

Who Is *the Man of Romans 7*?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 7.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Romans 7:6*).

Few chapters in the Bible have created more controversy than has Romans 7. Concerning the issues involved, *The SDA Bible Commentary* says: “The meaning of [Romans 7:14–25] has been one of the most discussed problems in the whole epistle. The main questions have been as to whether the description of such intense moral struggle could be autobiographical, and, if so, whether the passage refers to Paul’s experience before or after his conversion. That Paul is speaking of his own personal struggle with sin seems apparent from the simplest meaning of his words (cf. [Romans 7:7–11]; . . .). [Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 19; Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 475.] It is surely also true that he is describing a conflict that is more or less experienced by every soul confronted by and awakened to the spiritual claims of God’s holy law.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 553.

Bible students differ on whether Romans 7 was Paul’s experience before or after his conversion. Whatever position one takes, what’s important is that Jesus’ righteousness covers us and that in His righteousness we stand perfect before God, who promises to sanctify us, to give us victory over sin, and to conform us to “the image of his Son” (*Rom. 8:29*). These are the crucial points for us to know and experience as we seek to spread “the everlasting gospel” to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (*Rev. 14:6*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 25.

Dead to the Law

Read Romans 7:1–6. What illustration does Paul use here in order to show his readers their relationship to the law, and what point is he making with that illustration?

Paul’s illustration in Romans 7:1–6 is somewhat involved, but a careful analysis of the passage will help us to follow his reasoning.

In the overall context of the letter, Paul was dealing with the system of worship established at Sinai; that is often what he means by the word *law*. The Jews had difficulty grasping the fact that this system, given to them of God, should end with the coming of the Messiah. This is what Paul was dealing with—Jewish believers still not ready to abandon what had been such an important part of their lives.

In essence, Paul’s illustration is as follows: a woman is married to a man. The law binds her to him as long as he lives. During his lifetime she cannot consort with other men. But when he dies, she is free from the law that bound her to him (*Rom. 7:3*).

How does Paul apply the illustration of the law of marriage to the system of Judaism? *Rom. 7:4, 5*.

As the death of her husband delivers the woman from the law of her husband, so the death of the old life in the flesh, through Jesus Christ, delivers the Jews from the law they had been expected to keep until the Messiah fulfilled its types.

Now the Jews were free to “remarry.” They were invited to marry the risen Messiah and thus bring forth fruit to God. This illustration was one more device Paul used to convince the Jews that they were now free to abandon the ancient system.

Again, given all else that Paul and the Bible say about obedience to the Ten Commandments, it doesn’t make sense to assert here that Paul was telling these Jewish believers that the Ten Commandments were no longer binding. Those who use these texts to try to make that point—that the moral law was done away with—really don’t want to make *that* point anyway; what they really want to say is that only the seventh-day Sabbath is gone—not the rest of the law. To interpret Romans 7:4, 5 as teaching that the fourth commandment has been abolished or superseded or replaced with Sunday is to give them a meaning that the words were never intended to have.

Sin and the Law

If Paul is talking about the whole law system at Sinai, what about Romans 7:7, in which he specifically mentions one of the Ten Commandments? Doesn't that refute the position taken yesterday that Paul was not talking about the abolition of the Ten Commandments?

The answer is "No." We must keep in mind, again, that the word *law* for Paul is the *whole* system introduced at Sinai, which included the moral law but wasn't limited to it. Hence, Paul could quote from it, as well as from any other section of the whole Jewish economy, in order to make his points. However, when the system passed away at the death of Christ, that didn't include the moral law, which had existed even before Sinai and exists after Calvary, as well.

Read Romans 7:8–11. What is Paul saying here about the relationship between the law and sin?

God revealed Himself to the Jews, telling them in detail what was right and wrong in moral, civil, ceremonial, and health matters. He also explained the penalties for violation of the various laws. Violation of the revealed will of God is here defined as sin.

Thus, Paul explains, he would not have known if it was a sin to covet without having been informed of that fact by the "law." Sin is the violation of the revealed will of God, and where the revealed will is unknown, there is no awareness of sin. When that revealed will is made known to a person, he or she comes to recognize that he or she is a sinner and is under condemnation and death. In this sense, the person dies.

In Paul's line of argument here and throughout this section, he is trying to build a bridge to lead the Jews—who revere the "law"—to see Christ as its fulfillment. He is showing that the law was necessary but that its function was limited. The law was meant to show the need of salvation; it never was meant to be the means of obtaining that salvation.

"The apostle Paul, in relating his experience, presents an important truth concerning the work to be wrought in conversion. He says, 'I was alive without the law once'—he felt no condemnation; 'but when the commandment came,' when the law of God was urged upon his conscience, 'sin revived, and I died.' Then he saw himself a sinner, condemned by the divine law. Mark, it was Paul, and not the law, that died."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1076.

In what sense have you "died" before the law? How, in that context, can you understand what Jesus has done for you by giving you a new life in Him?

The Law Is Holy

Read Romans 7:12. How do we understand this text in the context of what Paul has been discussing?

Because the Jews revered the law, Paul exalts it in every way possible. The law is good for what it does, but it can't do what it was never meant to do—save us from sin. For that we need Jesus, because the law—whether the entire Jewish system or the moral law in particular—cannot bring salvation. Only Jesus and His righteousness, which come to us by faith, can.

What does Paul blame for his condition of “death,” and what does he exonerate? Why is that distinction important? *Rom. 7:13.*

In Romans 7:13, Paul is presenting the “law” in the best sense possible. He chooses to blame sin, not the law, for his terrible sinful condition; that is, his working “all manner of concupiscence [lust]” (*Rom. 7:8*). The law is good, for it is God's standard of conduct, but as a sinner Paul stands condemned before it.

Why was sin so successful in showing Paul up to be a terrible sinner? *Rom. 7:14, 15.*

Carnal means “fleshly.” Thus, Paul needed Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ could take away the condemnation (*Rom. 8:1*). Only Jesus Christ could free him from slavery to sin.

Paul describes himself as “sold under sin.” He is a slave to sin. He has no freedom. He can't do what he wants to do. He tries to do what the good law tells him to do, but sin won't let him.

By this illustration, Paul was trying to show the Jews their need of the Messiah. He had pointed out already that victory is possible only under grace (*Rom 6:14*). This same thought is reemphasized in Romans 7. Living under the “law” means enslavement to sin, a merciless master.

What has been your own experience with how sin enslaves? Have you ever tried to play with sin, thinking you could control it as you wished, only to find yourself under a vicious and merciless taskmaster? Welcome to reality! Why, then, must you surrender to Jesus and die to self daily?

The Man of Romans 7

“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:16, 17). What struggle is presented here?

Using the law as a mirror, the Holy Spirit convicts a person that he or she is displeasing God by not fulfilling the requirements of the law. Through efforts to meet those requirements, the sinner shows that he or she agrees that the law is good.

What points that Paul already had made did he repeat for emphasis?
Rom. 7:18–20.

To impress upon a person his or her need of Christ, the Holy Spirit often leads the person through an “old covenant” type of experience. Ellen G. White describes Israel’s experience as follows: “The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7. . . . Only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

Unfortunately, by failing to renew their dedication to Christ daily, many Christians are, in effect, serving sin, however loath they may be to admit it. They rationalize that, in reality, they are undergoing the normal experience of sanctification and that they simply still have a long way to go. Thus, instead of taking known sins to Christ and asking Him for victory over them, they hide behind Romans 7, which tells them, they think, that it is impossible to do right. In reality, this chapter is saying that it is impossible to do right when a person is enslaved to sin, but victory is possible in Jesus Christ.

Are you having the victories over self and sin that Christ promises us? If not, why not? What wrong choices are you, and you alone, making?

Saved From Death

Read Romans 7:21–23. How have you experienced this same struggle in your own life, even as a Christian?

In this passage, Paul equates the law in his members (his body) with the law of sin. “With the flesh,” Paul says, he served “the law of sin” (*Rom. 7:25*). But serving sin and obeying its law means death (*see Rom. 7:10, 11, 13*). Hence, his body—as it functioned in obedience to sin—fittingly could be described as “the body of this death.”

The law of the mind is God’s law, God’s revelation of His will. Under conviction of the Holy Spirit, Paul consented to this law. His mind resolved to keep it, but when he tried he couldn’t because his body wanted to sin. Who hasn’t felt that same struggle? In your mind you know what you want to do, but your flesh clamors for something else.

How can we be rescued from this difficult situation in which we find ourselves? *Rom. 7:24, 25*.

Some have wondered why, after reaching the glorious climax in the expression “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Paul should refer once more to the struggles of the soul from which he apparently has been delivered. Some understand the expression of thanksgiving as a parenthetical exclamation. They believe that such an exclamation follows naturally the cry, “Who shall deliver?” They hold that, before proceeding with an extended discussion of the glorious deliverance (*Romans 8*), Paul summarizes what he has said in the preceding verses and confesses once again to the conflict against the forces of sin.

Others suggest that by “I myself” Paul means “left to myself, leaving Christ out of the picture.” However *Romans 7:24, 25* are understood, one point should remain clear: left to ourselves, without Christ, we are helpless against sin. With Christ we have a new life in Him, one in which—although self will constantly arise—the promises of victory are ours if we choose to claim them. Just as no one can breathe for you or cough for you or sneeze for you, no one can choose to surrender to Christ for you. You alone can make that choice. There’s no other way to attain for yourself the victories that are promised us in Jesus.

Further Thought: “There is no safety nor repose nor justification in transgression of the law. Man cannot hope to stand innocent before God, and at peace with Him through the merits of Christ, while he continues in sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 213.

“Paul desires his brethren to see that the great glory of a sin-pardoning Saviour gave significance to the entire Jewish economy. He desired them to see also that when Christ came to the world, and died as man’s sacrifice, type met antitype.

“After Christ died on the cross as a sin offering the ceremonial law could have no force. Yet it was connected with the moral law, and was glorious. The whole bore the stamp of divinity, and expressed the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God. And if the ministration of the dispensation to be done away was glorious, how much more must the reality be glorious, when Christ was revealed, giving His life-giving, sanctifying, Spirit to all who believe.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1095.

Discussion Question:

① “In 7:25 the Apostle writes: ‘With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.’ This is the clearest passage of all, and from it we learn that one and the same (*believing*) person serves at the same time the Law of God and the Law of sin. *He is at the same time justified and yet a sinner (simul iustus est et peccat)*; for he does not say: ‘My mind serves the Law of God’; nor does he say: ‘My flesh serves the Law of sin’; but he says: ‘I myself.’ That is, the whole man, one and the same person, is in this twofold servitude. For this reason he thanks God that he serves the Law of God and he pleads for mercy for serving the Law of sin. But no one can say of a carnal (*unconverted*) person that he serves the Law of God. The Apostle means to say: You see, it is just so as I said before: The saints (*believers*) are at the same time sinners while they are righteous. They are righteous, because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them. But they are sinners, inasmuch as they do not fulfill the Law, and still have sinful lusts. They are like sick people who are being treated by a physician. They are really sick, but hope and are beginning to get, or be made, well. They are about to regain their health. Such patients would suffer the greatest harm by arrogantly claiming to be well, for they would suffer a relapse that is worse (*than their first illness*).”—Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 114, 115. Can we agree with what Luther wrote here or not? In class, give reasons for your answers.

“Find the Book”

Gahida* was born into a Muslim family, in a country of the former USSR. For decades, she followed the religion of her family. One day as she was praying, Gahida saw an angel who told her to “Find the Book . . . Find the Book.” Gahida wondered what “the Book” was.

Five years later, she received the answer. A Seventh-day Adventist evangelist came to her city, and Gahida decided to attend the meetings. There she saw a Bible for the first time and was able to buy one.

“When I began reading the Bible, I realized that this was ‘the Book’ that the angel told me to find,” recalls Gahida. She soon found many parallels between her Bible and the Quran.

Although she enjoyed the meetings, Gahida didn’t immediately become an Adventist. She was afraid that God would punish her. The evangelist, however, was praying for her, and Gahida decided to visit the church “just once.”

“The sermon was about the Samaritan woman in John 4. I knew it was me,” recalls Gahida. “I was like that Samaritan woman, searching for something better. When I fell in love with Jesus, I understood that He is the best—I don’t need anything but Christ!”

Gahida was baptized and, after a while, wanted to find a way to share her new faith with those who were still in her former religious community. She decided to write a book about her own spiritual journey and compare some elements of her previous faith with Bible teachings. She prayed much about publishing the book and received enough donations to print 1,500 copies.

Unafraid, she hand delivered her book to hundreds of religious leaders of her previous faith. “You need to think about what you believe in, and I think you’ll find this book helpful,” she said.

Gahida also has translated several books by Ellen G. White into her native language, but one book, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, almost wasn’t published.

“When the central press received my translation files, it was a time of great political unrest. Someone tried to kill the country’s president, and immediately all publishing houses were closed. Government agents checked every publishing house, looking for controversial material. When the agents came to the central press, the chief editor wasn’t able to switch on one of the computers. It was the only computer that had the translated files for *Patriarchs and Prophets*. After the government agents left, the computer easily turned on and they were able to print the book.

“It would have been very expensive to publish,” Gahida recalled, “but we didn’t have to pay anything. The chief editor told us, ‘This is a great work that you’re doing—we can’t take any money from you.’”

Gahida is thankful for the special ministry that God has given her. “Many are very grateful to receive these materials,” she said, “and through her writings, Ellen White has become my best friend.”

*Not her real name.