

**7:1-3:** *Or are ye ignorant, brethren (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law hath dominion over a man for so long time as he liveth? 2 For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. 3 So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man.*

Paul sometimes used the “*are you ignorant*” expression (see the commentary on 1:13 and 6:3) to end one argument and introduce another. Here, however, the word *ignorant* (*agnoeo*) means “I want you to know” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:21), and it is in the present tense. Translators of the KJV expressed the thought as “*Know ye not,*” instead of *are ye ignorant*. Paul was calling his reader’s attention to the law.

Some believe Paul was primarily referring to Jewish readers. This is a possibility for as Owen (p. 44) noted: “Paul spoke about the Gentiles in chapter 1 (‘God gave them up’), and in chapter 2 his attention went to the Jews: ‘God has also spoken to you.’” Sometimes information in this book is directed to one class of people. In other places, the information is directed to both Jews and Gentiles. In this section of the letter, Paul may have turned his attention to the Jews.

Paul’s point about the law is found at the end of verse 1. As long as a man is living, the law “*has dominion*” (present tense) over him. According to Kittle (3:1097), *has dominion* (*kurieuo*) means that “which cannot be arbitrarily evaded by the one who belongs to it.” In other words, people are subject to law as long as they are alive. This fact was especially significant for those who lived in Rome. This culture abounded with slaves and masters. Everyone recognized that slaves were under a law until they died. The only thing that separated slaves from their bondage was death. The “*law*” Paul had in mind was not slavery; it was the Law of Moses.

In the second verse, the thought is developed in more detail, and there is an interesting point not visible in the ASV and KJV. Other versions, however, such as the NIV, RSV, and NASB do make note of it. In the Greek text there is a word that means “*married*” (*hupandros*): this is an adjective that modifies the word “*woman*.” This term occurs only here in the New Testament, and it is a compound word. At the beginning of this word is a preposition (*hupo*) that means “under/subject to.” The remainder of the term is the basic word for *man* or *husband*. When these two terms are combined, the complete idea is being “subject to a man.” Gingrich and Danker (p. 837) define it as “*under the power of or subject to a man*.” Compare this to Eph. 5:22-25.

Lenski (Romans, p. 444) noticed this point and said, “One may ask why the woman is selected as the example and not the man. One might say that the sex is immaterial, that the man could also serve as an example. But that is a rather modern view. The woman is a better example because she held a position inferior to the man in the Roman world. Even according to Jewish law she was legally bound to a husband more than he was bound to her, for he could rid himself of her by simply handing her a bill of divorcement, but she was not granted a like privilege. The point of comparison desired is thus strongly brought out by the status of a wife who is bound by law to her living husband.”

When a marriage occurs, a wife is “*bound*” (*deo*) to her husband, a word meaning “to be tied.” This same term is used in Jn. 11:44 to describe Lazarus. Here the word is used figuratively to mean “the binding of man and woman in marriage,” and the idea is “founded on the order of creation and in the law” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:293). In addition to using this word Paul also employed the *perfect tense*, a tense that here indicates “has been bound and stands bound” (Bible Knowledge, p. 465). The perfect tense is one more proof that God designed marriage to be a lifelong commitment. A husband and a wife are supposed to be tied together until death. The modern view of marriage—stay together as long as both are happy and things are fun—is not God’s view of this institution.

At the end of verse 2 we are reminded of how frail mankind is. People die. A wife may lose her husband to death or a husband may become a widower. When death occurs, the **surviving spouse** is “*discharged from the law of the husband*” (the *law of the husband* is the marriage commitment). When Paul said, “*if the husband die,*” he used a third class condition (Bible Knowledge, p. 465). This means the situation is a real possibility. Also, when Paul said the surviving spouse is *discharged*

(*katargeo*) from the marriage law, he again used a perfect tense verb. This means that after the death of a spouse, the survivor “has been and stands discharged” from the marriage (Bible Knowledge, p. 465). *Discharged* can be defined as “freed” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:267), “terminate all relationships with” (Thayer, p. 336), “*have nothing more to do with*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 417), and a similar point is at the end of verse 3 (“*free*”). After death, a surviving mate has absolutely no ties to a deceased spouse. The marriage bond is completely gone, and Paul stressed this point by putting the word *discharged* in the perfect tense (the bond has been broken and stays broken). Paul used this information to form a conclusion in verse 3.

If God’s marriage law is not obeyed, a woman can become an “*adulteress*” (*moichalis*), “*one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another*” (*Vine, moichos entry*). Men who violate God’s laws concerning marriage become adulterers. When people disobey the pattern God has given for marriage (compare the notes on 6:17), the result can be adultery. If a person divorces their spouse for a reason other than fornication (Mt. 19:9), and the divorced spouse is still living, getting married to another mate results in adultery. The only people who are free to marry are (1) those who have never been married, (2) those who have lost a spouse to death, and (3) those who have gotten a divorce *because their mate was sexually unfaithful* (Mt. 19:9). These three reasons further show that God considers marriage to be a life long commitment.

Additional proof that this view of marriage or divorce and re-marriage is right is found in Rom. 7:2-3. When Paul described the permanency of marriage, he referred to the *law*. This *law* does not appear to be the Law of Moses because marriages under the old covenant were not always for life (see Deut. 24 and Mt. 19:8). Because the Jews were so insistent about divorce, God relaxed His marriage law during the Old Testament era. Matthew 19 says He allowed the people’s “hardness of heart” towards their mates to result in divorce (19:8). When Christ came and the new covenant was instituted, God reinstated His original marriage law (Mt. 19:4-6). Thus, the *law* concerning marriage must be the original one that God instituted.

In view of the passages given, God now allows one man and one woman to get married. If either of the partners wishes to marry someone else, one of two things must occur. Either their mate dies or their mate must be guilty of sexual sin. These are the only two reasons to contract another marriage.

In places where divorce is common, this teaching is often rejected. Even the Lord’s disciples found it to be a hard law (Mt. 19:10-12). No matter what our feelings are concerning marriage and divorce, God has established a pattern. Either we follow this pattern or we do not. Just as we choose to follow a spiritual leader (God or Satan), so we must make a choice whether or not we will obey God’s laws concerning marriage and divorce.

It is true that the opening verses of this chapter do not give us an extended treatise on divorce and remarriage (the subject is the law). However, this information is based upon truth and it does provide us with insight about God’s will for marriages. The information in this chapter corresponds with what Jesus said in Mt. 19 and with what Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:11). Justin Martyr (an ancient writer) said, “All who are twice married are sinners.” This statement is an exaggeration (1 Tim. 5:14), but it does show that people who believed in Christianity realized God’s dissatisfaction with divorce and remarriage unless the conditions in Mt. 19:9 are met. If it be asked why Paul singled out woman as an example, see the comments above by Lenski.

A final observation from the third verse is based upon the phrase, “*shall be called*.” *Called* (*chrematizo*) is the same term used in Acts 11:26. Some language authorities consider this term a designation for a *divine* calling.

**7:4:** *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, (even) to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God.*

Paul presented a principle and here he applied it. In the previous verses, he argued that a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lived. If the husband dies, she is discharged (freed, released) from the marriage bond.

Those who had lived under the Old Testament had been bound to the law (the Law of Moses).

However, since there had been a **death** (*by the body of Christ*; Jesus dying on the cross), people were made “*dead to the law*” (the Law of Moses). Just as death freed a first century wife from the marriage bond, so God’s people are freed from the Law of Moses as well as a religious system based upon law. God’s people have been completely separated from every part of Moses Law; this separation includes the Ten Commandments. The release from Moses’ Law is described as *dying* to it. The “*body of Christ*” (i.e. His death on the cross) has completely detached us from this system. In the Greek text a preposition (*dia*) makes the point too plain to miss: our death to the Old Testament system has come “*by, through, via, by means*” of Jesus death.

Barclay (Romans, p. 95) said, “Paul could still have put the thing quite simply. He could have said that we were married to the law; that the law was killed by the work of Christ; and that now we are free to be married to God. But, quite suddenly, he puts it the other way, and, in his suddenly changed picture, it is we who die to the law.”

Anyone who is saved has *died to the law* and has been “*joined to another*”—Jesus Christ and His New Testament. This *joining* occurs upon a person’s death to sin and union with Christ in baptism. After being freed from the law and sin, Christians have no worries or concerns about being saved by a system of law or keeping some part of the Old Testament.

The marriage illustration used in Rom. 7 is also found in Eph. 5:23. Christ is the head of the church. The church is Christ’s body and bride. When people enter into Christ (Gal. 3:27), they are essentially *joined* with Christ as a husband is joined with his wife. The nature of this intimate joining means that there can be no interest in any other partner. Christians cannot join themselves to any spiritual leader or religious organization besides Christ and the church He built (Mt. 16:18). There can also be *no participation in the system given by Moses* since we are commanded to listen to Christ (Mt. 17:5) and have been made “*dead to the law*.”

Because Christians have been joined with and to Christ, they are to bring forth “*fruit unto God*” (compare Rom. 6:22 and 7:5). Their lives should be full of fruit in the sense that they do many good works (Tit. 2:14; Eph. 2:10).

Before continuing, it is important to consider the practical significance of verses 1-4. These four verses show that the Old Testament Law is no longer in force. God does not want people to keep any part of the Old Testament because this part of Scripture has been *fulfilled* (Mt. 5:17). Paul said God’s people have been made **dead to the law**. The 6<sup>th</sup> verse, which will be dealt with momentarily, says that God’s people have been *discharged* from the law. What was this law? The answer is in verse 7. It was the law that prohibited *coveting*. The law that prohibited coveting was one of the *Ten Commandments*. We may put this information into the form of a proposition.

- The Ten Commandments prohibited covetousness.
- We are *discharged from the law* that prohibited covetousness.
- Therefore, we are *discharged* from (not under, dead to) the Ten Commandments.

The Old Testament no longer governs our behavior. We now follow the New Testament because we have been *joined to another*. The death of Jesus (4b) fulfilled the Old Testament system and brought about a new system (Mt. 26:28). Anyone who attempts to bind any part of the Old Testament Law on Christians (even the Ten Commandments) is condemned because they are teaching a different gospel (Gal. 1:8-9).

**7:5-6:** *For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. 6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.*

Here is the first occurrence of the word “*flesh*” (*sarx*) in this book. Paul introduced this word and then frequently used it, especially in the next chapter. Although this is the first time the word *flesh* is

used, the concept has already been introduced (see 5:6, 8, 10; 6:20). The expression “*in the flesh*” describes how people live before their conversion, and it is in the imperfect tense (continuous action). *Life in the flesh* is the exact opposite of what God desires (see 8:6, 8). It is certainly far removed from *abiding in Christ* (Jn. 15:4-5).

In this book, *flesh* describes many of the Jews who lived under the Law of Moses. Paul knew that before becoming Christians many allowed “*sinful passions*” (“*motions of sins*,” KJV) to rule or guide their lives. According to Thayer (p. 473), *passions* (*pathema*) means a passion (desire) that “lead to sins.” In our day and time, little has changed. Those outside the body of Christ often do what they want; their behavior is frequently uncontrolled and sinful. Our “*members*” (*melos*) can lead us into spiritual death or into a righteous life (compare Rom. 6:13, 19 where this same term is found).

In verse 5, Paul alluded to another problem: *sinful passions* “*which were through the law*.” There were sins that resulted from the Old Testament law. What this means may be best explained by an example.

When computer technology first exploded and the Internet became popular legislators passed new laws. Some of these laws related to pornography. The new laws made people aware of things they might not have otherwise known or discovered (i.e. pornography can be free, private, and easily accessed on the web). The creation of laws sometimes draws special attention to things. Once attention is focused on something, especially something that is evil, some become attracted to what is condemned. When Moses’ Law prohibited certain sins, people began to think about the forbidden acts and the forbidden acts became enticing. A further expression of this point is found in that fact that “*wrought*” (“*did work*,” KJV), is in the imperfect tense (continuous action).

Barclay (New Testament Words, pp. 120-121) describes this quite well by using sources from the past (namely *Confessions* of Augustine, 2.4-6): “There was a pear-tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and to carry our spoils away. We took a huge load of pears—not to feast upon them ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs—though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to be a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full.” The Old Testament law brought attention to several sins. In at least some cases this attention caused the people to become interested in what the law condemned. Hence, *sinful passions were through the law*.

When people did what the law condemned, there was a consequence: “*death*.” If we return to Rom. 6:23, we may conclude that Paul described spiritual death. This is the “*fruit*” of disobedience (compare 2:5 and Jas. 1:14-15).

The unsaved are released from this *death* by the process described in chapter 6. Once the lost have obeyed the gospel, the condition in 7:6 applies: people are *discharged from the law* (the law of Moses as well as any other law system). *Discharged* (*katargeo*) is rendered “*delivered*” in the KJV, and it is the same term used in verse 2 to describe a woman who is “*loosed*” (KJV) from her husband (the ASV uses the word *discharged* in both verses). Here this word means “God’s putting out of action through the cross...the destructive powers which threaten man’s spiritual well-being” (Brown, 1:73). Since Paul said we have been released from the law, any who affirms otherwise, or tries to bind any part of the law upon people today, is guilty of false teaching. Anyone who understands the basics of the Bible knows that the Old Testament is a system man wants freedom from because it “*held*” (*katecho*) people, verse 6. Paul used this term in Romans 1:18 to describe those who “*hinder*” the truth. It is used in Lk. 8:15 to describe those who “*hold fast*” the word. Here Spicq (2:289) says it has the idea of *constraint*. Thayer (p. 339) says “of some troublesome condition or circumstance by which one is held as it were bound.” Moses’ law was like a chain, and because Paul used the imperfect tense, it was *always* something that bound people. Why, then, would anyone want to go back under a system that lead to condemnation and death?!

The saved have also died to their former manner of life (6:2). The change that occurs is also described by a contrast at the end of verse 6. Christians have been released so they can “*serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter*.” *Serve* (*douleuo*) meant “consecrate oneself to a work, devote oneself to a master” (Spicq, 1:383), and here Paul used the present tense. Spicq’s definition is also applied to this term in Rom. 6:6 (for additional information on this word see the

commentary on Rom. 6:6). Christians dedicate themselves to the *newness of spirit*; this is in contrast to the *oldness of the letter*. “The word ‘oldness’ used here is *palaiotes* meaning that which is obsolete. Newness means that which is new as to quality in contrast to that which is worn out” (CBL, Romans, p. 109). Brown (2:714) goes further by saying “the old, obsolete past stands in contrast with the completely new.” Because there is a New Testament, God has made the Old Testament “obsolete together with its institutions and practices” (ibid). A study of the word *newness* (*kainotes*) reveals that it occurs only twice in the New Testament—here and Rom. 6:4. In Romans 6:4 it describes “one’s manner of living” (CBL, GED, 3:212). Here it is associated with “one’s relationship to the Lord” (ibid).

The word “*letter*” (*gramma*) refers to the Old Testament and the word “*spirit*” (*pneuma*) refers to the New Testament. The Old Testament was a covenant that required people to do everything perfectly. Down to the last detail, everything needed to be 100% right. This was not an unjust requirement, but this obligation was too much for anyone besides Jesus to fulfill.

Under the New Testament system, the stress is not on fulfilling every piece of legislation. That is, perfection is not required. The New Testament is a *middle of the road* system. Flawless living is not required, but at the same time, this system does not allow people to be openly rebellious and wicked (6:1). The New Testament requires Christians to “walk in the light,” do the best they can, pray, and repent when they sin. We do not need to be perfect, but we do need to be faithful and obedient.

These verses bring three great illustrations to a close. In chapter 5 Paul referred to two heads (Adam and Christ). In chapter 6 the apostle spoke of two masters (sin and righteousness—Christ). The third illustration, which is found in chapter 7, involves two husbands (the old man which is sin and the risen Christ). In the next few verses (7-12), Paul affirmed that the law provoked man to sin.

**7:7-8:** *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet: 8 but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin (is) dead.*

Because this section of Romans is difficult, a summary of Paul’s argument should be considered before the text is studied (this summary is taken from Sztanyo’s class notes).

- The law reveals the fact of sin (verse 7).
- The law reveals the occasion of sin (verse 8).
- The law reveals the power of sin (verse 9).
- The law reveals the deceitfulness of sin (verse 11).
- The law reveals the effect of sin (verses 10-11).
- The law reveals the sinfulness of sin (verses 12-13).

The Old Testament had several purposes. It **(1)** revealed sin (5:20; 7:7-13); **(2)** condemned the sinner (Rom. 3:19-20; Jas. 2:10; Gal. 3:10; 1 Tim. 1:8-11); and **(3)** was used to bring people to Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:24-25; Gal. 3:19).

As Paul developed these points, he offered another “structural marker” (Owen, p. 46). This marker is found in the question, “*What shall we say then?*” This query has already been posed in 3:1, 9; 4:1; 6:1, 15. Because Paul showed that Christians are not under law (6:14), and the saved have been released from law (7:6), he was ready for another point—the Law of Moses was not evil. Paul’s level of emphasis is found in the verb “*say*” (*ereo*), a word that goes beyond the mere saying or speaking of words. This term denotes “a command, affirmation, or objection... The speaker is not only verbalizing a thought but emphasizing it as well” (CBL, GED, 2:592).

Paul had to show that even though the Old Testament law was not designed to justify man, and “sinful passions came through the law” (the law awakened people to some sins, verse 5), the law was not wicked. The law did not produce sin, and it did not make people sin more. The problem was with

man, not the law. Paul stated this here as well as in verses 12 and 14 where the law is described as *holy, righteous, good, and spiritual*.

Paul showed that mankind is the source of evil and he used himself as an illustration. It should be understood that Paul seems to have described his life *prior* to conversion. This conclusion is partly based on the fact that Paul used “*coveting*” (7b) as an illustration. The ASV has “*lust*” in a footnote; the KJV has “*lust*” once in the text. This term is used as both a verb (*epithumeo*) and a noun (*epithumia*) in 7b. It denotes the “sin which rules man” (Brown, 1:457). It is the desire which “seeks gratification” and “urges man to activity” (ibid). This is the desire that “flagrantly contradicts God’s commandments” (Brown, 1:458). This same term is also found in verse 8 and there it is rendered “*concupiscence*” in the KJV.

Paul said he would not have known *coveting* is sinful if it had not been for the law. Without the law he could have experienced the desire to be covetous, but only with the law could he have known that covetousness is wrong. Another important point is found in the fact that the law *said* (imperfect tense—continuous action) that coveting is wrong. Under the Old Testament God’s law *said* things (existed and was thus binding) whether people recognized it or not. Today this is true with the New Testament. No matter what our response to God’s law, it is *always binding or in force*.

In verse 8, the thought is developed in more detail. Paul knew that in his life sin “*found an occasion through the commandment*.” This expression seems to be parallel to what was said in verse 5 - *sinful passions came through the law*. The word translated *occasion* (*aphorme*) was “frequently used to denote a ‘base of operations’ in war. The command, then, provided sin with a base of operations, an attack upon the soul” (Vine, 1:375). When God said “no” to certain acts people were sometimes motivated to engage in what was condemned.

There are modern examples of what Paul described. Parents teach their children to stay away from alcohol and drugs; in essence, a law is made. In spite of this law and the warnings, what do many young people do? The young are also warned about sexual activity outside of marriage and even God prohibits fornication. Yet, the stance against sexual sin sometimes creates an interest in prematurely exploring this area of life.

If we can identify with these or other examples, we can understand the first part of verse 8: “but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting.” When Paul was made aware of the fact that coveting is wrong (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21), the desire to be covetous increased. A law or a rule against sin often draws people closer and closer to doing what is prohibited. It is like the parent who says, “Do not eat any of the cookies.” Not all commentators share this interpretation of the passage, and it must be said the principle being described is not universally true. A law against murder does not give us a desire to kill someone. Even though there are exceptions to the principle being described, and not all commentators agree on this interpretation, I consider this explanation of the passage to be correct.

It must be understood that Paul did not have any hatred for the law. The apostle considered man’s enemy to be sin. The law was *good, holy and just* (verse 12). The devil misused the law and enticed people to sin. For an explanation of the word *concupiscence* in the KJV, see the commentary on verse 7.

At the end of verse 8, there is another expression that needs to be explained: “*without the law sin is dead*.” If the preceding explanation of Paul’s statements is correct, this expression is the exact opposite of what was just described. In other words, if law did not exist, man’s desire to sin *would be lessened*. If the existence of law increases the desire to sin, the lack of a law reduces the desire to sin.

The word “*dead*” (verse 8) is the opposite of *excited* (verse 7). Law excites (arouses) people to sin (verse 7). A lack of law (verse 8) can diminish interest in sin. When there is not a rule against something, evil will still exist, but the level of sin will likely be less than if there were a stated law against the practice. Think of the matter in terms of speed limit signs. The lack of a posted speed limit may cause most to drive at a reasonable speed. What if a speed sign is posted? There is an almost universal temptation to break the law.

The 7<sup>th</sup> verse starts a section where Paul used the pronoun “*I*.” This tells us the information is about Paul. Prior to this point Paul used the third person, the second person, and even the first person plural. In the next verse, He spoke of his own experiences.

**7:9:** *And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;*

There was a time in Paul's life when he was "alive" (*zao*). This statement is generally explained in one of two ways. It may refer to the time when Paul was a child. Before becoming accountable to God and being charged with sin, Paul was in an uncondemned state. Because sin was not chargeable to him, he was sinless in the sight of God and therefore *alive*. Another possibility is that the word *alive* describes the period when Paul was a Pharisee. Before conversion Paul was "self-righteous; observing the letter of the law and being satisfied that he was safe" (Lanier, p. 48).

I prefer the first view, though either explanation is possible. If the first explanation is right, this is further proof that the doctrine of Original Sin is totally false. The doctrine of Original Sin says a baby is tainted by Adam's sin. Infants are stained by sin and in need of salvation. If Paul was "alive" as a child, he was untainted by sin. As he got older, he learned about sin ("*the commandment came, sin revived, and I died*"). Paul discovered that the law condemns sin and when people break the law, they become sinners. When this discovery came in Paul's life, he *died*. This *death* describes spiritual death; Paul was separated from God because he was accountable for his sins. Paul died *when he learned of sin and the law*, not when he was born. Since he knew about the law prohibiting coveting when he was a Pharisee, the best explanation of the passage is the one given. The apostle was not born in a spiritually depraved or dead state. He died when the commandment came (he understood God's law) and sin got a hold in his life (compare Rom. 5:12; 6:23).

**7:10:** *and the commandment, which (was) unto life, this I found (to be) unto death:*

The point being made in this verse has already been covered. If one were able to keep every part of the law perfectly, he would be saved. If a person broke any part of the law, and the law was being used as the basis for salvation, just one slip would cause the person to be lost. Paul knew that he was unable to keep the "*commandment*" (law) perfectly. Hence, he found the system of law to be "*unto death*" for himself just as for every other person. The law killed Paul's relationship with God when Paul became accountable. The only person who has ever reached the age of accountability but never sinned under the law was Jesus.

It should be understood that the word *commandment* is another description of Moses' Law (this is seen from verse 12). For those who wonder why Paul used the singular *commandment* instead of commandments, the answer may lie in the fact that Paul specified only one sin (covetousness).

Another important note involves the Jews. The Hebrew people would not have appreciated what Paul said in verse 10. The Jews were proud of the law; they thought that it was one of the greatest things ever given to mankind. In this chapter, Paul told them that the law was the basis for condemnation since no one was able to keep it perfectly. In the book of Galatians, Paul told people the Law of Moses made those under it slaves and small children (Gal. 4:1-4). This was so upsetting that some in Galatia considered Paul to be an enemy (Gal. 4:16).

**7:11:** *for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me.*

Here Paul continued to tell his readers about his own life. The points he made are easy to list: (1) sin found an occasion (an opportunity in his life); (2) this opportunity came through the commandment (law); (3) sin "*beguiled*" the apostle; and (4) the result of this experience was death ("*it slew me*").

These points are probably best understood by looking at them in reverse order. If we look at the last point first, Paul said he was *slain* (he died spiritually). This term (*apokteino*) has been defined as "trying to achieve righteousness through adherence to the Law" (CBL, GED, 1:380). Since all sin, the result is spiritual death. Sin is the power "said to kill man by means of the commandment" (Brown, 1:430). The third point brings the point home a little more. Sin killed Paul (point four) because Paul was "*beguiled*" (point 3). This term (*exapatao*) means "go astray" (Brown, 2:460) so fully that some

are deceived “completely” and will “lose the way” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 364). Certainly this activity is associated with Satan (see how this same word is used in 2 Cor. 11:3). Satan sends messages like, “God’s commandments are restrictive and prohibitive. If you follow them your life will be wasted, enjoyment will be lessened, and you will lose out on many good things.” When people listen to this or any other message from the devil, sin and spiritual death are at the doorstep (Gen. 4:7). The second point shows that sin came into Paul’s life *by the law*. This is explained in the commentary on 7:7-8. Sin affected and killed Paul because he was vulnerable (point 1).

Since God’s commandments can be used by the devil, and they were so used in Paul’s life, Paul had to ask this question: *Is the law a good thing?* This question is asked and answered in verse 12. For information on the word “*occasion*” (*aphorme*), see the commentary on verse 8. Wuest (in his commentary and translation of this passage, 1:120) renders the expression “*And the commandment which was to life, this I found to be death; for sin, using the commandment as a fulcrum* (emphasis mine, BP), *beguiled me and through it killed me.*”

**7:12:** *So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.*

In spite of what Paul said in verses 8-11, the law was good. The law could not have been bad because God gave it. In describing the law, Paul said that it was “*holy*” (because it disclosed sin); it was “*righteous*” (because it condemned the sinner to spiritual death); and it was “*good*” (because it had a spiritual and divinely planned purpose). The thing that kills and hurts man is *sin*, not law.

**7:13:** *Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good; — that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful.*

This verse contains a lot of material. The first thing to extract from it is the subject. The apostle referred to “*that which is good*” (this is the law, verse 12). Knowing the subject allows us to rephrase the question to: *Was the Old Testament law an instrument of death to Paul and others?* Or, stated another way, “*Was the law the basis for Paul’s separation from God?*” Paul answered this question with the next two words—“*God forbid.*”

The rest of verse 13 says that sin is identified (made known by) the law. This takes us back to 3:20. When Paul said “*through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful,*” he made known what we find in Luke and Acts. Take a moment to read Lk. 23:34 and Acts 3:14-17.

Inspired writers said the ones who put Christ to death were *ignorant* about their sin. Although this may seem hard to accept, it is true. Knowing this fact allows us to understand Romans 7. Even though the ones who put Jesus to death committed their sin in ignorance, they were guilty of a crime. If they were not guilty, Christ’s request for their forgiveness was senseless. The guilt of people who put Christ to death establishes that God can charge people with sin, even though they are ignorant about His will and their wrongdoing.

Paul said, *through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful*, and some verses from Acts 2 illustrates what this means. On the day of Pentecost, several learned about the “*commandment*” (God’s law and will concerning Christ). The sermons preached on this day made the sin of crucifying Jesus “*exceedingly sinful.*” People not only learned what they had done, they were *pricked in their hearts* (Acts 2:36). This is parallel to the word “*shown*” (ASV) or “*appear*” (KJV) in Rom. 7:13. This term (*phaino*) means “*that sin might become visible as sin*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:412) or “*sin shows its true colours*” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:640). In other places *phaino* is used literally to describe the “*shining*” of the sun (Rev. 1:16). This word is small but very important because most people in the world are largely unaware of God’s laws, and they do not fully understand the problem of sin until they are confronted with God’s word. When the unsaved finally face their sin in its fullness, they see how *exceedingly sinful* their crimes against God are. The *commandment* (which for us is the New Testament) shows men that they have violated the laws of God and the punishment for these violations is death (6:23). Regarding the noun “*exceedingly*” (*hyperbole*), this same term is used in Gal. 1:13 to describe Paul’s persecution of Christians (the



church). A good summary of this verse comes from *The Living Bible*, though this version is neither recommended or endorsed. For verse 13 it reads: “*But how can that be? Didn’t the law cause my doom? How then can it be good? No, it was sin, devilish stuff that it is, that used what was good to bring about my condemnation. So you can see how cunning and deadly and damnable it is. For it uses God’s good laws for its own evil purposes.*”

**7:14:** *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

This verse serves as a transition statement. At the beginning of verse 14, we are reminded of what Paul previously concluded: Any system from God is good. Since Moses’ Law was from God, it was good. Moses’ law was “*spiritual*” (this means it was from God. It originated from God).

The law is spiritual but Paul was not. The apostle said he was unspiritual; he was “*carnal*.” When Paul described himself in this section of the letter, he consistently used the *present tense*. In the previous verses, Paul used the imperfect and aorist Greek tenses. In the previous material, he described how things had been in the past. The switch to the present tense appears to describe his continuing struggle with and against sin.

This shows that Paul fought sinful tendencies just as much as anyone else. Those who look at Paul and believe he never struggled with sin are wrong and misinformed. The apostle admitted to a continuing battle with sin (compare Gal. 5:17; this verse also uses the present tense).

Not every commentator believes the present tense describes Paul’s struggle with sin. Some think the man described in Rom. 7 must be a non-Christian because the unsaved are the ones always struggling with sin. To let you decide which view has more merit, here are the main arguments for both positions (they are summarized).

#### **THE MAN STRUGGLING WITH SIN IS *NOT* A CHRISTIAN:**

- The person in this chapter is *sold under sin*; Christians are not sold under sin.
- The person in this chapter is a *servant of sin*; this is inconsistent with Christianity.
- This person is *captive to the law of sin and death*.
- This person has the *law of sin* in his members.
- This man of Rom. 7 lives in a *body of death*.
- Rom. 7 cannot describe a Christian because of Rom. 8:2.  
(This information comes from McGuiggan, p. 215)

#### **THE MAN IN ROM. 7 IS PAUL *AFTER* HE BECAME A CHRISTIAN:**

- There is a change in the verb tenses. Paul used the present tense. This described his life as a Christian when this book was written.
- The man of Rom. 7 *delights in the law of God*; the unsaved man does not do this (verse 22).
- This man *serves the law of God*; a non-Christian does not (verse 25).
- This man has a *will to do good* (verses 15, 18, 19, 21).
- There is a war going on in the mind of this man; such is not usually the case with non-Christians.
- The shout of *hope* and *triumph* made by the man in Rom. 7:25 shows that Paul described a Christian.
- This chapter describes the kind of lives that Christians lead.  
(This is adopted from “Difficult Texts of the New Testament,” p. 182)

I consider the last view to be the best, though some excellent Bible students prefer the first one. Regarding the expressions such as “*sold under sin*” (“controlled by the power of sin,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:230) and “*sin dwelling in the body*,” it may be said that even after conversion sin exists in the life of a Christian. Even though Christians *die to sin* (6:2), sin still

rears its ugly head in the believer's life (Gal. 5:17). See too Romans 13:14.

Paul's statement in Rom. 13:14 shows that the old life continues to call Christians back to a life of sin. This seems to be the best explanation, especially when we hear of Christian men leaving their wives and families for other women, treasurers stealing from the church treasury, and church leaders overtaken in other scandalous behavior.

A thought from Cranfield (p. 165) is a jewel: "By describing the Christian as 'carnal' Paul is implying that in him too there is that which is radically opposed to God (compare what is said about 'the mind of the flesh' in 8.7), though in chapter 8 he will make it abundantly clear that the Christian is not, in his view, carnal in the same unqualified way that the natural man is carnal. With 'a slave under sin's power' we may compare verse 23 ('but I see in my members a different law, which is waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin...'). Understood in isolation from the teaching of chapters 6 and 8 and 12ff, these words would certainly give a thoroughly wrong impression of the Christian life; but, taken closely together with it, they bring out forcefully an aspect of the Christian life that we gloss over to our undoing. When Christians fail to take account of the fact that they (and all their fellow-Christians also) are still slaves under sin's power they are specially dangerous both to others and to themselves, because they are self-deceived. The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the discipline of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact of his continuing sinfulness, the fact that even his very best acts and activities are disfigured by the egotism which is still powerful within him—and no less evil because it is often more subtly disguised than formerly. At the same time it must be said with emphasis that the realistic recognition that we are still indeed slaves under sin's power should be no encouragement to us to wallow complacently in our sins."

**7:15:** *For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do.*

The first part of verse 15 may be compared to a little boy. When a small boy does something that is wrong, and the wrong is discovered, an adult asks the *why question*—"Why did you do it?" A typical response from the child is, *I don't know*. Sometimes things are done and there is not a good explanation for the sin. Paul sometimes did this same thing in his adult life.

The next clause in this verse says, "*for not what I would, that I do practice.*" This may be literally translated, "For what I am wishing, that I am not doing." Here Paul stated another problem that all Christians face: There are things that we should do (or perhaps plan to do), but our good intentions are never fulfilled. Can we list some examples of this? At one time or another, all are guilty of this sin. We either procrastinate for a lengthy period or we wait so long that opportunities are lost.

At the end of this passage, Paul presented a third but similar idea. Paul sometimes did things that he did not want to do. There were things that Paul hated; these things were sins that Paul knew he should avoid and not do. Knowing that some things were wrong was not always sufficient to keep him from sinning. There were times when he did things that he despised. Throughout this verse (as well as verse 16) he used the present tense (on-going action), so the picture is definitely that of an on-going struggle.

We too know that certain things should be avoided, but there are times when we give in and sin. Here are some examples that are widespread: (1) being disrespectful; (2) lying; (3) being mean or cruel; (4) being prejudiced; (5) bragging; (6) not being calm and collected with our children; (7) covetousness; (8) lust; (9) cussing; (10) bad thoughts; (11) an uncontrolled temper; (12) being a bad example; (13) dishonesty.

Paul also described things that Christians want to do or should do but the good never gets done. Examples of this would include (1) visiting someone; (2) evangelism; (3) spending more time with our children; (4) dedicating more time to prayer; (5) increasing our contribution to the church; (6) using more time to study God's word; (7) memorizing parts of the Bible; (8) saving more money; (9) sending a card to someone who is sick; (10) contacting a wayward church member.

Paul's third battle with sin may be described as, "I don't know." People do something and when asked why they acted as they did, they cannot give an answer. This category of sin is especially

prominent with violent crimes—spousal abuse, child abuse, rape, and unplanned murder. When these crimes are prosecuted, and a motive is sought, the accused may simply say, “I don’t know.” What Paul described in Rom. 7:15 should hit home with each one of us and prove that this part of Scripture describes Christians.

**7:16-17:** *But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17 So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.*

Once again Paul stated that the law is *good*. The word translated “*good*” (*kalos*) is different from the term used in verse 12. In verse 12, the word *good* (*agathos*) means “useful” or “upright.” In verse 16 a second term meaning “good, beautiful, noble, excellent” is used. Both words were an appropriate description for the Old Testament law. The different words further proved that God’s law was not somehow bad for man. In describing these separate terms the Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:641) says *agathos* in verse 12 means the law’s “beneficial purpose” while the term in verse 16 (*kalos*) denotes “the moral beauty or nobility of the law.”

The problem, as we have already seen, was and is sin. Paul spoke of sin in all of verse 17 and the first part of verse 16. In 16a, he described the battle with sin as, “But if what I would not that I do.” In other words, *I know what is wrong but I do it anyway*. This was the situation Paul sometimes got himself into because “*sin dwelt in*” him (verse 17). Even though Paul did not want to sin, hated sin, and wanted to do what was right, he still found himself in a constant battle with this powerful force. Instead of having sin *dwelt* in us, the right influence is God and His word (compare Col. 3:16).

It is easy to overlook, but a very important thought comes from the word “*consent*” (*sumphemi*), a present tense verb found only here in the New Testament. It means “the conscience, even of the sinner, is in ‘full agreement’ with the Law” (CBL, GED, 6:168). If we do not come to this same conclusion in this life, we will certainly be compelled to agree with it on the Day of Judgment.

**7:18-20:** *For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good (is) not. 19 For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise. 20 But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.*

This is one of the passages that commentators use to prove that Paul described a non-Christian instead of himself. It is argued that verse 18 cannot describe a child of God and therefore Paul did not describe himself in this chapter. Although this verse is used to prove that Rom. 7 does not describe Paul, the *evidence* is far from conclusive.

If Paul had said that nothing good was in his body, we could conclude that this chapter describes a non-Christian. Since this is not what Paul said, verse 18 does not prove that Rom. 7 describes an unsaved sinner. Paul said that “*in his flesh*” there was “*nothing that was good*.”

The word *flesh* takes readers back to the *old man*, the thing that was supposed to be buried in baptism. There is *no good thing* about that life. Any time this past part of our life is brought out, and at times it is brought out, it is still bad. The old man is always bad. When Paul’s old habits and sins were brought out of the closet, he didn’t always do what he knew was right. He wanted to “*do that which is good*” but sin sometimes won. We all face this problem. Because all must struggle with this difficulty, this is proof that Paul described himself, not an unsaved sinner.

Verse 19 restates what was said in verse 15 and verse 20 reaffirms the material in verse 17.

**7:21-23:** *I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.*

The information in verse 21 can be linked with material from the third chapter. In 3:23, Paul said that all have sinned (past action) and all *fall short* of God’s glory (Christians still sin from time-to-time). Sin affected us in the past and Christians still commit it after conversion, though this is not to

be habitual.

The idea in Rom. 7:21-23 is very similar to Rom. 3:23. Paul wanted to do what was good (this is expressed in the present tense) but he found that evil was within him (this too is in the present tense). At times, he still felt the urge to sin. No matter how hard he tried, Paul could not live above sin. The same is true for each of us. We can and we need to work on becoming the best people we can be; however, we will never stop struggling against sin.

To prevent a wrong conclusion Paul quickly added the information in verse 22. He wanted his readers to know that he “*delighted*” (*sunedomai*—a term found only here in the New Testament) in the law of God. He had a definite desire to do what was right, and he enjoyed doing what was right (*delight* is a present tense verb). However, the pull of sin never stopped.

The information in verses 20-21 forms a contrast. Paul delighted in what was good, holy, just and right. However, he did not always pick the things that were good, holy, just and right.

In verse 23, we find out why Paul didn’t always choose the right path. In his life, there was a “*warring against the law*” in his mind. The desire to do good battled against the enticements of sin. *Warring against* is in the present tense, and it comes from a single term (*antistrateuomai*) that meant things like “make a military expedition” or “to take the field against” someone (CBL, GED, 1:304). Here Paul had in mind a force that wanted to conquer and take him into captivity. This power “has not been eradicated, [but] its power over the believer has been broken and the believer need not obey it” (ibid). We do not need to let ourselves become “*captives*” (*aichmalotizo*)—present tense—to it (i.e. trapped by it). McGuiggan summed up the matter pretty well (p. 222) when he compared sin (or the desire to sin) to an unwanted guest. Because of the constant struggle between good and evil in the lives of Christians, Paul penned verses 24-25.

**7:24-25:** *Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Because Paul was fighting against sin, and he knew that he sometimes lost the fight, he could say that he was a “*wretched man*.” The word *wretched* “is translated from *talaiporos*, which carries the thought of being ‘wretched through the exhaustion of hard labor’” (CBL, Romans, p. 119). This apostle felt as if he were in a “*body of death*.” This *body* does not appear to be a reference to Paul’s physical body. Rather, it seems to describe the constant struggle that Paul faced. The text implies that Paul wanted to lead a life that was holy and free from sin. He wanted to be perfect. Since sin prevented him from being perfect, he felt like a *wretched man*. Paul also wanted to know who would be able to deliver him from his pitiful condition. The answer to this question is in verse 25.

Jesus Christ is the one who is able to deliver all men from sin. This fact made Paul grateful. Christ offers a way out: He died for our sins; He justifies us by His resurrection (4:25); He lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25); He forgives us by His grace (Acts 15:11). It is by His power that we are guarded (1 Pet. 1:5).

Lanier’s explanation of *So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God* is helpful. He said, “The inner man, the willing part of me, serves God, or would do so if not hindered. But occasionally the flesh gets the upper hand and drives me to sin.”

For the end of the verse (“*but with the flesh the law of sin*”) Lanier says: “Of course one cannot serve the law of God and the law of sin at the same time. If one continually serves the law of sin, he is the servant of sin (Satan) as taught in 6:16. If one served the law of God all the time, continually, he would have attained sinless perfection. But since no one does that, it follows that the Christian serves the law of God most of the time, but occasionally he serves the law of sin and is forgiven by repentance and prayer on his part and grace and mercy on God’s part.”