

The Book of Romans Study Guide

Chapter 7

In the last chapter Paul described the distinction between sin and grace, and the way that all people are either slaves to sin or slaves to God, resulting either to death or everlasting life. In this chapter he continues with this theme of contrasts.

7:1-6

- v 1 Paul brings together two concepts that he introduced previously. One is being under grace, not Law in 6:14. The other is slavery, although in the latter part of chapter 6, the focus was on slavery to sin. Here in verse 1, he is referring to slavery to the law. And he begins with the first of two analogies in this verse by saying that the law has jurisdiction over a person throughout one's life. That is true in any context, including our own country.
- v 2 The same is true in his analogy of marriage. A married woman is bound by law to her husband while alive, but she is released from that legal binding if he dies. Now, to be specific, this is about the wife being released from her legal obligation to her husband. The same is true in our civil law today.
- v 3 Then, based on Deuteronomy 25:5–10, the Torah explicitly allows widows to remarry, confirming that they are “free from the Law” of their former husband once he has died, and they legally can become joined to another man.
- v 4 With that background, he applies it to believers in Yeshua, whom are described elsewhere in Scripture as being the bride of Messiah. Since we have died to the Law, which is like saying we are no longer under the Law, we are free to be joined to the one who was raised from the dead, meaning Yeshua, which is like being under grace.
- v 5 When Paul says that “sinful passions. . .were *aroused* (not in the Greek) by the law,” he is describing a psychological and theological phenomenon known as forbidden fruit syndrome. Paul suggests that the human “flesh” (the fallen nature) has an innate tendency to rebel against authority. So, when a command says “Do not,” human rebellious nature finds that specific thing more desirable simply because it is forbidden.
- v 6 Paul summarizes the theme of verses 1-5 by saying “we have been delivered from the law.” So, in keeping with inclusive reckoning, we died with Yeshua, as a result, we are dead to the Law and delivered from its dominion over us. And that means we have a call to serve God under the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter of the Law.

7:7-13

- v 7 Based on the conclusion in verse 6, Paul asks another rhetorical question about the law actually being sin itself. And, in keeping with his previous approach, he answers with his preferred response – *Mē genoito* – “may it never be” or “God forbid.” Instead, through the Law, we come to know what sin is. That is an echo of what he said in 3:20, that “through the

- Law comes the knowledge of sin.” Then he cites the example of coveting, which is prohibited in Exodus 20:17.
- v 8 Paul shows that once God establishes a boundary for us, we become enticed to cross it. This gets back to his earlier statement in verse 5 about sin being aroused by the Law or the concept of forbidden fruit. So, the problem is not the Law with its God-given boundaries, it is the fault of sinful humanity.
- v 9 Paul describes his personal transition from blissful ignorance to legal condemnation. Like a dormant virus, sin was already in Paul, but it lacked a target. The moment the Law said “No,” his fallen nature reacted with “Yes.” The commandment provided the opportunity for his inner rebellion to be manifested. Sin was no longer a theory; it became an active, visible power in his life.
- v 10 Then he points out the ultimate irony of the Law: The very thing intended to point the way to life (by showing how to be holy) actually delivered death (by proving he was unholy).
- v 11 He shows that sin is deceptive regarding the Law because it leads us to rebel, and, without God’s intervention, that results in killing us. You can see how that relates to Satan’s deception of Eve that led to rebellion by both she and Adam, and that is what ended up killing them, when God intended them to live forever.
- v 12 Again, Paul affirms the Law by calling it holy and righteous and good, That is an echo of passages like Psalm 19:7-9 –
 “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. . .
 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. . .
 The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes”.
 And Psalm 119:142, 172: “Your law is true. . .all your commandments are righteous.”
- v 13 Paul doesn’t blame the Law for producing death, sin is the culprit. While it is true that the Law provokes our sin nature, it is still good because it exposes our sinfulness. Sin “becomes utterly (KJV – exceedingly) sinful” because it continues to increase in our lives, especially when we rebel against authority. But the Law maintains a constant standard of righteousness. So, over time, we just get further and further away from meeting that standard.

7:14-25

- v 14 Paul begins to personalize his message by calling himself “of flesh” (KJV – carnal). The Greek word is *sarkikos*, which literally means “pertaining to the flesh,” and is used to convey actions that satisfy physical desires and are self-serving and temporal. When Paul states that he is of the flesh or carnal, he is not saying that he isn’t a believer. He is just demonstrating his awareness of his natural state that God has begun a transformational work in him.
- v 15-19 Paul states a similar concept in each of these verses, with subtle distinctions. In verse 19, he provides the most direct summary: “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.” Paul’s problem is the same for all of us. It isn’t about a

lack of desire – he does want to do what is right. And his problem isn't about a lack of knowledge – he knows what the right thing is. His problem is a lack of power because the Law provides no power.

- v 17 & 20 He shows that it is sin dwelling within us that causes to do what we don't want to do, He is not denying his personal responsibility as a sinner. But he is recognizing that as he sins, he is acting against his nature as a new creation in Messiah Yeshua. The point is that we must own up to our sin, while realizing that the impulse to sin does not come from who we really are in Messiah.
- v 21-23 He describes a war waging within him between two elements:
- The law of his mind or his inner self, representing a person's conscience, reason, and spiritual desire to obey God.
 - The law of sin in his members (the body), representing the physical self and its natural impulses.
- v 24 He expresses the culmination of this argument by calling himself "wretched." The literal sense of the word describes someone who is calloused by toil or worn out by enduring trials. It implies a state of being "beat down" or "exhausted" from a long, arduous struggle, perfectly capturing Paul's fatigue from the "war" described in the previous verses. And then, he asks another rhetorical question – "Who will set me free from the body of this death?"
- v 25 Having painted this dark and depressing description of humanity left on our own, he now suddenly proclaims how to have victory in this war. Now, notice the last phrase that shows we will continue battling the law of sin throughout our earthly lives. But, believers have a great resource that others do not. The first phrase of this verse shows that Paul realizes that the power to overcome the "body of death" (v. 24) does not come from his own willpower or from following the Law, but strictly from God's intervention through Messiah Yeshua.
- Notice that Paul doesn't pretend that looking to Yeshua takes away the struggle, but He works through us, not instead of us in the battle against sin. And that is how He can say that He can serve the Law of God, even while warring against the law of sin.