death. But the difference is not with the law but with the person before and after he or she receives Christ.

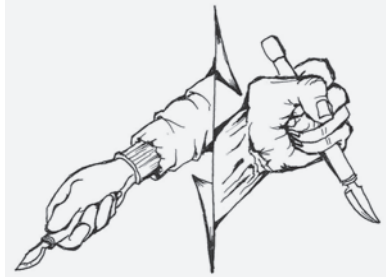
In what ways does Paul’s discussion in Romans 7:7–13 show how the law works?

How the law works depends on the person. For example, the same knife can be used by a surgeon (doctor) to heal or by a murderer to kill. In the eyes of the law, a thief who breaks a law to steal someone’s purse will have a different relationship to the law than the one whom the law is meant to protect (the owner of the purse). The law itself is described as “holy and righteous [pure] and good” (Romans 7:12, NASB), or as the “law of sin and of death” (Romans 8:2, NASB). In the same way, God’s work as Punisher or Judge does not stop Him from being a just and holy God of love. The law’s work as an agent (tool) of sin and death also does not make it sinful.

According to Romans 8:5–8, the law is a tool of “sin and death” for those who “think about what your sinful nature wants” (Romans 8:5, NlrV). This describes the person who is still married to the “old self.” This person has no desire to die to the old self and to be joined to the risen Christ. As a result of the sinful union, the person finds himself or herself an enemy of God and His law because they are on opposing sides (Romans 8:7).

Paul then points out that it is *not possible* for the “sinful mind” to surrender to God’s law, or even to please Him (Romans 8:7, 8, NlrV). This clearly does not mean the person who struggles in Romans 7:13–25, because that person serves the law of God “with my mind” (Romans 7:25, NASB). Paul is probably talking about wicked people who “say no to the truth” (Romans 1:18, NlrV). It is for these rebels against God’s authority that the law becomes a tool of sin and death (Romans 2:12).

How do you feel about the law when you break it?



The same knife that can be used to heal can be used to kill.

THE POWER OF THE LAW (Romans 7:8–11)

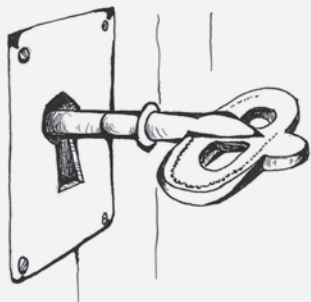
According to Romans 4:15; Romans 5:13; and Romans 7:7, what is the purpose of the law? Also, what does Romans 7:8–11 say the law will do to the person who breaks it?

Every tool has its purpose. A key is used for opening a lock. A knife is used for cutting. In the same way, the law is used to tell us what sin is. If God's law had not been around, there would be no way of knowing what actions were acceptable or unacceptable to God. And sin cannot continue without the law. But Paul makes it clear that the law is not a willing partner with sin: "Did what is good cause me to die? Not at all! Sin had to be recognized for what it really is. So it produced death in me through what was good. Because of the commandment, sin became totally sinful" (Romans 7:13, NIRV).

In what ways do the above verses help to give light to 1 Corinthians 15:54–58?

If read separately, 1 Corinthians 15:54–58 would appear to give a negative view of God's law. But Paul's point is that the law makes sin clearer only because it describes what sin is. And, of course, the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). If it had not been for the law, there would be no death because it would not be possible to tell what sin is. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's purpose is not to make the law look bad but to show how all people who believe can experience victory over death because of Jesus. The death that Jesus helps us to have victory over is the death that comes as a result of breaking the law.

When was the last time that someone sinned against you by breaking God's law in a way that hurt you? How does such an experience help us to understand why the idea that God's law was removed after the Cross is so wrong?



Just as a key is used for opening a lock, the law is used to tell us what sin is.



The "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

THE IMPOTENT (WEAK) LAW (Acts 13:38, 39)

The law gives power to sin (1 Corinthians 15:56, NIV). But in another real way, the law is very weak. How can the same thing be both powerful and weak at the same time?

The difference does not lie in the law but in the person. For example, when a person discovers that he or she is a sinner, the law causes him or her to admit that he or she is going against God's will. As a result, the sinner realizes that he or she is on the way to eternal death. Then, the sinner may decide to follow the law to the letter (exactly; very carefully). But the fact is that he or she has already sinned, and this has marked him or her for eternal death.

Read Acts 13:38, 39; Romans 8:3; and Galatians 3:21. What do these verses tell us about the law and salvation?

Some people believe that obeying the law faithfully will mean salvation. But this belief is not a teaching from the Bible. The law describes sin (Romans 7:7). It does not *for-give* it (Galatians 2:21). So, Paul says that the same law that gives power to sin is also “weak” (Romans 8:3). It is able to make the sinner feel guilty about his or her sins. But it cannot make the sinner righteous (holy). A mirror can show us our faults. But it just cannot fix them. Ellen G. White wrote, “The law cannot save those whom it makes guilty. It cannot rescue those ‘dying of sin.’ ”—Adapted from *Signs of the Times*, November 10, 1890.

When we fully think about the purpose of the law, it is easier to understand why Jesus became the atoning (forgiving) sacrifice for humans. The death of Jesus put sinful human beings in a right relationship with God and with His “holy and righteous [perfect] and good” law (Romans 7:12, NASB). At the same time, Jesus' death helped us to understand that it would be useless to “earn” salvation by keeping the law. After all, if obedience to the law could save us, Jesus would not have had to die in our place.

God has promised us again and again the power to obey God's law. But why is this obedience not enough to make our salvation sure? In one sense, the answer should not be that hard to understand. Think about yourself and your law-keeping. If your salvation depended upon your obedience, how much hope would you have?

THE CURSE OF THE LAW (Galatians 3:10–14)

What do the following verses tell us about human nature: Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 64:6; and Romans 3:23? How do we experience the reality of this truth every day?

With the exception of Christ, all human beings have a common experience. All human beings have been infected by Adam's sin. As a result, no human being can ever claim to be fully righteous and holy. There are several persons, such as Elijah and Enoch, who had very close relationships with God. But no one has been able to live fully blameless. Indeed, with this in mind, Paul says, "All who depend on obeying the law are under a curse. It is written, 'May everyone who doesn't [does not] continue to do everything that is written in the Book of the law be under God's curse'" (Galatians 3:10, NIV). The truth is that the law requires full obedience. And who has ever always been completely obedient, except Jesus?

How does Romans 6:23 help to explain what the "curse of the law" means? Read also Genesis 2:17 and Ezekiel 18:4.

Everyone is naturally under the curse of the law. The law leaves no room for sins. For this reason, it is not possible for a person to correct a past sin. As a result, death is what everyone must suffer. James paints an even darker picture by reminding us that breaking one area of the law is just as bad as breaking the law in all areas (James 2:10). The wages of sin is death, and death has no mercy.

So we need to realize the helpless condition of all humans under the curse. Then it is easier for us to understand and appreciate God's love. "But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NIV). Through His death, "Christ set us free from the curse of the law. He did it by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13, NIV).

Think about what Paul said: "For all who rely [depend] on works of the law are under a curse" (Galatians 3:10, RSV). This is because the law cannot save us. So, we are cursed with death. How can accepting this truth help us better to understand what Jesus has given us? In what ways do we show such understanding in our lives? Read 1 John 5:3.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘It Is Finished,’ ” pages 758–764, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The law requires righteousness—a righteous life, a perfect character;² and this is something man does not have to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ came to the earth as man. He lived a holy life and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. They have forgiveness of sins that are past through the mercy of God. More than this, Christ fills men with many good traits [qualities; points] of God. He builds up the human character to be like God’s character in its spiritual strength and beauty. So the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God is ‘fair. He proved that he is right. He also made right with himself those who believe in Jesus.’ Romans 3:26 [NirV].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 762.

In summary, the death of Jesus powerfully showed that God’s law is permanent. When our first parents sinned, God could have removed His laws and taken away the punishments for law-breaking. But this would have meant a terrible life in a lawless society for the earth’s people. Instead, God chose to send His Son as a Substitute for us so that He could receive the punishment for sin as required by the law for the sake of all people. Through Jesus’ death, all humans have a chance for a new relationship with God. This means that any one of us, through faith in Jesus, can have our sins forgiven and stand perfect in God’s eyes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Many religions teach that at the end of a person’s life, God balances the person’s good deeds against the bad deeds. Then He decides how that person will be rewarded in the after-life. What is so terribly wrong with this kind of thinking?
- ② Jesus, the One who is equal to God, died for our sins. But suppose we think that obedience to the law has something to do with saving us. Then what does this say about the value of Christ’s sacrifice for us?
- ③ What are some other reasons why the idea that says that God’s law was removed, or done away with, after the Cross is false? When people say that, what do they really mean was removed? For example, what commandment do they think was removed?

DEFINITIONS

2. character—the good qualities of a person that usually include moral (good) or emotional (having to do with strong feeling) strength, honesty, and fairness.