

Romans 7:7-25 Answers Freedom From Sin Impossible Under Law

Introduction: The purpose of Romans 7 is to explain and expand upon what Paul wrote in Romans 6:14.

ESV **Romans 6:14** . . . sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The exact opposite is true also:

ESV **Anti-Romans 6:14** . . . sin will have ~~no~~ dominion over you, since you are ~~not~~ under law but [not] under grace.

1. The first issue Paul dealt with in Romans 7 is: **How is it that Christians are no longer under the law?** (The answer is in 7:1-4).
2. The second issue Paul dealt with in Romans 7 is: **Why is freedom from sin's dominion impossible for those still under the law?** (The answer is in 7:5-25). (Leiter, p. 147).

Parallels: Those who are in Christ have died to both **sin** (Romans 6) and the **law** (Romans 7).

Romans 6 states that in Christ we have **died** to sin (6:2, 11), have been **set free** from sin (6:7, 22) and sin no longer has **dominion** over us (6:14) with the result that we can bring forth **fruit** unto sanctification (6:21-22).

Romans 7:1-4 states that in Christ we have **died** to the law (7:4), are **free** from the law (7:3) and the law no longer is **binding** on us (7:1) with the result that we can bring forth **fruit** for God (7:4).

Audience: According to 7:1, Paul was speaking to those who knew the law (i.e. Jewish Christians). Paul already clearly made the point that pagan Gentiles of his day were those who “do not have the law” (2:14). Thus the “we” and “our” in 7:5 also refer to those who “know the law” (7:1), i.e., the Jewish Christians in Rome.

What indication is there whether Paul was in 7:5 describing his Jewish readers in their present condition in Christ or their past condition before Christ? That Paul was describing his readers before conversion (Cranfield, p 337) is evident in that he wrote “while we were living in the flesh” and because he wrote of sinful passions that “were at work in our members”. Also notice the transition to “but now” in 7:6. Verse 5 was back before conversion, verse 6 is after conversion.

ESV **Romans 8:9** You . . . are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Based on the overall context leading up to 7:5, Paul in 7:5 is describing *Jewish* Christians (those who knew the law) before they became Christians (back when they were still living in the flesh). He is about to describe what it was like to be an elect Jew living under the law before coming to faith in Christ (7:7-25). It explains why sin dominates people under the law before grace came (6:14).

Only two types of people: It is critical to understand that here Paul writes in terms of only two types of people: the saints and the ain'ts. There are those who are under law, under sin and in the flesh and there are those who have died sin, died to the law and are under grace and in the Spirit (Leiter, p. 148). Romans 5-25 deals with why is it impossible for those under the law to be free from sin's dominion. It describes those who are still under the law, not those freed from it.

Controversy: Read aloud 7:15, 18-19, 22-23, 24. Does Romans 7 describe the normal Christian life? Does this describe how you feel? The question is not, *Is this your experience?* The question is, *What was Paul teaching? Is Romans 7 wretched man that I am or victory in Jesus?*

******How is sin aroused by the law (7:7-12)?** The presence of law increases the desire for that which is forbidden. Sin is not only identified by the law (3:20) but the desire to sin is provoked by the law.

1. **False Conclusion: Why is the law itself not sinful (7:7)?** See also 7:12. The problem is not with the law; the problem is with people. The law serves the important service of making sin known to people.
2. **According to 7:7, what valuable ministry had the law played in Paul's life as an elect Jew before conversion?** Paul would not have really known sin apart from the law's ministry of death.
3. **How did sin seize opportunity to produce covetousness through the commandment not to covet (7:8)?** Like the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, people tend to want what they cannot have. The grass is always greener on the other side.

Word Study: "Opportunity" (7:8) is from *aphormé*; *apo* means off or from and *hormao* means to set in motion. Thus *aphormé* means a starting point, a place from which a movement or attack is made, a base of operations. It also can mean that which gives occasion for an undertaking, the incentive (Thayer # 874).

Here we have a situation where a.) sin was dead and b.) Paul was alive (7:8-9). Based on 7:8, when does sin lie dead? Sin lies dead apart from the law.

4. In what sense does sin lie dead apart from the law (7:8)? The idea is that sin is dormant or latent, but not nonexistent (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2169). Sin is aggravated and motivated by prohibition. Sin was dead in the sense that Paul was unaware of its depth in his life.

According to 7:9, when was Paul alive? He was alive apart from the law (sin was dead and he was alive).

5. In what sense was Paul alive before he died (7:9)? See *Philippians 3:6*. He was alive in the sense that he was unaware of the depth of his own personal sinfulness and need for salvation. He had not been convicted of his sin. He was fat, dumb and happy. He felt no conviction of sin (Rienecker, p. 364). Paul formerly saw himself as outwardly in conformance (but of course inwardly he lacking):

ESV **Philippians 3:6** . . . as to righteousness, under the law blameless.

Paul's Testimony: Arguably, 7:9-25 contains Paul's testimony of how he, as an elect Jew, came to faith in Jesus. God used the law in Paul's life to lead him to Christ.

ESV **Galatians 3:23-25** . . . before faith came, we [Jews] were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed . . . the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian . . .

6. What caused Paul to die (7:9)? Paul died when the law came and made sin alive in his life. He died in the sense of becoming acutely aware of sin in his life and of his lack of personal righteousness.

Isaac Watts Hymn "Conviction of Sin by the Law" (based on Romans 7, Charles Leiter, p. 153):

Lord, how secure my conscience was,
And felt no inward dread!
I was alive without the law,
And thought my sins were dead.

My hopes of heav'n were firm and bright;
But since the precept came
With a convincing power and light,
I find how vile I am.

My guilt appeared but small before
Till terribly I saw
How perfect, holy, just, and pure,
Was thine eternal law.

Then felt my soul the heavy load;
My sins revived again

I had provoked a dreadful God,
And all my hopes were slain.
I'm like a helpless captive, sold
Under the power of sin:
I cannot do the good I would,
Nor keep my conscience clean.

My God, I cry with every breath
For some kind power to save;
To break the yoke of sin and death,
And thus redeem the slave.

7. What paradox does 7:10-11 reveal? See 3:21. The law points to God's righteousness but cannot give it to anyone. Indeed, in pointing to righteousness it makes people aware of their own sin.

Example: The law is like a mirror. You can look into it and see your pimples, but the mirror can't make the pimples go away. It just shows them to you. Neither can the law help you overcome your sin. **Joke:** Even if you put a teenager in jail, but you can't keep his face from breaking out! So too you can be the law jail, but you can't keep your sins from breaking out.

8. In what way did sin deceive and kill Paul (7:11)? A similar situation happened with Adam and Eve. God gave a good commandment to stay away from harmful fruit. Satan abused that good commandment, exploiting it for his own evil purposes, deceiving Eve with deadly effect. Cranfield opined, ". . . the merciful limitation imposed on man by the commandment and intended to preserve his true freedom and dignity can be misinterpreted and misrepresented as a taking away of his freedom and an attack on his dignity, and so can be made an occasion of resentment and rebellion against the divine Creator . . ." (p. 341, 359).

9. What question does 7:12 answer? See back to 7:7. It answers the question concerning whether the law is sin or not. Obviously, the law is not sin. Rather, the law is holy.

The ultimate problem is not with the law, it is with us. It is similar to the saying "Guns don't kill; people kill." The law does not sin; people sin!

******How had God used the law in Paul's life (7:13-20)?** The law, which is holy and righteous, brought out in Paul the worst of his sin, showing him the depth of evil in his soul. Arguably, Paul is describing the ministry the Law of Moses had in his life as an elect Jew before coming to faith in Jesus. In a sense, this is Paul's testimony.

10. How deeply did Paul feel the depth of his sin (7:13)? He saw his sin to be sinful beyond measure.

Word Study: “Beyond measure” is from *hyperbolé* (hyperbole); *huper* (hyper) means beyond and *bolé* means to throw (thus, to throw beyond). Metaphorically it means beyond measure or exceedingly (Thayer #5236).

False conclusion: In 7:13 Paul dealt with a false conclusion (similar to 7:7). The problem is not with the law (it is holy and good). The problem is with our sin (which is beyond measure). Sin causes death, not the law.

What problem did Paul bring out in 7:14? Whereas the law was spiritual, Paul was of the flesh. Yet Romans 8:9 says:

ESV Romans 8:9 You . . . are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

11. According to 7:14-20, what things were true of Paul? Paul was of the flesh and sold under sin (7:14), he did the very thing he hated to do (7:15, 19), and he had the desire but not the ability to do what is right (7:18).

How could 7:20 been the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*?

This is total depravity in all its fullness ~ not that people are as bad as they possibly could be but that people are total inability to live up to God’s law or, for that matter, to even come to Jesus in faith.

How does 7:18 harmonize with 6:14? It does not harmonize in any way.

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12. Verb Tense: What are we to make of the fact that the present tense is used throughout 7:14-20? Some have concluded that Paul was describing himself in the present tense because that is the normal condition of every Christian, even under grace. Thus they conclude 7:14-20 describes the normal Christian life: a constant struggle with sin and continual defeat. This is the view of Abrose, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Barth (Cranfield, p. 346).

A.W. Pink: “This moan, ‘O wretched man that I am’, expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life” Pink also wrote, “The one who is truly in communion with Christ, will . . . emit this groan . . . daily and hourly” (Leiter, p. 148-149).

Historic Present: It should be noted that Greek grammar allowed for an “historic present” wherein the present tense was used to describe a past event (Greenlee, p. 48), making it more vivid and drawing the listener into the narrative. The context suggests Paul was not describing the normal Christian life at all, but rather was explaining how it was the law increased sin. Christians who identify with Paul’s wretched man statement would find better support from Galatians 5:16-25.

13. How could both 7:14-20 and the clear proclamations of 6:2, 6:6, 6:7, 6:14, 6:17-18 and 6:22 both be true? *Compare also 7:5-6, 8:9.* The two conditions described are polar opposites. The problem with Pink’s view is that it goes against everything Paul wrote in Romans 6 and 8. The reality of those who are in Christ is expressed in Romans 6 (and the same in Roman 8). Romans 7 describes Paul when he was an elect Jew when still under the law before coming to faith in Christ. We were formerly all living in the flesh (7:5) “but now” (7:6) we serve in the new way of the Spirit. It explains how the law arouses sin (7:5). This is not to say that every unbelieving Jew experienced what Paul did; only elect Jews.

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Also, in Christ we are not under the law, yet the man in Romans 7 is very much under the law!

******What inner war raged inside Paul under the law (7:21-25)?** “Waging War” (7:23) is from *antistrateuomenon* (*anti* means against and *strateuo* is basis for our word strategy). It means to make a military expedition or take to the field against anyone, to oppose, to war against (Rienecker, p. 364). The war was within Paul over wanting to obey the law yet continually losing to sin. Paul delighted in the law of God but was held captive to sin. He needed deliverance.

According to 7:23, to what was Paul held captive? He was captive to sin. The Greek word for held captive literally means to capture with a spear, to take a prisoner of war, to subdue (Rienecker, p. 364).

14. How could Paul be captive to sin (7:23) and yet no longer enslaved to it (see back to 6:6, 17-18, 22)? Paul was captive to sin before experiencing God’s grace. He is describing what he went through under the law of Moses as an elect but as yet unbelieving Jew. In Christ we are no longer enslaved to sin.

ESV Romans 6:6 . . . our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

ESV Romans 6:22 . . . you have been set free from sin . . .

15. How did Paul describe himself in 7:24? He saw himself as wretched man living in a body of death.

Word Study: “Deliver” (7:24) is from a word that was used to denote the act of a soldier who rushes toward his comrade’s cry to rescue him from the hands of the enemy (Rienecker, p. 365).

16. At what point in his life had Paul cried out the question of 7:24? Paul is here quoting the cry for help he uttered as an elect Jew under the law, in the flesh, dominated by sin before experiencing God’s grace. It is not as if Paul did not know the answer when he penned this.

What is the answer to the question of 7:24? Jesus Christ is the answer (7:25). This is a ray of hope in the valley of despair. Paul had already written about this victory in Roman 6 and in 7:1-6. It is expanded upon further in Romans 8. All between 7:6 and 8:1 is parenthetical.

17. In 7:24, how did Paul summarize why it is impossible for those under the law to escape sin’s domination? An unregenerate Jew may see the law as holy and good, but in his flesh he cannot keep the law. It is impossible because those under the law are powerless to throw off sin’s yoke. Only the grace of Jesus gives us power over sin.

So What?

18. What does Romans 7:7-25 reveal about the Law of Moses? The law is holy and righteousness and good and spiritual but sin is so evil that the law actually causes sin to increase. The ministry of the law is to show sin to be utterly sinful. The law testifies to God’s righteousness but it cannot give righteousness.

ESV **Galatians 3:21** . . . if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

19. Why is freedom from sin’s dominion impossible for those still under the law? See 7:18b. Paul had no ability to carry out what was right.

20. What does it matter whether Romans 7:7-25 describes the normal Christian life or the impossibility of escaping sin’s dominion when still under the law? Compare 6:3, 11, 13. In Romans 6 we are told to “know” (6:3) that we died with Christ to both sin and the law, we are to “consider” (6:11) yourselves dead to sin and we are to “present” (6:13) ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. If Romans 7 does not describe the normal Christian life, but we falsely think it does, then we “know” the wrong thing and we “consider” bad information, setting ourselves up for failure.

Ending on a Positive Note: What truths does 7:1-6 teach about believers?

1. We have died with Christ, 7:4.
2. We are joined to Christ, 7:4.
3. We can bear fruit for God, 7:4.
4. We are released from the law, 7:6.
5. We served God in the newness of Spirit, 7:6.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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