



# The Struggle

Romans 7



## Not Under Law

- ❑ In Romans 6, Paul says to believers, “you are not under law,<sup>1</sup> but under grace” (6:14b). The believer has been freed from “the law” (as it functioned in the Old Testament era),<sup>2</sup> and is now in the realm of grace (in Jesus Christ).
- ❑ Paul continues this thought in 7:1-6.<sup>3</sup> Believers have “died to the law” (7:4); thus “we have been released from the law” (7:6). We “have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in old way of the written code” (7:6, *NIV*).

## The Law is Good, But...

- ❑ In Romans, the “realm of law” and the “realm of sin” are related. In Romans 5, Paul says, “the law was added so that the trespass might increase” (5:20a, *NIV*).<sup>4</sup> He later says that our sinful passions were “aroused by the law” (7:5). This might provoke some questions. For example, “Is the law sin?” (7:7a); or “Is the law responsible for people’s sin?”
- ❑ Paul answers, “Certainly not!” From Paul’s experience, he knows that the law reveals sin (7:7b). It “was intended to bring life” (7:10). It is “holy, righteous, and good” (7:12).
- ❑ However, the law provided opportunity for sin to attack, and sin seized (took advantage of) the opportunity (7:8, 11). When the commandment said, “Do not do this or you will die,” sin seized the opportunity and said, “Do this. It’s worth it!” And Paul says, “sin...deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death” (7:11b). Sin is “utterly sinful!” (7:13)
- ❑ The law is not responsible for sin and death. The law is good, but the law is not able to make us right with God. The law is not able to make us holy and pure, because sinful people are not able to obey the law.

## The Struggle

- ❑ Paul continues to talk about life under the law in Romans 7:14-25. Read 7:14-25.
- ❑ The problem is not the law, which is spiritual (from God). The problem is “I,”<sup>5</sup> for I am unspiritual,<sup>6</sup> under the control of sin (7:14).

<sup>1</sup> “law” (*nomos*) – In Romans, the word “law” typically refers to the Old Covenant (Old Testament) law (or “law of Moses” or “Mosaic law”), though in some cases it may mean “principle” or “rule” (7:21, 23).

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that believers have been freed from all moral authority (God’s law in a general sense). But believers have been freed from the realm of law (i.e., the binding authority of the Mosaic law and its condemning power). Believers are instead in the realm of grace, under “the New Covenant.” This does not mean that Old Testament believers could not escape the condemning power of the law. They too were saved by grace through faith.

<sup>3</sup> Paul uses marriage law as an analogy. As a woman is released from the law of marriage by death (the death of her husband), the believer is released from the law of Moses by death (the believer’s dying with Christ). Believers are no longer “married” to the law; rather they are “married” to Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Interpretations vary. Some say it means the law arouses sin (cp. 7:5). By forbidding certain activities, the law makes these activities more attractive to rebellious sinners. It more likely means the law intensifies the seriousness of sin (cp. 7:13). Or it possibly means it increases the number of trespasses by adding commandments (cp. 4:15).

<sup>5</sup> “I” (*egō*) is repeated in this passage. The identity of “I” is disputed. Is it Paul or a “rhetorical I?” Is it a Christian or non-Christian? There are several different views. Because the verbs change to present tense, many believe that Paul is talking about his Christian experience. This view is most common. However, like Douglas Moo, I think the “I” is pre-Christian Paul (and others like him) viewed from his Christian perspective. (Ask me for more information.) In any case, Paul’s main point can be applied to both the non-Christian and Christian. Both are subject to struggle.

<sup>6</sup> “unspiritual” (*sarkinos*, fleshly) – in our “flesh” we are subject to the influence of sin

- Paul describes a conflict between what he “wants to do” and what he actually does.
1. What does he want to do? Why does he want to do it? (7:18-19, 22, 25b)<sup>7</sup>
  2. Why does he fail to do the good that he wants to do? (7:17-18, 20, 23, 25c)<sup>8</sup>
  3. Paul says, “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” (7:20, *NIV*; cf. 7:16-17). Do you think this means that “I” am not responsible for sin because I am a victim to sin? Explain.<sup>9</sup>
  4. What are the main lessons you learn from Romans 7:14-24?



After talking about the struggle with sin, Paul says, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”<sup>10</sup> (7:24, *NIV*)

5. What is the answer to Paul’s question? (7:25a)<sup>11</sup>

### *Reflection/Application*

- Do you want to do good? How do you determine what is good and evil? What is the basis for human ethics? The Bible says God is the ultimate Lawgiver. Without God there is no real basis for ethics. If you don’t believe this, consider the arguments of Christian philosophers.<sup>12</sup>
- Do you want to do good, but struggle in attempting to do it? Do you relate to the person in Romans 7:14-24? What particular struggles with sin are you currently facing? What are you doing to overcome these struggles? Are you attempting to do it in your own strength?
- If you attempting to overcome sin in your own strength, you will only become more frustrated. If you want to be freed from the controlling power of sin, you need to be rescued from it. You need the Savior. You need to constantly live “under grace.” This week, read Romans 6-8,<sup>13</sup> and make notes that specifically address the struggles you are facing.

<sup>7</sup> He wants to do “good” according to “the law,” which he sees as good. He “delights in God’s law” in his inner being (7:22). This may be evidence for a Christian “I,” but a good Jew might delight in the law (Psalm 119:70, 174).

<sup>8</sup> There is “sin living in him” (7:17, 20-21). Nothing (completely) good lives in his “sinful nature” (*sarx*, flesh) (7:18a). Sin has taken control (7:14, 23, 25c). He “cannot carry out” the good he wants to do (7:18b).

<sup>9</sup> He has good intentions, but there is something else within him that fights against those good intentions. Sin is not some kind of external force. Sin is something that is part of him, and is expressed in desires, attitudes, and actions. So while he may have good desires, he also has bad desires that fight against the good desires. Who is responsible for his bad desires and sinful actions? He is. However, Paul’s focus in 7:17, 20 is not on assigning responsibility for sin, but rather he is emphasizing the power of sin and his inability to overcome it by his own power.

<sup>10</sup> “wretched” – miserable, distressed; “body of death” – the body dominated by sin, resulting in death

<sup>11</sup> Paul will expand his answer in Romans 8. So Lesson 7 is an essential follow-up to Lesson 6!

<sup>12</sup> One of the many arguments for the existence of God is the universal realization of human moral obligation. If you don’t believe in God, or moral absolutes, I encourage you to ask me for resources on this subject.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 7 should not read in isolation. Romans 6 and 8 are needed to put Romans 7 in proper context.