

Who Is the Man of Romans 7?



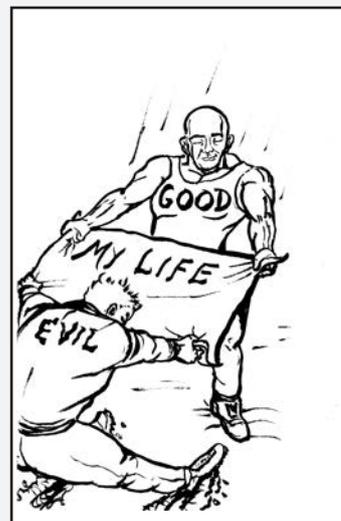
SABBATH—NOVEMBER 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 7.

MEMORY VERSE: “But now we have died to what used to control us. We have been set free from the law. Now we serve in the new way of the Holy Spirit. We no longer serve in the old way of the written law” (Romans 7:6, NlrV).

FEW CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE cause more disagreement than Romans 7. Here is what *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]* says about the reason for the disagreement: “The meaning of [Romans 7:14–25] is one of the most talked about problems in the whole letter of Romans. The first question is about the battle Paul describes going on between good and evil inside him: Is Paul describing himself here? If yes, is Paul discussing his experience *before* or *after* he gave his life to Jesus? It seems Paul speaks about his own personal fight against sin. . . . Paul also describes a war experienced by every person who becomes aware of how much we owe God’s holy law.”—Volume 6, page 553, adapted.

Did Paul have the experience in Romans 7 *before* or *after* he became a Christian? What you choose to believe about Paul’s experience is important. But more important than that is believing that Jesus’ holy life covers us. We can stand in Jesus’ holy life without sin before God because of this covering. God promises to make us holy and give us victory over sin. God promises to make us “to be like [the same as] His Son” (Romans 8:29, NLV). These beliefs are important truths for us to know as we take the Good News about Jesus to everyone on the earth (Revelation 14:6).



In Romans 7, Paul talks about the war going on for the soul of every Christian.

DEAD TO THE POWER OF THE LAW (Romans 7:1–6)

Read Romans 7:1–6. What word picture does Paul use in these verses to show to his readers their connection to the law? What important idea does Paul explain with that word picture?

Paul's word picture in Romans 7:1–6 is somewhat difficult to understand. But a careful look at the verses will help explain Paul's thinking.

First, we must remember that Paul's topic in Romans deals with the worship plan God gave Moses at Sinai. Paul often uses the word "law" to mean this worship plan. The Jews had a difficult time understanding that this plan ended when Jesus came as the Messiah. The Messiah was the One God chose to take away our sin. Paul's topic also deals with Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah. But these Jewish believers were not ready to give up their worship plan because this plan had been such an important part of their lives. So, Paul came up with a word picture about marriage to help these Jewish Christians understand why they should let go of the old plan.

Here is the meaning of Paul's word picture about the law of marriage: a woman is married to a man. The law joins the wife to her husband for as long as he lives. The wife cannot join herself to another man during that time. But what would happen if her husband died? Then the woman would be free from the law of being married to him (Romans 7:3).



The death of a woman's husband frees her from being married to him. This word picture was one more example Paul used to convince the Jews they were now free to let go of their old plan of worship.

Read Romans 7:4, 5. How does Paul use the word picture of the law about marriage to help Jewish believers understand they could let go of the old worship plan?

The death of a woman's husband frees her from the law of being married to him. In the same way, Jesus' death puts to death our old life of sin. And so, Jesus' death freed the Jews from the old worship plan. The Jews were free to "marry again." They were invited to "marry" the risen Jesus. Then the Jews would live holy lives that made God happy. This word picture about marriage was one more example Paul used to convince the Jews they were now free to let go of the old worship plan. But nowhere does Paul say God put an end to the Ten Commandments. People who say that we no longer need to obey the law make Romans 7:4, 5 say something it was never meant to say.

SIN AND THE LAW (Romans 7:8–11)

The old worship plan ended when Jesus died. But the end of the old plan did not bring an end to the Ten Commandments or to our need to obey them.

Read Romans 7:8–11. What does Paul say in these verses about the connection between the law and sin?

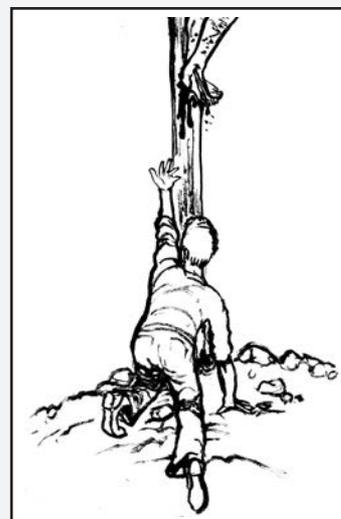
God made Himself known to the Jews. He made clear to them what was right and wrong. God also explained the punishments for breaking His laws. In fact, the meaning of sin is breaking God’s law.

Paul explains that he would not know what sin is if the law had not shown him. But what if God’s law were broken by someone who did not know the law? Then this person would not understand that he or she sinned. But what would happen if God made His law known to that person? Then that person would understand that he or she is a sinner who would be punished with death. And so, in this way, we can say the person “dies.”

What Paul is doing here is helping the Jews to see that Jesus paid in full everything that we owed to the law. Paul shows us the law was necessary. But the law was limited in what it could do. The law was meant to show us that we needed saving. But we never were meant to be saved by obeying the law.

“Paul shares an important truth. It is the truth about the work that takes place in the person that God makes right with Himself. Paul says, ‘I was once [at one time] alive. That was when I did not know what the Law said I had to do’ [Romans 7:9, NLV]. Here, Paul means he felt no guilt. But then he says, ‘I found that I had broken the Law. I knew I was a sinner’ [Romans 7:9, NLV]. God’s law showed Paul his guilt. And so, he says, ‘Death was mine because of the Law’ (NLV). Paul saw himself as a sinner. God found Paul guilty of breaking God’s law. Notice, it was Paul, and not the law, that died.”—Ellen G. White Comments [Thoughts], *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1076, adapted.

How have you “died” because of the law? How does that word picture help you better understand everything Jesus did for you when He gave you a new life?



Jesus paid in full everything we owed the law.

THE LAW IS HOLY (Romans 7:12)

How do the ideas that Paul discussed so far in chapter 7 help us to understand Romans 7:12?

The Jews showed a lot of respect for the law. So, Paul honored and praised the law. The law is good for showing us our sin and our need to be saved. But the law cannot do the things it was never meant to do. The law cannot save us from sin. Only Jesus can and His righteousness. His righteousness is His power to forgive us and make us right with Him. Jesus' power gives us victory over sin. God gives us this righteousness because we believe in Jesus.

Whom does Paul blame, in Romans 7:13, for his “death”? (Of course, Paul really does not mean he is in the grave. Instead, Paul is using “death” as a word picture to show what happened to his spirit.) Who does Paul say is *not* to blame for his “death”? Why is this difference so important to understand?



Paul is a slave of sin. He cannot do what the law asks of him.

In Romans 7:13, Paul blames sin, and not the law, for his being a sinner and for causing him to “have all kinds of desires” (Romans 7:8, CEV) for things he should not want. The law is good. The law is God’s example of how to live. But as a sinner, Paul is guilty of breaking the law.

As shown in Romans 7:14, 15, why did sin succeed at showing Paul that he was an awful sinner?

Paul says that he is “a person who does what is wrong and bad” (Romans 7:14, NIV). So, Paul needed Jesus. Only Jesus could take away the punishment that came from sinning (Romans 8:1). Only Jesus could free Paul from his slavery to sin.

Paul is “a slave of sin” (Romans 7:14, NIV). Paul has no freedom. He cannot do what the law asks him to do.

Paul uses this word picture of a slave to show the Jews that they needed Jesus. Paul already showed the Jews that victory over sin is possible only by God’s grace (Romans 6:14). Grace is God’s mercy and power over sin.

What has been your own experience with how sin makes us slaves? Why must you give yourself to Jesus? Why must self “die” daily?

THE MAN OF ROMANS 7 (Romans 7:16, 17)

In Romans 7:16, 17, Paul describes a fight that is going on inside him. Why is this war taking place?

The Holy Spirit uses the law in the same way we use a mirror. The Spirit uses the law to show us our sin. The Spirit shows us that we are not obeying the law. When we try to do the things the law tells us to do, we show that we agree that the law is good.

What ideas does Paul talk about in Romans 7:18–20 that he talked about earlier?

The Holy Spirit helps us to know we need Jesus. The Spirit often leads us into experiences that are the same as the one Israel had in the wilderness. Ellen G. White describes Israel's experience in these words: "The people did not fully know how evil their hearts were. They did not know that they could not obey God's law without help from Jesus. The people quickly agreed to the contract with God. They felt they could become right with God in their own power. . . . Only a few weeks passed before the people broke their contract with God. They bowed down to worship a false god. The people could not hope that God would accept them now. They had broken the contract with God. Now, they saw how full of sin they were. They saw their need of pardon. They felt their need of the Savior shown in the agreement God made with Abraham."—*Patriarchs [Fathers] and Prophets [Special messengers]*, pages 371, 372, adapted.

Sadly, many Christians fail to give their lives again to Jesus every day. So, these Christians serve sin, even if they do not want to accept this fact as true. They make the mistake of thinking that falling into sin from time to time is part of the normal experience of their being made holy. They think their sins only mean they have a long way to go. So, they do not take these sins to Jesus and ask Him for victory. Instead, these Christians misunderstand Romans 7. They think Paul says it is impossible to do right. But the truth is Romans 7 says it is impossible to do right when a person is a slave to sin. But victory is possible in Jesus.

Are you winning the battle over self and sin that Jesus promises? If you are not, why? What wrong choices are you making that stop you from having victory?



The Holy Spirit uses the law as we would use a mirror. The Spirit uses the law to show us our sin.

SAVED FROM DEATH (Romans 7:24, 25)

Romans 7:21–23 talks about an awful war. How have you experienced this same war going on in your own life?

In Romans 7:21–23, Paul says that the law that controls his body is the law of sin. “In my mind I am a slave to God’s law. But sin controls my desires. So I am a slave to the law of sin” (Romans 7:25, NIV). But to serve sin and obey its law means death (Romans 7:10, 11, 13). So, Paul’s body can be described by the word picture “this body of death” (Romans 7:24, NKJV) because Paul’s body obeyed sin.

Paul also talks about “the law of [the] mind” (Romans 7:23, NIV). The law of the mind is the choice to obey God’s law. The Holy Spirit convinced Paul to agree to obey the law. So, Paul made the choice to obey. But when Paul tried to obey, he could not. Why? Because Paul’s body wanted to sin. Who has not felt this same fight going on within his or her own spirit? In our minds, we know we want to do right. But our bodies have strong desires to do wrong.



Without Jesus, we are helpless against sin.

Read Romans 7:24, 25. As shown in these verses, how can we be saved from the dangerous war against sin that is going on inside us?

Some people wonder why Paul would go back to discussing his spirit’s fight against sin. After all, God already freed Paul from sin. Paul’s words, “I thank God I can be free through [in] Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25, NIV) show us the freedom from sin Paul found. But other people think these words of thanksgiving in verse 25 mean that Paul is only saying the same thing he said in earlier verses of this chapter. These people think Paul is only telling us again about the war going on inside him against sin.

But other people disagree. They say that Paul used the wording “I myself” (NKJV) to mean that he was leaving Jesus out of his fight here against sin. Whatever we think that the verses in Romans 7:24, 25 mean, one thing should be clear to us: we are helpless against sin without Jesus. With Jesus, we have new life. We know that sin always will fight against us. But God gives us victory over sin if we choose to take hold of it. You alone must make that choice. There is no other way to get the victories that God promises us in Jesus.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “There is no safety or peace for us in breaking the law. There is no reason to sin. Humans who choose to sin cannot hope to stand innocent before God or be at peace with Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 213, adapted.

“Paul wants his brothers and sisters in Jesus to know that the glory and power of Jesus gave meaning to the whole Jewish plan of worship. God gave Moses this plan to give to Israel. Every gift that the Jews gave to God under the old worship plan pointed to Jesus. These gifts showed the Jews that Jesus would save them.

“Jesus died on the cross as payment for sin. Jesus’ death put an end to the need for the laws dealing with the offering of animals to God in place of the sinner. At the same time, the old plan of worship was full of glory. The whole law showed that God gave the law to humans. The law showed that God is holy, fair, and good. It is true that an end was made to that law. But that law was full of glory, as we have said. Then Jesus came. All of the symbols of the old law pointed to Jesus. Jesus and the gift of His Spirit were full of more glory than the old law ever could be. Jesus gives His Spirit to everyone who believes. The Spirit gives life to God’s believers and makes them holy.”—Ellen G. White *Comments [Thoughts], The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 1095, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

① “In Romans 7:25, Paul gives us his clearest teaching about the law of sin. From this verse, we learn that the believing person serves the Law of God at the same time that he serves the Law of sin. *The sinner is made right with God and, at the same time, he stays a sinner.* Paul does not say, ‘My mind serves the Law of God.’ And Paul does not say, ‘My flesh serves the Law of sin.’ Instead, Paul says, ‘I myself.’ By this wording, Paul shows that the whole person is a slave in two ways. . . . What Paul means to say is: Believers are sinners at the same time they are right with God. They are right with God because they believe in Jesus. Jesus’ holy life covers them. But they are sinners, because they cannot pay the penalty for having broken the law. They continue to want to do evil. They are the same as sick people who need a doctor.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pages 114, 115, adapted. Can we agree with what Luther wrote here? Yes or no? Give reasons for your answers.



All the symbols of the old law pointed to Jesus.