

FREE AT LAST

"LAW AND DISORDER" ROMANS 7:7-25

It's not as easy as it sounds—at least not for me personally. Paul says, "anyone who has died" in union with Christ—that would be me—"has been set free from sin" (Ro 6:7). He also says, "you used to be slaves to sin"—that would include me—but "you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (v. 18). I consider both statements true about me. I died to sin, and now I'm free to serve righteousness. All that remains for me to progress in my sanctification is to do what Paul says: "Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness" (v. 13). *Who knew it would be so hard?* Shouldn't obedience to God come naturally to a born-again Christian like me?

Had I read Paul a little more carefully, I would have known that living the Christian life would be a struggle. In Romans 6, "sin is personified as an evil power which takes up its residence within human nature, and there controls man's actions" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 147). And while I may have died to sin, sin did not die to me. True, I'm a born-again human being, but I'm still human and still have a fallen human nature inherited from Adam. Put differently, I'm not my "old self" (v. 6), but I still have a sinful nature or inherent disposition to sin. True, sin is no longer my master; I have been emancipated, set free from sin. However,

even though I'm no longer necessarily a slave to sin, you might say I'm a slave to sin to the extent that I offer myself to impurity and ever-increasing wickedness rather than to righteousness leading to ever-increasing holiness (v. 19; cf., v. 16). One commentator agrees: "Paul did not say that considering oneself dead to sin means that sin has lost its appeal for the Christian. It still has a strong appeal to any Christian, because their human nature is still sinful (6:15-23). He said that considering oneself dead to sin means that we no longer must follow sin's dictates" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," 2017 ed., 109, www.soniclight.com). Paul elaborates on my struggle and your struggle with sin in Romans 7:14-25.

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Following Paul's first missionary journey, which "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Ac 14:27), a dispute broke out between some men from Judea and the apostle regarding circumcision. The men claimed, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). Paul and Barnabas vehemently disagreed, so they took the matter to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem where a council was convened to address it. Luke reports that some Pharisees, who were Christians, "stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" (v. 5). Apparently, they believed Gentiles had to become Jews and then live like Jews to be Christians. Put differently, they believed circumcision was necessary for justification together with obedience to the law for sanctification.

The old nature knows no Law, the new nature needs no Law.

– Warren W. Wiersbe

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Peter then testified, "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our father have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (vv. 8-11). And James agreed neither circumcision nor obedience to the law should be demanded of Gentiles.

Later Paul argues in the book of Romans that neither circumcision nor obedience to the law is required for either *justification* or *sanctification*. In the first place, Abraham was declared righteous—that is justified—by faith before he was circumcised, making him "the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (4:11-12). And in the second place, believers "are not under the law but under grace" (6:15). Believers "died to the law" (7:4) and "have been released from the law" to "serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (v. 6). For ironically, although the law is holy, righteous, and good, it's neither able to deliver believers from the power of sin nor able to empower them to do what is right (vv. 21-25). From Paul's personal experience described in Romans 7:14-25, "we are warned that the Mosaic law, and, hence, all law, is unable to deliver us from the power of sin; the multiplication of 'rules' and 'commands,' so much a tendency in some Christian circles, will be more likely to drive us deeper into frustration than to improve the quality of our walk with Christ" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 467).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Romans 7:7-25

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. 9 Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. 10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. 11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. 12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am

unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Bracket the question in v. 7 and in v. 13.

* Circle "sin" in vv. 8, 9, 11, 14, 17, 20.

* Bracket "died" in v. 9, and "put me to death" in v. 11.

* Box "so then" indicating *result* in v. 12.

* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23.

* Circle "sold" in v. 14.

* Underline "sinful nature" in vv. 18, 25b.

* Bracket "this law at work" in v. 21 and "another law at work" in v. 23.

* Circle "inner being" in v. 22.

* Underline "the law of my mind" and "the law of sin" in v. 23.

* Box "so then" in v. 25b.

* Highlight v. 25b.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul uses "sin" repeatedly in verses 7-12. To what does this word refer in this context?
2. Explain the rather ironic *contrast* introduced in verse 8.
3. Paul says, "apart from the law, sin was dead" (v. 8). How so?
4. Explain how "sin" used the law to put Paul to death (v. 11).
5. Do verses 7-12 describe Paul *before* or *after* his conversion? What makes you think so?
6. Paul says he's "unspiritual" (v. 14). Is that true of you too? Explain.
7. Describe the effect of the "sinful nature" (v. 18) on Paul's behavior.
8. Is Paul denying responsibility for what he does in verses 17 and 21? Explain.
9. Do verses 13-25 describe Paul *before* or *after* his conversion? What makes you think so?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about the extent to which you see yourself in Paul's description of himself (v. 25b).

The main topic of Romans 7 is the law. After concluding from the facts in verses 1-6 that believers "have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (v. 6), Paul goes on to explain why sanctification does not result from keeping the law (cf., 6:14). One author explains: "Next [vv. 7-13] Paul shows why release from the law is absolutely necessary if a person is to bear fruit for God [v. 4]. The law has an ironic effect upon the *unregenerate* person. It arouses his sinful disposition [i.e., flesh, old nature, sinful nature] to produce more fruit for death. Thus, the old covenant law actually hinders the unregenerate person from living righteously even though it demands perfect righteousness from him" (Renald E. Showers, *The New Nature*, 92).

But perhaps the law might have a different effect upon the *regenerate* person, who has a "new disposition" [i.e., new nature] within him. The writer goes on: "In Romans 7:14-25, Paul relates what happened to him when he, as a Christian, tried to use the law as the means of practical sanctification. In spite of the fact that he had the new, holy disposition within him, the law did not enable him to live righteously. He continually experienced depressing defeat by his sinful disposition. Paul's purpose, then, for this passage is to demonstrate what he has been teaching earlier in the context—that if the Christian is to be free from the dominance of his sinful disposition, he must also be free from the old covenant law. He must never use the law as his means of practical sanctification" (92).

The questions in verse 7 and verse 13 together with a change in verb tense from *past* in v. 7 ff. to *present* in v. 14 ff. mark a major division in the passage—with verse 13 serving as a 'bridge' between the two parts, which both employ *autobiographical* narrative. In the first part (vv. 7-12), using past tense verbs, Paul explains that sin, using the law, brought him death *before* he was saved. "I found," he says, "that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death" (v. 10). In the second part (vv. 13-25), using present tense verbs, Paul describes the constant battle *after* he is saved between the "mind" (v. 23), which agrees with

God's law (v. 22), and the "sinful nature," which succumbs to "the law of sin" (v. 25b). And what is true of Paul in particular before and after he became a Christian is also true of others in general. "The result, then, is that the law of God, which aroused sin, is impotent to break the power of sin" (Moo, 424).

Verses 7-12 raise a question: How can the law, which is holy, and the commandment, which is holy, righteous, and good, that were both intended to bring life, actually bring death? Paul answers: Certainly not through any fault in the law! The fault lies not with the law, he says, but with sin, taking advantage of the "flesh" or "sinful nature." Sin lies quiescent until the commandment comes, and then seizing the opportunity, sin springs to life. This is apparently what happened to Paul. He considered himself "alive" (v. 9). Unaware of the law's true demands (cf., Mt 5:17-47), his confidence was rooted in his Jewish heritage, pharisaism, zeal, and scrupulous conformity to traditions (Php 3:4b-6), but at some point before his conversion, he reflected on the commandment, "You shall not covet" (v. 7), sin sprang to life in him producing every kind of coveting, and he died, that is, he realized he was condemned to die. The law revealed his sin and sin's wages is death (6:23). The effect the law had on Paul in particular before his conversion is typical of the effect it has on others in general.

Verses 13-25 raise a similar question: How did the law/commandment (v. 12), which is in itself good, become a *cause* of death thereby showing sin's true colors? Paul answers: Certainly not through any fault in the law! The fault lies not in the law, which he says is "spiritual," but in himself, who is "unspiritual." One writer puts his statement in context. "Paul asserts, because, while the law is indeed good and 'spiritual,' 'I am 'fleshly.' Verses 15-25 justify and develop this statement about himself, concluding from his tragic inability to put into practice what he knows to be right (vv. 15-21) that he is controlled by an alien and negative force—'the law of sin' (vv. 22-23). It is because of his captivity to the power of sin that the law can become the instrument of death" (Moo, 453). The law becomes a cause of death when sin living in Paul and working

through his sinful nature, keeps him from doing the good he wants to do and causes him to do the evil that he doesn't. He's *one* person not two—one person caught in a conflict between mental assent to God's word on the one hand and practical failure to do it on the other. So, he sees two principles at work in him; one he calls the "law of my mind" and the other the "law of sin" that wages war against it. In his mind he's a slave to God's law, but in his sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (v 25b). The struggle Paul faced

trying to do the good he desired to do after his conversion is typical of the struggle Christians in general face.

No wonder, Paul cries out for deliverance. But deliverance is not available through the law for Paul or for us. *Trying harder* to do what is right, what agrees with the law, amounts to fighting a losing battle. As chapter 8 will show, deliverance is available through Jesus Christ our Lord to those "who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4).

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

Although the law is holy, righteous, and good, it does not provide a means of sanctification because sin uses it to multiply our sins and because our sinful nature frustrates any desire we have to do good and not evil.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the message of Romans 1:1-7 and your response to it.

Do you think Christians today are trying to keep the law in an effort to be sanctified, that is, to be like Jesus?

Can you illustrate the truth of what Paul says, especially in verses 14-25, from personal experience?

Identify your personal takeaway from the message of this passage.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

vv. 1-25 **I** The passage is an example of *autobiographical* narrative; Paul describes his own experience preconversion (vv.7-13) and postconversion (vv. 14-25). "The apostle probably appealed to his own personal experience. The main alternative views are that he was speaking of Adam's experience, Israel's experience, or the experience of every man. Paul broadened his own experience into a more general picture of the struggle that every person faces (vv. 7-13), and the struggle that every believer encounters when he or she tries to serve God by obeying the Law (vv. 14-25). Others hold that Paul was describing only the experience of an unbeliever" (Constable, 105, 113-15; see also Moo, 424-31; 443-51).

v. 8 et al. **sin** "Sin is personified as an evil power which takes up its residence within human nature, and there controls man's actions" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 147). The word "sin" occurs 13 times in 7:7-25 to refer not to acts of sin but to sin personified made manifest in the disposition of fallen humanity to sin. "Paul is regarding sin, not as an act, but as a governing disposition which demands acts . . . In 7:7-8 Paul declares that sin produced coveting (lust) of every kind in him. According to James 1:14-15 lust in turn gives birth to an act of sin. The joining of these passages indicates that Paul is not talking about an act of sin. Instead, he refers to the sinful disposition [sinful nature] which prompts the chain reaction which produces the act of sin" (Showers, 61, 62).

v. 8 **dead** "'Dead' here means dormant or inactive, but not completely impotent, as is clear from verse 9 where this 'dead' sin springs to life. The absence of the verb [is] before 'dead' in the Greek text indicates that what Paul was saying was a generalization rather than a specific historical allusion" (Constable, 107). "The statement appears to be an axiom, a broad principle" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:80).

v. 9 **the commandment** I.e., "You shall not covet" (v. 7). "Paradoxically, what sin produces by taking advantage of the commandment is just what the commandment prohibited: 'all kinds of coveting'" (Moo, 436). With the commandment and the "every kind of coveting" produced by it, came Paul's consciousness and conviction of sin.

v. 9 **I died** "I was alive" and "I died" are to be understood *relatively*. Paul was the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) and lived in strictest conformity to the regulation of his sect (Acts 26:5). He seems to mean, then, that there was a time when he was living in a state of blissful indifference to the intensely searching demands that the law made on the inner man. He was careless and self-deceived as to his own righteousness. This state is reflected in Philippians 3:6, where he speaks of his preconversion days when he was 'faultless' with respect to legalistic righteousness" (Harrison, 80). "I died" is placed in contrast with 'I was alive apart from the law' and must, therefore, be interpreted as the death of the complacent self-assurance and calm which the former 'being alive' denotes" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 251).

v. 11 **deceived . . . put to death** "Paul personified 'sin' as an actor here. 'Sin' plays the part of a tempter. It 'deceived' Paul and 'killed' (destroyed) him (cf. Gen. 3:13). Paul's sinful nature urged him-being typical of all people-to do the very thing the commandment forbade" (Constable, 107).

v. 14 **sold . . . to sin** "Since Paul in Romans 6 and 7 uses the term 'sin' to refer to the sinful disposition, the expression 'having been sold under sin' implies bondage to the sinful disposition . . . The regenerate person, then, as a result of being made of flesh, is still in bondage in the sense that the sinful disposition continues present in him and in the sense that he is susceptible to that disposition's power. It is in these senses that Paul, as a regenerate man, could say that he is of flesh, having been sold under sin" (Showers, 96, 97). "The nature which I have inherited 'in Adam' finds the law uncongenial. The law is 'spiritual' because it is God's law; but this nature of mine is unspiritual (sarkinos, 'fleshly'), enslaved to a power which my will repudiates. There is something in man-even regenerate man-which objects to God and seeks to be independent of Him; this 'something' is what Paul here calls his 'flesh' (cf., v 18), a prey to the tyranny of indwelling sin" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC, 153).

v. 14 **unspiritual** Cf., "of flesh" (NASB); "carnal" (NKJV); "merely human" (ISV); "so human" (ERV).

v. 18 **sinful nature** Lit., "flesh," that is, "sinful disposition" (see, Showers, 102-103); cf., "Yes [For...], I know that nothing good lives in me—I mean nothing good lives in the part of me that is earthly and sinful [my sinful self; my sinful nature; my flesh]" (EXB).

v. 21 **this law . . . another law** While Paul generally uses "law" to refer to the Mosaic law, here it refers to "a principle or rule based on the predictable consequence of an act, condition, etc." (e.g., the law of supply and demand).

v. 22 **inner being** Cf., "inner self" (HCSB); "whole heart" (CEV); "new nature" (TLB).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I had already coaxed my toddler out of the play pool at the waterpark. He was dried off and dressed in dry clothes for the ride home. I instructed him not to get back in the water as I dried off the baby and changed him as well. I could see him struggling, staring at the water. The little cartoon angel and devil were almost visible on either shoulder. The angel was reminding him to obey his mom. The devil was reminding him how great the water felt and maybe he should take one more dip before he left for the day. The devil won, and the wet toddler did not get a treat before we left the park that day. I get this kid. I do the same thing sometimes. I am fully aware of the boundaries the Lord sets for me, yet I want to stick my toe over on the other side. On occasion the thing isn't even tempting until I know it's off limits! In our text this week Paul identifies with this struggle as well. How can we parent our little ones through moments of blatant intentional sin? We do it with a delicate balance of grace and justice. Your kids need to know that they are unconditionally loved by God and by you despite what they do. They also need to know that all actions have consequences. We reap what we sow. I'm praying for you as you lead them through these moments - press on parents!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 7:7-25

1. How does Paul answer the question, "Is the law sinful?"
2. What does Paul say in verse 19?

What Do You Think

1. Have you ever felt the same way Paul did in verse 19?
2. What is one area in which you struggle to obey?
3. How can you overcome temptation to sin?

What R U Going To Do

Look at our memory verses today. Make a list of things the sinful nature might desire. Make a list of things the Spirit desires. Keep your list nearby this week to remind you to live in obedience to the Spirit.

Core Comp

Salvation by Grace - I believe I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

Memory Verse

Romans 8:5-6 – *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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