

Romans 7:1-5

PREVIOUS

NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	God's Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

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Romans 7:1-3

Romans 7:4-6

Romans 7:1-5

The Frustration of Living Under the Law

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Romans 7:1 Or do you not [know, brethren](#) (for I am [speaking](#) to those who [know](#) the [law](#)), that the [law has jurisdiction over](#) a [person](#) as [long](#) as he [lives](#)? 2 For the [married woman](#) is [bound](#) by [law](#) to her [husband](#) while he is [living](#); but [if](#) her [husband dies](#), she is [released](#) from the [law](#) concerning the [husband](#). 3 [So then, if](#) while her [husband](#) is [living](#) she is [joined](#) to [another man](#), she shall be [called](#) an [adulteress](#); but [if](#) her [husband dies](#), she is [free](#) from the [law](#), so that she is not an [adulteress](#) though she is [joined](#) to [another man](#). 4 [Therefore](#), my [brethren](#), you [also](#) were [made](#) to [die](#) to the [Law through](#) the [body](#) of [Christ](#), [so](#) that you might be [joined](#) to [another](#), to Him who was [raised](#) from the [dead](#), in [order](#) that we might [bear fruit](#) for [God](#). 5 For [while](#) we were in the [flesh](#), the [sinful passions](#), which were aroused by the [Law](#), were at [work](#) in the [members](#) of our body to [bear fruit](#) for [death](#).

Well, we have been looking at our new life in Christ in chapter 6 as Paul has told us how we are no longer under the "power" or "penalty of sin. Last week we saw that we have a choice about who we are to obey—and we are to daily choose to obey Christ, not our fleshly desires. We should remember that the fruit of choosing our flesh is death. We used to be slaves sin and to the flesh, but now we are free in Christ. All the flesh ever does for us is ruin us.

That takes us into chapter 7. Years ago we had a paper we sent out to our people to inform them as to what was going on and what was about to happen in the life of our church. The name of the paper was "As we see it". Well, as I now approach chapter 7, I want you to know that what I will share it "as I see it".

Back in chapter 5 we saw that we used to live ungodly lives (5:6), sinful lives (5:8)—in fact, willfully sinful lives. And in 5:10, Paul

tells us that we were enemies of God. Then in chapter 6 Paul labored to show us that we are "dead to our old life being controlled by sin" that we lived in Adam. We saw that while we are "dead to that old life in sin," we are not dead to the **ability** to sin. We are dead to the sin that once controlled us: sin is now a choice to the believer.

Paul showed us that everything we were in Adam is dead, and as a result "our body of sin"—which houses all the sinful passions of the flesh—cannot control us any more unless we choose to allow it to do so. Look at 6:6: "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;" and again in 6:11: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

What a great truth. These fleshly bodies we live in, with all the inordinate lusts contained in them are now powerless on their own to cause us to be their slave.

But, what is Paul saying in verse 12? "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts." Paul wants us to know that with all Christ has done to effect our inner man, to completely change it and to put His Spirit in us to empower us over sin and enable us to live Godly unto God the Father, we are still left with a propensity to sin in our outer man that is so strong that in Galatians it says it is a holy war day by day with his Spirit in us.

You see, all the effects of our salvation have not experientially occurred yet. Salvation is like a time-release vitamin: When we put our faith into Christ, *immediately* His Spirit comes to live within us and we are free from the **penalty of sin**. Then the process of "sanctification" begins as we obey Christ and watch as He empowers a holy behavior, showing us that we have victory over the **power of sin**. Then one day our body of sin dies, and we are freed from the very **presence of sin**.

Look again at chapter 6, beginning with verse 11: "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace."

What? Does sin have the power to reign? I thought our bodies that contain this propensity to sin were dead. How can sin possibly reign anymore? Only when we choose to let it. Only when I look back at the law can sin ever "reign over me". Why? Because when I am looking at the Law, I am not looking at the Lord and I am not depending on His grace, but upon my flesh. It won't work that way.

Now, Paul wants us to see this in chapter 7. Out of the 77 times the word law is used in Romans, it is used 23 times in chapter 7. In other words, almost 1/3 of the times that it is used in the whole book are in this chapter alone. We cannot in any way ignore that fact. It should be pretty obvious what the theme of this chapter is.

As I see it, the question is not whether or not Paul is saved or lost, it is the law and it's deadly influence on all of us whether lost or saved. First, he gives a universal principle. Look at 7:1: "Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?"

Once again Paul uses the word for "know," *agnoeo*, which means "without understanding." He uses it here in the same way he used the phrase in 6:2. In other words, he's saying, "Are you walking around without this understanding? You had better pay attention."

"I am speaking to those who know [the] law." There is no "the" in the text, which to me implies that Paul is stating a general principle that everyone should know—those who know about law and how it works. "I am speaking to those of you who understand law and how it works."

Now, he lays out the fundamental principle of law: that the law has jurisdiction over a person. "Has jurisdiction over" is the word *kurios*, which means Lord, sovereign, that which has control over a person. It controls him, has dominance over him, tells him what to do, and condemns him for not doing it. If you've ever gotten a speeding ticket, you understand this principle—the officer of the law has the right to enforce the speed limit on you! The law has jurisdiction over us. How long does this jurisdiction last? For as long as we live. As long as he is living, a man is controlled by, told what to do, is lorded over, by the law.

Now Paul is going to show how a person can be rid of the jurisdiction of the law. He is going to show us that the death of the person separates him from the jurisdiction of the law. When you are dead, then the law doesn't have any effect on you anymore.

Second, Paul shows us a practical application of what he is talking about. Look at Romans 7:2: "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband."

Paul takes those who know law to a law concerning a married woman, one they would obviously be familiar with in their culture whether Jewish or Gentile. "For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living." Very clearly, the law said

that a man and a woman were bound to one another by the law till the death of one of the partners. The term *deo*, for bound, is used to mean that which holds someone under restriction.

"But if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband." "Released from the law" comes from the word *katargeo* (from *argeo*), which means, "to be idle, inactive." The same word translated here "released from the law" is used in other places in Romans. Let's look at them, because it appears to have the same meaning.

Romans 3:3: "What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not **nullify** the faithfulness of God, will it?"

Romans 3:31: "Do we then **nullify** the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."

Romans 4:14: "For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is **nullified**."

Romans 7:6: "But now we have been **released** from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter."

So we see that the "law" that Paul refers to, that they would be familiar with and which says a woman is bound to her husband, is no longer in effect if the husband dies. The hold it once had on the wife is now **nullified**. Look at verse 3: "So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man."

The law says that if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress. The word "joined," (*suzeugnumi*—to yoke or pair), seems to be in the sense of being married, and implies that there has been a divorce between the two and the husband is still living. The same word is used in Matthew 19:6: "Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate." So, if her husband is still alive, and she remarries she is called an adulteress according to the law that Paul is talking about.

But, "but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man." Upon the death of her husband, she is no longer bound to him, and she is free to marry another man. Death broke the bondage. Death freed her to remarry.

So, the principle is clear, "death" breaks the bondage of a marriage relationship. When one of the partners dies, the other is now free forever from any responsibility to that old relationship. The point Paul is making concerning the "Mosaic law" and our freedom from it becomes crystal clear as we see in the next verse.

In Romans 7:4 we see the purpose of the illustration: "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God."

You know the old saying: Whenever you see the word "therefore," always see what it is there for! Paul now relates the principle to the fact that in our relationship to the "law" there has been a death. No one can be related to Christ until he first of all dies and is freed from the law.

The death that we died to the law, was when we were identified with Christ's death at salvation: "you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ." You were put to death to the law and shown to be dead. How? Through the body of Christ. He fulfilled the law, and He established it by paying the penalty all humans deserve. We are "baptized into His death"—totally identified with His death—with His body that was a flesh body that died on the cross.

Look back at chapter 6:3-5: "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Jesus died to the law—and we died with Him.

Back in verse 4 of chapter 7 we read: "that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead." The phrase "that you might be joined to another" comes from *ginomai*, which means to come into being. The word "joined" is understood from the previous verses, but it means to come into being with another.

Now notice this: "to another" is the word *heteros*—another of a different kind. The Christ who came under the law and who identified with our sin on the cross arose in a different relationship to the law and to sin. We are joined to Him in this new identity. We've already explained that as we studied chapter 6.

Why were we joined to another? "That we might bear fruit for God." The **purpose** of being joined to Christ in His new identity concerning "the law of sin" is so that we might bear fruit unto God. Our redemption was in order to produce righteousness. We are delivered from the Law and the power of sin so that we might be united with Christ, and we are united to Christ so that we might

bear fruit unto God. Under the law, sin seized its opportunity through the weakness of our flesh, as we will see shortly in chapter 7 and rendered "righteousness" impossible.

Now, this leads us naturally to Paul's next thought. We have seen the principle, the practical illustration and the purpose of the illustration. Now, we want to look at the problem man had that required him to be joined to Christ—free from the law and from the power of sin.

You see, before when we were in Adam we could only produce the kind of fruit that would end up in death—unrighteousness. Romans 7:5 says, "For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death."

Here is a new phrase to describe our life in Adam. "For while we were in the flesh." Look at this phrase "in the flesh" in Romans 8:8-9: "and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." "In the flesh" is in the imperfect indicative tense. It describes our past life in Adam. We were dead spiritually, and all that Adam was we were.

Verse 5 again: "the sinful passions," literally, the passions of "the" sin. These "passions" refer to the inordinate desires of the flesh caused by our sinful state. Where do they reside? In the same bodies we now live in, but they have now lost their power.

Then we read, "which were aroused by the Law." "Aroused" is a word that means "to work, to energize." These passions were constantly being energized by the law. How were the passions of our flesh being energized by the law? We were rebellious enemies of God, and the natural tendency of rebellion is to do the very thing that we are told not to.

One way to illustrate how the "law" aroused our sinful passions is to think of a person trying to sweep a very dusty and dirty room. Just by swinging and swishing the broom, every particle of dust in the room is stirred up.

Once these passions were obeyed, then the result was a life filled with the fruit of death. The fruit of death is "unrighteous fruit". These are deeds that are not acceptable unto God. Isaiah 64:6 refers to them as "filthy rags." So, the only solution to that problem was to put our faith into Christ and to be identified with His death and His resurrection and be set free from the law and the power of sin.

Romans 7:6: "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." "But now" gives us the time frame. When did this happen? Since we have died with Christ.

I have been "released from the law" and now I am a slave in a brand new way. I do not in any way shape or form serve the law any more. Now, having been united to Christ, joined to Him, I obey Him by faith. And as I do so, I access His grace and the result is righteousness and holy living!

There is a song you may know that expresses what we have learned in these verses:

Free from the law oh happy condition
Jesus hath bled and there is remission
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.
Now are we free there's no condemnation
Jesus provides a perfect salvation
Come unto me oh hear His sweet call
Come and He saves us once for all
Children of God Oh glorious calling
Surely His grace will keep us from falling
Passing from death to life at His call,
Blessed salvation once for all.

Chorus:

*Once for all oh sinner receive it,
Once for all oh friend now believe it,
Cling to the cross the burden will fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.*