

Romans 7:5-7

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⁶ *But 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.*

⁷ *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

To begin, let us step back and get a wider view of Romans 7 in the greater context of the epistle: Romans 3:19-20 shows us the Law was given to make the entire world *guilty*, and that by the deeds of the Law *no flesh shall be justified*. In Romans 5:20 we learned that the Law actually made the offence of man *abound*, therefore, it had the effect of *increasing* man's guilt and accountability before God.

The Law therefore up to this point does not seem to be something that is profitable to man in a direct sense, but only insofar as it communicates God's righteousness to us—in declaring to us *who He is*.

We learned in Romans 6:18-19 that we have become servants of righteousness, and that we are to yield ourselves servants to righteousness, unto holiness. Well how exactly are we to do that? Do we need some sort of law? Some commandment? In time past, God's servants followed the Law—that is in fact *how* they served Him.

But now, in the dispensation of grace, we're told that the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested (Rom. 3:21), and this is the righteousness of God by the faithful performance of Jesus Christ. God's righteousness without the Law is not only to be manifested in regards to our justification, as in the context of Romans 3, but also in regards to our sanctification and our service. It is going to be Jesus' faithful performance *in us* that allows us to walk in freedom and righteousness—not our own self effort.

Jesus didn't stop His work when He rose from the dead and ascended to the Father—He is still doing something, and that something is His ministry in the inner man of the saints through the word and the Spirit. If we are to serve God, it is going to be by faith and by the Spirit, and

therefore it is going to be by *Christ in us*—not ourselves. We see then that everything we receive in the three components of our salvation is by grace—it is by Jesus Christ and what He did and does.

Now, while Romans 7 is addressing the Law of Moses, and its relevance (or irrelevance) to the Christian, remember that this can be expanded to apply to *any* works or performance based system of “righteousness.” To God, and in the thinking of the apostles, there was only one *legitimate* system of works, and that was the Law of Moses. Consider Galatians 3:

Galatians 3:21

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

We see here clearly that if ever there was a law which could have profited mankind, which could have *given life*, it was God’s Law given under the Old Testament.

But even in its perfection, it was unable to perfect man because it rested upon the strength of man’s own compromised nature and upon their flesh. Thus, any works-based system that man creates in place of God’s *is inferior*, and therefore has *no ability* to perfect man either. And so, from Romans 7 here we can extrapolate this doctrine to apply to any performance based system where man attempts to please God on his own, that is, in his flesh.

Romans 7:5-6

⁵*For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*

⁶*But 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.*

In verse 5 we see that the Law is of the flesh, for it says, *when we were in the flesh*, and then speaks to the Law doing something in our flesh that relates to our deeds, that is, *sins*. Notice that it says *sins*, plural. Verse 5 is speaking of the actual sins we’ve committed, the deeds themselves, not the law of sin. Now we have not yet arrived at that phrase *law of sin* in scripture, but that is the exact phrase Paul is going to use.

Consider also that it says *the motions of sins*, which Paul says *did work*, indicating that this has *physical deeds* in view, as motion and work are associated with physical activity.

The Law essentially put sin into motion, thus the Law made one functionally dead to God. This is why the commandments in the Old Testament came with a large prescription of blood offerings—because without that blood, there would have been no way for God to withhold His judgment for those transgressions, and they wouldn't have been able to serve God at all. Functionally, they would not have been servants of God, but worthy of death. Thus we can say, in a functional sense, they would have been dead to God.

Now verse 5 begins with *For*, connecting it to the previous verse in a line of reasoning. The gist of verse 4 is that, through the body of Christ, we are dead to the law. Through His perfect obedience in the flesh, and the offering up of that flesh in death as a substitution for us, we are positionally dead to the Law.

This specific point of doctrine in verses 5 and 6 about being delivered from the Law *is* positional—how could we be delivered from a performance based system of the flesh, *through death*, when we haven't yet physically died? This point of doctrine *must* be positional.

But remember, the overall point of what's about to be communicated to us in chapter 7 is *functional*. We cannot forget that all of our sanctification flows out of positional truths, out of the things Christ freely gave us when we believed—out of the standing and identity He gave us. Our being made free from the Law is going to allow us to serve God by grace, is going to allow us exercise liberty, and allow us to grow and be conformed to the image of sons of God—something the Law could never do.

In Paul's epistles, we're said to be dead to two things: to sin, and to the Law. Remember chapter 6 dealt largely with our being *dead to sin*, and now chapter 7 is explaining that we are also *dead to the Law*. Being dead to sin allows us to walk in freedom from our old nature, and being dead to the Law allows us to walk in freedom from the penalty that would naturally result from the things we do in our flesh. Therefore, we are free from both the power and penalty of sin so that we can actually serve God, and so that we can actually know Him as a Father. God is training up children in the way they should go, He is raising a family.

While being *dead to the Law* is a positional reality for us, the entire context of Romans 7 is going to prove that a believer can still walk in the flesh, and that walking in the flesh includes trying to live according to the Law. Therefore, when Paul says *when we were in the flesh*, in past tense, he is not saying that no believer has the ability to live in the flesh practically in their daily life. The context of Romans 7 and 8 will not allow that. That is another way we know he is speaking of a positional truth here.

While our flesh is *positionally* dead in Christ, and it is by the substitutionary work of Christ we are dead to the Law (Rom. 7:4), the point of Romans 7 is not going to be our positional standing, but our functional walk.

Consider the very language of the following verses:

Romans 7:4

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

This *being married to another* speaks to the two becoming one flesh, as we discussed in the last lesson. This is not automatic, but God made us *dead to sin* and *dead to the Law* so that this could be accomplished—so that Christ Himself could live His life in us and through us, that we would then bring forth fruit unto God; so that *the two* (both Christ and ourselves), can become *one flesh*. The “being dead to the Law” (positional), makes it possible for us “to be married to another” (functional). We *should* be married to another—we *should* bring forth fruit unto God, but that is not automatic. The two are not automatically *one flesh*; that is something that requires the effectual working of the word of Christ in our inner man, to reproduce Christ in us, to reproduce the resurrection life of Jesus in our present bodies, thus it says here in Romans 7:4, “even to Him who is *raised from the dead*.”

Romans 7:6

But 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.

The word *should* indicates a *desired or expected state or end*. It indicates *intention* and *probability*, not absolute certainty.

It is possible that *should* could be used in place of *shall*, but when we substitute the two in the context of Romans 7, this becomes contradictory to the overall meaning of the chapter. If that were the case, the entire passage would be pointless, as all believers would *automatically* walk after the Spirit instead of the Law, as the word *shall* indicates either something that is *certain* or else implies a command, and neither of these make sense in this context.

This principle, that the Law tends to put sin into motion, is still possible for us as believers. Your flesh didn't change when you got saved. And so, though we are positionally dead in Christ, and therefore freed from the Law, to put yourself back under the Law *in any way* is going to produce

the same result, whether saved or unsaved—it is going to empower sin in some way. The inevitable result will be failure and then condemnation. Condemnation tends to produce hopelessness, and hopelessness lends to futility, which further abets sin. A man, overcome by sin, tends to give up, seeing no point in fighting at all. The Law does not commend you for doing right, it only condemns you when you fail.

Understanding your position in Christ in relation to the Law is essential for understanding how you are to walk and please God—and it is not according to the Law, or according to your own effort, in other words.

We were *delivered* from the Law. The word *deliver* itself indicates that we were somehow held down or held back by it, such that we needed deliverance. We have already seen that the Law actually puts man under the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:14), and in the previous verse of Romans 7:5 we see that sins themselves, the actual deeds a man commits, are put into motion by the Law. The flesh is hostile toward God, but is also hostile toward authority in general.

Thus, when you see Christians refusing to submit to governments, in almost every case what you're seeing is Christians living out of the flesh. We will see in Romans 13 that our instruction is submission to authority. And so, when you place a command on a fleshly person, their natural reaction is to say, "I don't have to listen to you." "It's my life, I'll do what I want." "It's my body, my choice." The list goes on.

This is not spiritual though. This is carnality, and their minds themselves have been overcome by carnal impulses so that their very thinking cannot be differentiated from the flesh. It is no different when your mind, *the law of your mind*, tries to tell your flesh to perform—your flesh sometimes will not just refuse, but try to get you to do the very thing you know is wrong. The Law actually can and does put sin into motion.

The truth is *you are dead to the Law* by the body of Christ, but our lives don't always reflect this. We tend to gravitate toward law in some way. The flesh, though contrary to law, loves to perform. But we must get the truths of Romans 6 rooted in us so that we walk by faith, and this is the essence of what Paul is saying here in Romans 7, verse 6, that we should serve in *newness of spirit*.

Notice it is a lower case "s" in spirit; this is speaking of our *human* spirit. Not every use of the word *spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit. In this case it is speaking of us serving God by faith and by grace, and not by the Law, or as it's referred to here, *the oldness of the letter*.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Paul here has to set the record straight, lest we begin to have an incorrect attitude toward the Law itself. Is the Law sin? *God forbid*. The Law is *good*. What man is there who thinks it a dishonor to honor your father and mother? Who among us thinks unjustly *taking* someone's life is *giving back* to society? Even the law of our own conscience tells us these things are wrong. The Law is good, but the commandment, resting upon our own carnality, has no ability to help us in our spiritual life. The stop sign tells me to stop, but has no power to actually make me stop.

We cannot confuse *the effect* of the Law with the Law itself. As it has been said many times by many people, there is nothing wrong with the Law, *there is something wrong with us*.

Now, I have to address this—and apparently so did Paul—because what we are essentially saying is that the Law is useless for us personally, in a practical sense; but *what we are not saying* is that the Law is *bad*.

There are some grace believers out there who, because they have understood the Law is not profitable to their spiritual life, have assumed *the attitude* that the Law is bad. That was not Paul's attitude and that shouldn't be ours either. As we continue to grow in grace, we see that the end result—*the righteousness of God*—is the same, though it's an entirely different vehicle by which we get there.

On the other hand, there is a large cross section of the moral majority of professing Christianity that would take what we are teaching here and call it heresy, claiming that what we are teaching is *antinomian*, that is, that we are promoting *lawlessness*. And in fact that is the result we see with some of the aforementioned grace brethren, that, though saved, often live much as the heathen, because, as they say, "I'm under grace," not understanding that grace has a dominion, and a power.

We are not teaching absolute lawlessness here. In one sense we *are* teaching lawlessness in that we are not under the Law of Moses or *any* carnal commandment. But as I've said before, God provided for us something much better when He delivered us from that Law.

And what exactly did He provide? Let's consider a few passages to help us understand:

Romans 8:2

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

The Law communicated correct relations with God and with our fellow man. By our union with Christ spiritually, and by the renewing of our mind to align with God's truth of who He's made us to be, we are able to be free from sin, and are then free to engage in a healthy relationship with God and our fellow man *without the Law*.

We are "under" something—remember, we are *under* grace (Rom. 6:14); but what does being "under grace" mean? Grace is something given, that we didn't deserve, but it's also something with power. Seeing as we were powerless, that we were without strength (Rom. 5:6), if God was going to make it so that we could serve Him, He would have to, in some way, empower us. Whatever this grace is, we learned that because of it, *sin shall not have dominion over us* (Rom. 6:14).

This grace we are under is our identification and spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Thus, it is *His* power and *His* life in us.

All that God has accomplished in us through the gospel is not only by *lawful means* but *operates according to laws God has set forth*. We have seen these as we have tracked through the doctrine: the law of faith, substitution, propitiation, imputation, atonement, even death itself. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ is the law of the Spirit that has eternally bound us to Jesus Christ and His eternal life and resurrection power.

Being freed from sin, as I mentioned, we are then free to engage in a healthy relationship with God and our fellow man. This frees us to actually perform the work of the ministry. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:

1 Corinthians 9:20-21

²⁰ *And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;*

²¹ *To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law.*

We see here how being delivered from the Law actually allows us to use our liberty to do the work of the ministry. Paul, while not under the Law itself, used his liberty to be "as under the law," so that he could minister to those who were under the Law. Certainly that is not how many people understand Christian liberty today. "Christian liberty" today is an often misunderstood doctrine used to justify otherwise questionable behaviors.

We see also here in 1 Corinthians 9, that to those who were *without* law, Paul used his liberty to become "as without law," so that he could do ministry in that context as well. But notice he says

parenthetically that he was still *under the law to Christ*. We *know* he cannot be speaking of the Old Testament Law here, for that would contradict the very doctrine he's given us in Romans and elsewhere, and even in this very passage, else why would he have to *become* "as under the Law," if he were already under it? What he is saying here is that while he made himself as without any law for the sake of ministry, he was still operating out of the law of the Spirit of life that is *in Christ*, he was still under that law to Christ.

Paul was *walking after the Spirit* and engaging in the work of the ministry from a place of identity and grace.

Let's consider one more passage:

Galatians 6:1-3

¹*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

²*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

³*For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*

We see here that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ is able to work in us to free us from sin and thus allows "those who are spiritual" to do ministry with other believers who are still dealing with sin. That law allows for the selfless character of Christ to be perfected in us, that we learn to bear others burdens, just as Christ did for us; this in itself is *the intended end* of the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ, and *thus fulfills that Law*. It is to love your neighbor as yourself—and so it fulfills the righteousness of the Law, without us actually being *under* the Law.

Paul reminds the Galatians here in verse 3 that we ourselves are *nothing*; what he is saying is that all our victory, all our sufficiency, comes from and through Jesus Christ and Him alone, it is by what the Spirit did and does in us—it is the work of God, accomplished by faith in the word of God, and thus it is a law. If received properly, it will *always* work.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

Now, Paul says here, *is the Law sin?* We already understand that this is not the case, and that God's Law is perfect. Paul even equates the Law with the *sound doctrine* which is according to Paul's gospel in 1 Timothy 1:

1 Timothy 1:8-11

⁸ *But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;*

⁹ *Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,*

¹⁰ *For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;*

¹¹ *According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.*

Notice that the Law is made for the sinner, not for the righteous. But we have been made the righteousness of God in Christ in our justification. We are then able to be made the holiness of God in our sanctification. What more could the Law do for us that Christ has not already done?

The Law however is good when used properly, that is, to make sin known and abound and convict the guilty of their deeds. It was made for the sinner. And this leads us right back to Romans 7:7, in that Paul says, *I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

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How could you not know sin Paul? Isn't sin *evident*? Many sins are clearly evident, but Paul says I had not known *sin*, singular. He is not saying "I had no idea what sin was until the Law told me." That would be ridiculous. Think about the entire discourse on conscience in Romans chapter 2 which told us very plainly that those who've never heard God's Law were still accountable because their conscience bore witness with the Law, and that this was therefore *a law unto itself*.

What Paul is calling our attention to in chapter 7 is not men's *deeds*, which was the subject of chapter 2 (Rom. 2:6), but to something *within our flesh*, beyond the mere actions men take. He's calling attention to the fact that there is something residual in these vessels from our Adamic nature, something he is going to refer to later as *the law of sin*.

What Paul is saying in verse 7, in defending and upholding the righteousness of God's Law, is that he wouldn't have even known that there was an actual law of sin within himself, except for the Law. Notice Paul says *I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet*. Why didn't he say, *I had not known dishonesty, except the law had said, Thou shalt not bear false witness*? He cites a command that specifically relates to something *within* man: *lust* and *covetousness*.

To covet something is to desire something in your heart; in the context of the Law, it is to desire something that isn't yours. Properly defined, to covet is *to desire or wish for* (something) *inordinately, or without regard for the rights of others*. We often think of *lust* in sexual terms, but truly a man lusts after all sorts of things: his neighbors car, his coworkers position, money, power, etc...

There is in fact something *in* man that is contrary to God. Look at this passage in John 2:

John 2:23-25

²³ *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.*

²⁴ *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,*

²⁵ *And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

Jesus, in His deity, knew *all men* and knew what it was that was *in* man. The issue here at hand in Romans 7 is that very thing—something residing in us that is contrary to God.

Now this passage is in the context of unregenerate man, that is, the natural, “unsaved” man. But the inner man of the believer, while made new in Christ, is still subject to be acted upon by that which remains of sin in the physical body. The muscle memory, as it were, of a lifetime of actions we've personally taken, for better or worse, and in addition to this, whatever is communicated to us on a genetic level from our forefathers, to which there is some evidence this may in fact play a role in our individual predispositions. Nonetheless, there is something in the body of a believer that pulls at him and attempts to subvert him, that wars against his own soul.

Because of this very clause contained in the Law, specifically *covetousness*, which is the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17), Paul came to see the lust within his own vessel, the very desire within, *as sin*, because the Law of Moses says, Thou shalt not covet. The fact that it is something inside of you that is sinful testifies that there is something therefore in man that is contrary to God and yet independent of his actions, and often contrary to man's own will even.

God says to desire something that is not yours is a sin. But to the natural thinking, you've "done nothing wrong." And so the Law itself sheds light on something within man, not just what he does.