

*The Pros and Cons of Rules*  
What the Old Testament Law Was For  
Blueprint for Breakthrough Series – Part 13

Romans 7:1-25  
June 13-14, 2026

Introduction

- Do you want to know? – in the **information age, knowledge is said to be king**. We think that those who know more control more, right? **But at what cost?** Is the overload of information good for us? **Is it healthy to know all the problems of the world, that we have no power to solve?** When does knowing more cross the line of helpful?
- The law of accountability – the law of accountability is that **when you have the information you are responsible to act on it**. You cannot hold someone accountable if they don't know it's their responsibility. You can hold them accountable for it if they are **SUPPOSED to know about it and didn't bother**. But if someone is completely ignorant of an expectation you cannot hold them accountable for not doing it.
- The benefit of knowing – But there is a benefit of knowing, right? None of us want to walk in ignorance. **If we are ignorant it's possible that we are missing out on expectations from someone we care about**. It's possible that we are missing out on benefits or letting something go to waste. Like for example: did you know that in most cases the interest you earn in your **bank savings account** isn't keeping up with inflation and you are technically losing money (buying power) by keeping it in there? (Traditional bank interest rate average is 0.38%. While, HYSAs (High Yield Savings Accounts) with online banks are 4%-5%)
- The cost of knowing – **But sometimes there's a downside to knowing things, especially things you can't change once you know them**. It's like finding out about **suffering that you can't alleviate** in the world. It's like discovering something **devastating from the past** that you can't change now.
- Adam & Eve & the Tree of Knowledge – I find it fascinating that God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden. They walked by it on a consistent basis. The Tree of Life was there as well. But there was one rule about trees: you can eat from all of them but not the ONE tree. That immediately made it more interesting. For a bit Adam and Eve were content with all their other new stuff and didn't touch it, but then the serpent (Satan manifested) brought it up. It made it more tempting to consider what they would gain vs. what they would miss out on. **When they ate of it they knew new things: 1.) that they were naked and exposed toward one another and God; 2.) that they could say no to God and still physically stay alive**. Those are dangerous truths to know. God wanted to save them from it. Prior to knowing those things they had unity and freedom and deep intimacy with each other and God, after they had brokenness. Why? They knew things they ought not.

- Ge 2:9 – “The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”
- Ge 2:15–17 – “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”
- Gen 3:1-7 – ““Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup>And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup>For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”

### The More We KNOW, the More We are RESPONSIBLE For

- Last Week Recap
  - Grace Effect - God's grace changed our relationship with Him. It didn't make sinning less serious, but gave us room to follow the Lord without fear.
  - It also changed how we live our lives: We used to be forced to do selfish things (we didn't know better and when we did we chose it), but now we have been freed to live in good relationship with God and do good things with Him and for Him.
  - Follow the lean and make good choices - Just as we used to lean into our nature of doing our thing and choosing sometimes to do bad, now since we have the Holy Spirit and have been transformed, it should be more natural to lean into God stuff and want to choose to do some good things.
  - Blessing/Benefit now and later - If we keep making choices against God's will we are going to wreck ourselves, but on the other hand, if we continue to make choices aligned with what God has told us to do, there is not just benefit and blessing for this life, but even more in the next.
- Set up – This Week – we need a big set up to avoid all the explanation and drama needed to talk about the passage we are studying. In theological circles it's a hotly debated passage and so in order for us to just get to what we need to know for our lives today, let me share some necessary background info.
  - The Giving of the LAW: Story Time – it begins in Exodus 19 (runs through 31, then jumps to Leviticus) and is the recording of God gathering the Hebrews (newly freed from bondage to Egypt) at the base of Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. They get their new identity as a nation there as well as commandments, rules, and regulations for how their community is to be set up and ran. The main point running throughout is that the Jews were not to be like everyone else around them (other nations) but unique and distinct, set apart for God. They had a very specific calling on them and purpose in the world. This is the gist of what happened:

- If you obey = X - God said, *'if you obey my words that I'm giving you, I will bless you and use you for great things.'* It's a harkening back to the promises and covenants given to Abraham (and the patriarchs). (Ex 19:5-6)
- God primarily talked to Moses who conveyed it to the people (Ex 19:7-8; 20:18-21) – only one time did God talk to everyone and they were clear that they didn't want that to happen and they would rather go through the mediator of Moses.
- It was super serious and scary – When God descended/manifested on the mountain, thunder and lightning and darkness covered the mountain with what looked like fire blazing. It was ominous on purpose (take this seriously) (Ex 19:10-13)
- 10 Commandments - The first thing God told 'them' was the 10 commandments which had to do with perspective and expectations toward God and toward their neighbor.
- Different rules – God set before them a series of rules, some seem very serious and big and others seem smaller and detailed, but all of them were parts of 'the law'.
  - What types of altar to make (rock, not fancy - although that was altered for the tabernacle in Ex 27)
  - How to treat slaves
  - Laws of restitution for wrongs done
  - What's sinful and what's not in community
  - Laws about sabbath and festivals
  - Info about the coming Promised Land
  - Instructions on how to build a 'sanctuary' (tabernacle) & how the priests and temple workers are to be set up.
  - Census taxation (atonement payment)
  - Levitical Laws – additional details and rules were given in the Tent of Meeting to explain more fully God's expectations. Those are recorded in the book of Leviticus. Near the end of the book it says: *"These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai."* (Lev 26:46; cf. 27:34)
    - The sacrificial and offering system and how it works
    - Anointing rules for priests (and references to Levites)
    - The Kosher laws (clean and unclean: types of animals, not eating blood, etc.)
    - Purification rules (e.g. after childbirth, leprosy, house cleaning, bodily discharges, etc.)
    - Info on the Day of Atonement and other festival celebrations (including Jubilee year)
    - Sexual rules
    - How to lovingly treat your neighbor (including the poor)
    - Warning to keep God's statutes in the 'law'.
    - Special warning against child sacrifice

- Do not be like the nations around you.
- Eye for an eye rules and punishments for sins
- How to handle Promised Land property
- Blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Lev 26)
  - Blessings: plenty of rain, harvest, plenty of food, peace from neighboring nations, no harmful beasts, no war in your land, victory in necessary expansions, fruitful wombs, and extra presence of God.
  - Curses: be struck with panic, fear, disease, loss of food and harvest, enemies will overtake you, constant discipline, hard life, wild beasts will invade, pestilence, famine, starvation, death, blocking of prayers, exile. But I will wait for repentance to restore.
- Laws regarding vows
- Why the “law” is such a big deal – throughout the book of Romans we’ve been talking about the Mosaic law, here called ‘the law’ a ton. We’ve done a good job figuring out how it relates to us but the question has to be asked over and over, ‘why is the law such a big deal to Paul?’ Can’t we just move on and talk about something else? We get it, the law is done and we are now ‘in Christ’. It makes sense to me but then again it’s because I’m a modern-day, American, Gentile. It’s very different from an ancient Jewish perspective, especially when you are at the very crux of humanity’s shift of relationship dynamics with God and His people. Imagine how intense and meaningful talk of ‘independence’ and ‘freedom’ was around 1750-1776 as America was breaking away from England. Today, we take all of that as a given and have moved on it where it’s simply old news. But in that moment, in that critical moment, it was everything people were talking about because it was the biggest issue on the table. This is similar to that, but deeper due to the thousands of years of Israel’s history with the law. Basically all the prophets (major and minor) in the Old Testament were challenging Israel in how they were or weren’t following the law. The Law was the signed contract between God and the Jewish people.
- The false expansion of the law – by the time we get to Jesus’ day, the law had expanded inappropriately. In effort to: A.) Make sure no one got close to violating the actual laws; B.) to talk about details of how the laws play out in real life; the Jewish leaders had added hundreds of rules and regulations to the original list. When the Pharisees were challenging Jesus on the ‘law’ He used that time to explain the difference between what God asked of His people and what mankind added to it. The Pharisees took all of it to be the same.
- The Jewish pride in the law – one thing that Paul consistently had to deal with as ministering to Jewish people (he being one of them), was the pride they had in their system covenant with God. No other nation on earth had God gather them at the beginning into a group and give them direct expectations and insight about what He wanted. No other nation had God so present as He was to the Jews. No other nation could claim the corner market on Truth. No other nation had a system set up by which they could remain deeply connected to the God

of the universe. They were proud of that, and they should be. But here's the problem: **when you are too proud of something it's too hard to let it go or embrace any form of change.** The Jews were used to their system and they didn't want anyone messing with it. **They shaped their entire community around it and it was deeply entrenched into their thinking.** So when Jesus showed up and started altering things, they weren't having it. Even afterward Paul had to constantly wrestle with them about this issue.

- What the law was and what it was for – **The law was set up for one thing and it became used for another thing. It was set up to provide connection to God and instructions on Israel's calling in the world. What it became was a system that the Jews felt entitled to own and earn their own salvation rather than rely on God and their relationship to Him.** Since it talked about what God expected, it was assumed that to do it perfectly would allow salvation from the wrath of God. However, due to the perfect standards, it should have been clear that it was ultimately impossible to fulfill. That's the part of the narrative where we see Jesus enter the picture to clarify what God really wants.
- What it meant to the Jews (rich young ruler) & Jesus' Pivot – We learn from the **rich, young ruler story** that the **good Jewish people WANTED to know what God wanted from them and they wanted to do good. Jesus confirmed that from their perspective** they needed to obey the commands and have hearts that are solely for the Lord (2 greatest commandments). But then Jesus challenged the rich young man on the 'God only' aspect through his love of money. **Jesus publicly restated the difficulty of following the law even by those most ardent and good.** He concluded by saying, **'man can't do this, but God can.'** He was **alluding to both His sacrifice and a new way for mankind to actually fulfill what God wanted from them.**
  - Matt 19:16-26 - *And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"*<sup>17</sup> *And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."*<sup>18</sup> *He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,*<sup>19</sup> *Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*<sup>20</sup> *The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?"*<sup>21</sup> *Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*<sup>22</sup> *When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*<sup>23</sup> *And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>24</sup> *Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*<sup>25</sup> *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"*<sup>26</sup> *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*
- What Jesus did – Jesus was very clear that He didn't come to say that the law was useless or a waste of time. He wasn't even going to say that it was bad. He was going to say that **it was impossible to fulfill by sinful individuals. He**

goes on to fulfill it perfectly as the Son of God on our behalf and then offers us to ride on His coattails.

- Mt 5:17–20 – *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*
- Jesus's Pivot and New Way – the vast majority of Jesus' earthly ministry was laying out the NEW WAY of salvation, that was NOT THROUGH the law, but through connection and relationship to God. He kept telling people that the only way to God was through Him because He was the only one who could give human beings spiritual life. As fulfilling the law it was completed and now those who trust in Him and follow His commands (2 commands: 1.) believe in Him; 2.) love God and people) will be rescued, cleansed, purified, indwelt, transformed into children of God, and launched into a perpetual state of grace. Jesus would do what the law was unable to do since it was dealing with sinful people. Jesus solved the sin problem and now could set people free to BE WHO GOD BUILT THEM TO BE.
  - Jn 5:39–40 – *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."*
  - Jn 6:47–51 – *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."*
  - John 6:63 – *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."*
  - John 14:6 – *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*
- Why modern-day Christians need to know about the law<sup>1</sup> - The main reasons why Christians need to know about the law is: 1.) it's the clearest information we have on God's expectations for His creation. Sure, we have to do some accommodating and adjusting for being Gentiles, but we can get more of a gist from the law than we can from silence. 2.) it demonstrates our inability to live up to the perfect standards of God and thus our need for a savior and thus an appreciation for what Christ has done for us. When we fall into a modern day Gentile thinking that sin isn't really that bad, we lower the glory of Christ's sacrifice.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Although it is the experience of Israel with the Mosaic law that Paul describes in vv. 7–12, their experience, as we have seen, is symptomatic of that of all people who, in various ways, are confronted with God's "law." Thus the failure and "death" of Israel should serve to remind all of us that salvation can never be earned by doing the "law," but only by casting ourselves on the grace and mercy of God in Christ. Augustine says, "God commands what we cannot do that we may know what we ought to seek from him." And Calvin: "In the precepts of the law, God is but the rewarder of perfect righteousness, which all of us lack, and conversely, the severe judge of evil deeds. But in Christ his face shines, full of grace and gentleness, even upon us poor and unworthy sinners."<sup>74</sup> The experience of Israel with the law should also remind Christians never to return to the law—whether the Mosaic or any other list of "rules"—as a source of spiritual vigor and growth." NICNT, Douglas Moo,.



- Jn 3:3–6 – “Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”
- Jn 3:35–36 – “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.<sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
- John 5:24 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”
- Jn 11:25–26 - “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,<sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

## Lesson

- Bound to Death
  - Contracts are only good for one life
    - Romans 7:1 – “*Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?*”
      - Or do you not know,<sup>2</sup> - because you should know this as either Jews, or those who are god-fearers in their past, or those who know the Jewish system through which the Messiah came.
      - Brothers – and SISTERS. The word is adelphoi and means those connected in a spiritually familial way. For Paul, who was both Jewish and Christian it’s not clear by one word who he is directly addressing yet but it will in the next line.
      - for I am speaking to those who know the law<sup>3</sup> — Paul is going to talk to those Jews (primarily) who know and wrestle with how Christianity fits into Jewish law.
      - that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? – whether Jew or Gentile the people of that day could easily understand that concept of contract. When you die the contract is up. Human contracts are only good for life at max.
      - This is one of Paul’s major points<sup>4</sup> – don’t get derailed by his analogies to make the point: **When we were made new creations with Jesus Christ, our reality shifted and we are now living under a new relationship with God.** Paul’s going to talk about laws and marriages,

<sup>2</sup> “it introduces teaching with which Paul assumes his readers are familiar. The phrase implies that Paul is elaborating on a point he has just made...the focus on the law that now begins makes it almost certain that Paul is harking back to his assertion in 6:14b (cf. v. 15) that Christians are not “under law.” Douglas Moo, NICNT Commentary

<sup>3</sup> “This does not require, however, that his readers be Jewish Christians. Many of the Gentile Christians in Rome were probably “god-fearers,” or synagogue worshipers, before coming to Christ. In any case, new converts would have been exposed to the OT and the law early in their Christian instruction.<sup>12</sup> It is almost certain, then, that Paul here refers to the Mosaic law, but no implications about the ethnic background of his audience can be derived from the fact.” NICNT

<sup>4</sup> “I think Paul’s main reason for writing Romans 7 is that he wants to do two things in particular. He wants to explain what the law was given for, and how in a strange sense it actually did the work God set it up to do, and that it is now in a sense fulfilled through the work of the Messiah and Spirit while at the same time explaining...the law itself could not give the life that it promised...It does not lift Israel out of the mess. It simply informs Israel that it too, is in the mess.” NT Wright, Romans for Everyone

and inner wrestling with sin, but at the end of the day Paul is trying to make the bigger point that there are different systems in the world to try to become good and they will all fail. We need Jesus. We are either rescued or we die. There is no human-perfection model we can follow.

- Ultimately this portion is answering the question: **If Christians are adopted (or grafted) into the Spiritual Jewish line, then why aren't we under the Law?** – it's helpful to look at this passage/chapter through this lens. Jesus was the JEWISH Messiah. Sure, He saved a ton of us Gentiles, but He came through a Jewish system. So, for all Christians who are quasi-Jewish spiritually, why isn't the law, the very backbone of Judaism still a part of the Christian experience? **What changed it?**
- Till Death do we Part
  - Paul uses a marriage law analogy
    - *Romans 7:2-3 – "For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives,<sup>5</sup> but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress."*
    - Don't make it more than it is - This is an analogy to make a point about contracts, this is not counseling and information on marriage and divorce. We can infer and learn things from it, but it's not a direct teaching by Paul on marriage and divorce. Let's be clear.
    - For a married<sup>6</sup> woman is bound<sup>7</sup> by law to her husband while he lives, - the simple point is that marriage is a contract on paper. It is only valid for life.
    - but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage<sup>8</sup> – if one party dies, the marriage contract is null and void. It's cancelled and over.
    - Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. – If death isn't involved then the contract of marriage is still active and they are still married. Therefore if she moves on and has sex with another man, they are now fused and she has two

---

<sup>5</sup> "These verses are sometimes cited to prove that remarriage on any basis other than the death of one's spouse is adulterous. Whether this is the biblical teaching or not, these verses at any rate are probably not relevant to the issue. Paul is not teaching about remarriage but citing a simple example to prove a point. In such a situation, one often generalizes to what is usually true in order to simplify the analogy. Since Paul does not mention divorce, we can assume that the remarriage of the woman has taken place without a divorce of any kind; and any such remarriage is, of course, adulterous. Further, any body of law that Paul may be citing—Roman or OT (cf. Deut. 25:1–4)—allows for remarriage on grounds other than the death of the spouse. His readers, who "know the law" (v. 1), would certainly recognize this possibility without it in any way spoiling the effectiveness of Paul's analogy." NICNT

<sup>6</sup> "Gk. ὑποταγὴν τῷ κυνῇ. The word ὑποταγὴν means, literally, "under a husband" (continuing Paul's use of the preposition ὑπὸ to indicate a relationship of bondage); cf. the Heb. תַּחַת־אִשָּׁה (cf. Num. 5:29, etc.)." NICNT

<sup>7</sup> Bound = Deo – "to fasten or tie. NT meanings: to bind, tie, as with a chain or cord; bind up; bind or oblige by a moral or religious obligation." (Lexical Aids to the NT, NASB).

<sup>8</sup> "The believer in Christ is compared to the wife, and the law to her husband, but whereas in the illustration it was the husband that died, in the application it is not the law that has died, but the believer; the believer has died with Christ – and yet it is still the believer who, no longer bound to the law, is free to be united with Christ." (F.F. Bruce, commentary on Romans).



husbands, which means adultery is in effect. The point is the contract is still live so you can't make another contract of the same kind.

- But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress – and then he reiterates, but if one person dies, the other is freed from the contract and can marry (create another contract) again without penalty.
- Legally Widowed
  - New life in Christ releases us from deadly obligation
    - *Romans 7:4-6 – “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”*
    - Likewise<sup>9</sup> - in a similar contractual way – and that was the primary analogy/metaphor: Contracts.
    - my brothers, - and SISTERS.
    - you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another<sup>10</sup> - you were once under contract with the law as Jews (or to sin depending on your interpretation) and bound to it. But once you engaged with Jesus and died to self, that broke the contract with the law, so that you could enter into another covenant/contract.
      - Is death (radical example) necessary in this situation? – This seems to be a bit of a radical analogy. Is Paul being extreme for exaggeration? If God's in charge, why can't we just shift over from law to Christ? The law was permanent and perpetual for the Jews. It was, 'life long.' So, yes, death (death and resurrection in Christ) is a necessary aspect of this argument and reality.
    - to him who has been raised from the dead, - We can now shift contracts and loyalties from the law to Jesus Christ as our means of salvation and connection to God.

---

<sup>9</sup> “This principle is similar to a maxim of the rabbis: “if a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments.” Paul may be citing this principle,<sup>16</sup> although the relative dates call for caution, and the principle is of such a nature that it could have parallels in almost any culture.” NICNT

<sup>10</sup> “Paul is describing his experience as a Jewish convert to Christianity and, as in this paragraph, showing that he had to be released from the binding authority of the law if he were to be able to please God. We can understand how a Jew who became a Christian would “die to the law,” for the Jew would have grown up under the authority of that law. But how could it be said of Gentile converts that they would need to “die to the law”? In order to evade this problem, some expositors suggest that the “law” in 7:4 is moral law generally or that the “brothers” whom Paul addresses in this passage are exclusively Jewish Christians.<sup>40</sup> But neither solution is acceptable. While Paul never makes the matter clear, we suggest that Paul views the Jewish experience with the Mosaic law as paradigmatic for the experience of all people with “law.”<sup>42</sup> Israel stands in redemptive history as a kind of “test case,” and its relationship with the law is ipso facto applicable to the relationship of all people with that “law” which God has revealed to them (cf. 2:14–15). In 7:4, then, while being “put to death to the law” is strictly applicable only to Jewish Christians, Paul can affirm the same thing of the whole Roman community because the experience of Israel with the Mosaic law is, in a transferred sense, also their experience. And, of course, Paul also wants to make clear that, in the new era, in which righteousness is revealed “apart from the law” (cf. 3:21), Gentiles have no need to come under the law to become full-fledged members of the people of God.” NICNT

- in order that we may bear fruit for God. – if/since we do that, we are then freed to be alive with Him and do things in His name through freedom and power He offers. In other words, we are energized in this new life and new contract to produce for God the good things He wants to do in us and through us.
- For while we were living in the flesh, - The difference PRIOR was that we were living in the flesh and trying to carry out the law. It's all we had. We were regular people trying to do a supernaturally demanding perfection standard. We were in trouble. The word flesh in Greek can either mean simply: human, or it can carry the negative tone of 'sinful'. Either works here.
- our sinful passions,<sup>11</sup> aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death<sup>12</sup> – The human and sinful side of us that is rebellious, saw that we were under rules and regulations of the law, and automatically wanted to buck against the system and do the opposite. We were 'aroused by the law' meaning, the rules made us want to break them, and our sinful side of things, started going and we were in a bad way, heading a bad direction, and ultimately hurtling toward spiritual death.
  - We need more than rules - The sinful nature in us is activated by the law in the sense that we desire to break the law. Our rebellious nature needs something more than the law. Rules will never change a heart. They try to modify behavior but many times they exacerbate the problem. Rules can't fix what we need fixed. It only contains our bad behavior.
- But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive,<sup>13</sup> - But now, as Christians, we are released from that negative system that we couldn't do right. When we died to self and raised with Christ (shown by baptism, but done in the surrender of the heart), we were released from the contractual obligations of that system.
- so that we serve<sup>14</sup> in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code – And now we are part of a new system of connection to God. We are now active in a way that was made by the Holy Spirit, and

---

<sup>11</sup> Passions = Pathema – “suffering; from pascho, to suffer. The suffix –ma makes it that which is suffered. Suffering affliction. A passion, an affection.” (Lexical Aids to the NT, NASB).

<sup>12</sup> “the “sinful passions” are those desires to disobey God and his law that are, paradoxically, exacerbated by the law itself. As Paul explains more fully in 7:7–11, the law, in setting forth God’s standard, arouses sins by stimulating human beings’ innate rebelliousness against God. In addition—although this idea is not so evident in this verse—the law increases the seriousness of sin by branding sinful failure as violation of God’s positive decree.” NICNT

<sup>13</sup> “For to be “dead to the law,” as we have seen, means to be delivered from the “power-sphere” of the law. It does not necessarily mean that the believer “has nothing more to do with the law.” Thus, positively, as a “witness” (1:2; 3:21) the law continues to teach the believer much that is indispensable about God’s holiness and the holiness he expects of his people. Moreover, while this verse implies that the believer is not directly under the authority of the law—thus excluding any “third use of the law” in the traditional sense—this is not to say that individual commandments from that law may not be re-applied as “new covenant law” (see, further, on 8:4 and 13:8–10). Finally, the law of which Paul speaks here is the Mosaic law, not “law” in the Lutheran sense of “anything that commands us.” Paul affirms here that the believer is no longer under the authority of the Mosaic law, not that he or she is under no law at all. In fact, Paul himself makes clear that the believer is still “under law” in the broader sense—still obligated to certain commandments (see Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:20–22).” NICNT

<sup>14</sup> “Serve – “Douleuo – This verb does not describe the voluntary service of a hired worker, who is able to refuse an order and look for another employer if he so desires. It refers exclusively to the serve if a bondsman, whose sole purpose for existence is to obey the will of his master.”

not through the Mosaic law (written code). Now it's a matter of God having our hearts and lives, not just our physical obedience.

- The Line Between Good and Bad
  - The law isn't bad but sin makes it dangerous
    - *Romans 7:7-13 – "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." <sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. <sup>10</sup> The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. <sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. <sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. <sup>13</sup> Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."*
      - What then shall we say?<sup>15</sup> That the law is sin?<sup>16</sup> – But if God is having to adjust the system with the Mosaic Law, does that mean that the law was bad and if it was bad wouldn't that make it sin? God was the one who started it and created it, so it can't be bad right?
      - By no means!<sup>17</sup> – Not at all, no way. The law that God created was good and right. It was from Him and did what He wanted it to do. The law isn't the problem.
      - Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin<sup>18</sup> – the good part of the law is that we knew God's expectations. The bad part of the

---

<sup>15</sup> "This paragraph has two purposes: to exonerate the law from the charge that it is sinful and to delineate more carefully the true relationship among sin, the law, and death...Between these, Paul cares for his other main purpose. He admits that, though the law is not "sin," it does have a close relationship to sin. For the law brings recognition of sin and even stimulates sinning (vv. 7b-8). In fact, alluding, as we have seen, to his and other Jews' solidarity with the people of Israel at Sinai, he argues that the coming of the law brought a "radicalizing" of the sentence of condemnation (vv. 9-10a). Strangely, then, the very commandment that was "unto life" became the instrument of death (v. 10b). Verse 11 summarizes: sin has used the law as a "bridgehead" to deceive and to condemn." NICNT

<sup>16</sup> "This section brings to a climax the negative assessment of the law that is such a persistent motif in Rom. 1-6 and thereby also raises with renewed urgency perhaps the most serious theological issue with which Paul (and early Christianity generally) had to grapple: How can God's law have become so negative a force in the history of salvation? How could the law be both "good" and an instrument of sin and death?" NICNT

<sup>17</sup> "The law itself is God's law, and it is holy, just, and good...it is an excellent thing and in good working order." NT Wright.

"If Paul teaches that the law "increases the trespass" (5:20) and "arouses sinful passions" (7:5), he must believe that the law is by its nature evil and sinful. Should Paul hold such a view, he would effectively destroy any continuity between the law and his gospel, between the OT and the NT, between Moses and Christ. Indeed, many Jews and Jewish Christians accused Paul of holding just such an opinion. Paul is undoubtedly aware that such charges against him have reached the ears of the Roman Christians; so, to prepare the way for his visit and the enlistment of the Romans in his missionary efforts, he seeks here to dispel any such apprehensions. "Is the law sin? By no means!" NICNT

<sup>18</sup> "But what kind of "knowing" is this? Perhaps the most obvious possibility is that Paul is talking about the law as defining sin: through the law, the revelation of the righteous standard of God, "I" come to know that certain acts are sinful, that, for example, my inner desire to "possess" is nothing but a "coveting" that is prohibited by God. This is no doubt true, but Paul implies earlier that such knowledge is available even to those who do not have the (Mosaic) law (1:32; 2:14-16). The context, in which Paul stresses that the law reveals sin to be "sin" and renders sin "utterly sinful" (v. 13), suggests a stronger nuance: that through the law "I" come to "understand" or "recognize" the real nature and power of sin. The law, by branding "sin" as transgression (cf. 4:15; 5:13-14) and bringing wrath and death (4:15; 7:8-11, 13), unmasks sin in its true colors. But we should probably go further, and conceive this "understanding" of sin not in a purely noetic way but in terms of actual experience: through the law, "I" have come to experience sin for what it really is. Through the law sin "worked in me" all kinds of sinful desires (v. 8), and through the law sin "came to life" and brought death (vv. 9-11). It is through this actual experience of sin, then, that "I" come to understand the real "sinfulness" of sin." NICNT

law was that once we knew about the rules, we wanted to break them and we realized there was something interesting and valuable the law was keeping us from.

- For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”<sup>19</sup> – Paul uses an example that they all understood: The commandment of coveting (#10). When the command was not to covet your neighbor’s stuff (meaning become obsessed with it, wanting to take it from them, and to consume it yourself), suddenly that forbidden fruit of that concept started sticking in our heads.
- But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness<sup>20</sup> – in a personification (or anthropomorphism) style, Paul talks about sin as if it’s a being or an active thing. He said sin took the opportunity to attack once temptation became a thing. Once the rule was given, sin came alive and started tempting coveting in a ton of ways.
- For apart from the law,<sup>21</sup> sin lies dead. – sometimes when Paul talks about something being ‘dead’ it’s helpful to think of it as ‘dead to me.’ In other words it’s still active and alive, but if it’s being ignored it’s like it doesn’t exist. Paul uses this type of talking when he says to be ‘dead to sin, alive to Christ.’ It means ignore sin and don’t react to it. Treat it as if it’s dead and it will feel like it doesn’t exist. So, here Paul is saying when you don’t have rules, the temptation to break the law is dead. It’s as good as not being there at all.
- I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive<sup>22</sup> and I died<sup>23</sup> – Paul explains, that as a Jew there was a

---

<sup>19</sup> “Paul again personifies sin, picturing it as a “power” that works actively and purposefully (cf. Gen. 4:7). Paul uses “commandment” instead of “law” (nomos; cf. v. 7) because he is referring to the single commandment he cited in v. 7, but the commandment represents the Mosaic law as a whole.<sup>43</sup> Paradoxically, what sin produces by taking advantage of the commandment is just what the commandment prohibited: “all kinds of coveting.” But how is it that the law can give sin the occasion to stir up all these desires? To some extent, the old adage about “forbidden fruits” can explain what Paul means: people, told not to do something, immediately conclude that there must be something “fun” about it and are motivated all the more, or even perhaps for the first time, to do it. Ancient moralists noted this phenomenon, and we are all familiar with it; witness the result of a parent telling her child, “Now do not go outside and jump in that mud puddle!” Paul, however, probably applies this conception in a more distinctly theological way: Israel, confronted in God’s law with limitations imposed by its rightful sovereign, was stimulated by that very limitation to rebellion. It was only after the Israelites had heard the commandment not to make any idols for themselves (Exod. 20:4) that they had Aaron fashion a golden calf for them to worship (Exod. 32). In just this way the law, abused by the sinful tendency already resident in every person, has been instrumental in stimulating all kinds of sinful tendencies.” NICNT

<sup>20</sup> “The law, Paul affirms, is “God’s law” (v. 22) and is “good” (vv. 12, 17), “holy” (v. 12), “just” (v. 12), and “spiritual” (v. 14). How, then, could the law come to have so deleterious an effect? How could the good law of God “work wrath” (4:15), “increase the trespass” (5:20), and “arouse sinful passions” (7:5)? This Paul seeks to explain in 7:7–25, pointing to sin as the culprit that has used the law as a “bridgehead” to produce more sin and death (7:7–12) and to the individual “carnal” person, whose own weakness and internal division allows sin to gain the mastery, despite the “goodness” of the law (7:13–25). Romans 7:7–25, therefore, has two specific purposes: to vindicate the law from any suggestion that it is, in itself, “sinful” or evil; and to show how, despite this, the law has come to be a negative force in the history of salvation.” NICNT

<sup>21</sup> “Accordingly, “apart from the law” will not mean “before I became aware of the true meaning, or real force, of the law” (as in the autobiographical view) or “before the law was given to Adam in the Garden” (an interval of time for which the Genesis account does not, in any case, appear to allow), but, as in 5:13, “before the Mosaic law existed.” In the years before Sinai, Paul asserts, sin was “dead” to Israel. That sin was “dead” does not mean that it did not exist but that it was not as “active” or “powerful” before the law as after.” NICNT

<sup>22</sup> “The law, God’s good, holy, and spiritual gift, has been turned into an instrument of sin because of the “fleshiness” of people.” NICNT

<sup>23</sup> “People in the ancient world often wrote in the first person singular (I) when they wanted to say something more general...He [Paul] is not talking about the human race in general. He is talking about Israel in particular – Israel, who received the law as a good gift from God but who found that there was always someone lying in wait...to take advantage of the new gift...The more Israel does the right thing, which his to embrace God’s holy, just, and good law, the more the law itself says: You have broken me...The law does not enable Israel to get out of the problem. It merely intensifies it...The real problem was sin.” NT Wright

time as Hebrews that they were alive (doing just fine) apart from the law, but when the Mosaic law was enacted, the temptation to sin kicked up and I was as good as dead.

- Who is Paul talking for?<sup>24</sup> – who is the “I” in this passage (here and in the famous passage below about the wrestle of spirit/flesh)? There are

<sup>24</sup> In this section of Romans he tells us more clearly than anywhere else how he found the law so inadequate as a way to secure a righteous standing before God. (Bruce, F. F. (1985). *Romans: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 6, pp. 147–148). InterVarsity Press)

“In the history of interpretation, four main identifications of the egō in this passage have been proposed...It might be more accurate, then, to speak of four “directions” in interpretation...1. The autobiographical direction. The average Christian is—understandably!—likely to ask, “What is all the fuss about?” Doesn’t Paul use “I”? Who else except Paul would it be? Most interpreters throughout the history of the church have agreed and concluded that Paul uses egō simply because he is depicting his own experience. Most, however, would quickly add that he describes his experience not because it is unique but because it is typical—the experience of “every person.” Those who defend an autobiographical interpretation differ over what experience in Paul’s life he may be describing in vv. 7–12. The following are the main possibilities: a. The awakening of the sinful impulse at the time of Paul’s “coming of age,” or “bar mitzvah”: “I was living without understanding the real power of sin at one time, but when I became responsible for the commandment, sin sprang to life and I perceived myself to be under condemnation” (or “perceived myself to be unable to throw off sin’s power”). b. The realization of condemnation just previous to Paul’s conversion: “I thought myself to be ‘alive’ in the days when, as a self-satisfied Pharisee, I thought I was fulfilling the law. But when the Spirit began to make clear to me the real, inward, meaning of God’s law, I saw that I was far short of its demands and was, in fact, under condemnation.” In vv. 14–25, then, defenders of the autobiographical view think that Paul is describing his experience as a Jew under the law, his immediate postconversion struggle with the law, or his continuing struggle to obey the law as a Christian. (See, further, the introduction to vv. 14–25.) 2. The Adamic direction. While few have thought that Paul describes the experience of Adam throughout the section, many, from the earliest days of the church, have thought that vv. 7–12 can be applied directly only to Adam. “I was fully alive [spiritually] before the ‘law’ not to eat of the fruit of the tree came. But when that commandment was given, sin [through the serpent] sprang to life and brought upon me spiritual condemnation.” Most contemporary interpreters, while not thinking that vv. 7–11 describe only Adam, think that reference to Adam is present and prominent. Interpretations of vv. 14–25 by proponents of this view differ widely, but perhaps the most attractive is that of Longenecker. He argues that after using the idea of corporate solidarity with Adam in vv. 7–13—“I in Adam”—Paul goes on in vv. 14–25 to describe the continuing effects of that solidarity—“Adam in me.” 3. The Israel direction. Since Chrysostom, some interpreters have understood the egō in at least parts of 7:7–25 (usually vv. 8–10 especially) to be a representation of the people of Israel. “We [the nation Israel] were, relatively-speaking, spiritually ‘alive’ before the giving of the law at Sinai. But when that law was given, it gave sin its opportunity to create transgression and so to deepen and radicalize our spiritual lostness.” Most of these interpreters, then, think that Paul in vv. 14–25 describes the continuing situation of Jews under the Mosaic law. This is often called the “salvation-historical” view. 4. The existential direction. Convinced that vv. 7–12 cannot be identified with any particular person or experience, many interpreters identify the egō in 7:7–25 as nobody in particular and everybody in general. Paul, they argue, is using figurative language to describe the confrontation between a “person,” qua person, and the demand of God. Paraphrase of vv. 9–10a in this case is both impossible and inappropriate. In assessing these views, three issues are key: the potential lexical range of egō; the identification of the “law” depicted in the chapter; and the experience described by Paul in vv. 9–10a. When these are considered, we will find that, while elements of all four of these interpretations are present, a combination of views 1 and 3 yields the best explanation of the text. Paul is describing his own, and other Jews’, experience with the law of Moses: how that law came to the Jewish people and brought to them, not “life,” but “death” (vv. 7–12); and how that law failed, because of the reign of the flesh, to deliver Jews from the power of sin (vv. 13–25).... If Rom. 7 is about the Mosaic law, two conclusions follow. First, it is unlikely that Paul describes in vv. 7–12 the situation of “everybody”—because “everybody” has not been given the Mosaic law—and still more unlikely that he describes the experience of Adam—because Paul insists that the law was given through Moses (cf. 5:13–14), “four hundred and thirty years” after Abraham (Gal. 3:17). To be sure, some argue that Paul, depending on Jewish traditions, could view Adam as bound by the torah; but this is unlikely.<sup>15</sup> In light of these considerations, while there may be allusion to Adam’s situation in vv. 7–11—in that the situation depicted parallels Adam’s—I cannot think that Paul is describing events in the Garden of Eden. But there is a second, positive, conclusion to be drawn from the fact that Rom. 7 is about the Mosaic law. This is that “the coming of the commandment” in v. 9 is most naturally taken as a reference to the giving of the law at Sinai...Paul could be describing either his own personal confrontation with the law or that of the people of Israel generally. The latter is preferable for two reasons. First, to make the language apply to Paul personally, “without the law” and “when the commandment came” (v. 9) must both be interpreted subjectively: “without being conscious of the [real demands of the] law” and “when I became responsible for, or aware of, the commandment.” Not only should we avoid, if possible, a subjective application of Paul’s apparently objective language, but it is difficult to fit such an experience into what we know, or can surmise, of Paul’s own experience. For there is little evidence that a Jewish child was ever considered to have so little responsibility for the law as to be said to be “without the law” (assumed by view 1a above). And, despite its popularity, there is even less evidence that Paul before his conversion was brought to a deeper consciousness of his sinfulness (assumed by view 1b). A second factor favoring reference to Israel as a whole is the similarity between the sequence of vv. 9–10a and Paul’s persistent teaching about how the giving of the Mosaic law made the situation of Israel worse, not better. The law, Paul has affirmed, “brings wrath” (4:15), turns sin into transgression (5:14; cf. Gal. 3:19), and “increases the trespass” (5:20a). The prominence of this “salvation-historical” sequence in Paul makes it likely that in vv. 9–10 he is using a vivid narrative style to describe this sequence from a more “personal” angle. We have reason, then, to think that Paul alludes to the giving of the law to the people of Israel in vv. 9–10. But could he use egō to represent the nation? This is possible, in light of the use of “I” to stand for Jerusalem, or the nation of Israel, in some OT passages. But perhaps more likely, in light of the undeniable autobiographical elements in vv. 14–25, is that Paul uses egō to describe himself—and, by extension, other Jews—in solidarity with the experiences of his people. We know that the individual Jew had a lively sense of “corporate” identity with his people’s history. Most famous in this regard, of course, is the Passover ritual, in which each Jew confesses that he or she was a slave in Egypt and was redeemed through the events of the Passover. In like manner, I suggest that Paul in vv. 7–11 is describing his own involvement, as a member of the people Israel, with the giving of the law to his people at Sinai. In vv. 14–25, then, Paul describes what the coming of the law meant for himself and other Jews. And since this situation was one consciously experienced by Paul, autobiographical elements are more strongly in evidence in vv. 14–25 than in vv. 7–11. We conclude, then, that egō denotes Paul himself but that the events depicted in these verses were not all experienced personally and consciously by the Apostle. It is in this sense that we argue for a combination of the autobiographical view with the view that identifies egō with Israel. Egō is not Israel, but egō is Paul in solidarity with Israel.” NICNT



4 historical interpretations (per NICNT commentary):

1. Autobiographical perspective – Paul is talking about his own experience personally. But, if it's him, what specifically about his experience?
  - A. Coming of age of awareness of sin – I was always sinful as a child but at one point it became clear to me and my part in it. I also realized I couldn't get rid of it.
  - B. Just before/after conversion – doing great as a religious Pharisee but then the Spirit revealed his continued lack and problem with sin. I saw I was falling short and was condemned under it.
2. The Adamic perspective – Adam's experience was going great until he sinned and it all fell apart. The law is the command not to eat of the tree. That's when things started to unravel. Sin is represented by the temptation through the serpent. It's not just Adam but Adam being our representative as well. Human nature.
3. The Israel perspective – Jews specifically (Paul being one of them). The point would be the Jews were spiritually 'alive' until Mt. Sinai when they were given the Mosaic Law. Suddenly sin saw an opportunity and rose up and a desire to 'break laws' intensified. This continued for all Jews who were continuing to live under the law.
4. The existential perspective – no particular person or experience per se, but everybody. It's figurative language talking about the confrontation of a person and the commands of God.
- The Lance Hahn Perspective – I believe that Paul is talking to Jews and coming at it from the solidarity view of being Jews and the role of the Mosaic law in their lives. However, I believe that the application is for all people to realize that there is a way of life contrary to God that He makes us aware of and saves us from. When we get to the passage below (7:14-25) I think that we can use the application (even though he's still talking as a Jew in the old covenant) to apply to us as modern Christians being frustrated by our continuing sinful habits even after being saved (practical sin nature in our bodies that continue to lead us astray).
- The very commandment that promised life<sup>25</sup> proved to be death to me. – Paul continues: the very law, the commandments, that were supposed to

---

<sup>25</sup> "What did the law promise? According to verse 10, 'life'...But once the law was given on Mount Sinai, Israel's sinfulness was shown up for what it was...all it could deliver was death." NT Wright

"Throughout chaps. 5–8, Paul focuses not so much on the condemnation that comes when the law is disobeyed—"the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13)—as on the failure of the law to deal with the problem of sin—"the inability of the law" (cf. 8:3a). Thus, in vv. 5–6, where Paul elaborates v. 4, the law is presented as not only failing to deal with sin but as actually stimulating sin in the person who is "bound" to it. That law which Jews, not unnaturally, considered a great bulwark against sin is actually, according to Paul, an instrument that sin has used to produce more sin (vv. 5, 8) and to make the sin problem even worse than it was without the law (vv. 9–11, 13)... Probably Paul thinks of the way that the "promise of life" held out by the law "deceived" Israel into thinking that it could attain life through it. But the attempts of Israel to find life through the law brought only death—not because obeying the law itself is sinful, or worthy of death, but because the law could not be fulfilled." NICNT

be a way to honor God and receive His blessings, ended up making things worse for me and ended with me condemned by it.

- Was the law for life or not?<sup>26</sup> – In a sense the law was never going to save anyone. It was given to the Jews to have a greater quality of life but it never promised eternal life (that I can see). I think that Paul is talking about things in terms of: doing God's things in God's ways are life and doing things human ways with brokenness with sin are death.
- For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me<sup>27</sup> and through it killed me – Sin, personified, the rebellious anti-God part of our broken human nature, saw an opening to attack once we got the rules and laws, and it tricked me into thinking I was a part of doing something good when in fact the result was it killing me in condemnation.
- So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. – but lest anyone think that Paul is blaming the law he will continue to clarify: The law is great. It's God-stuff and pure. It's not the problem.
- Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! – Again he is stating the law didn't harm us. The law isn't the problem. In a parallel teaching by Paul in Galatians 3:19-22 we see that the law did help to connect to God on one hand but also it was limited in how much life it could bring. We were always going to need a Messiah savior and be rescued from our sin. The law was the lead up to the Messiah. It was both a help and evidence we needed more help.
  - Gal 3:19-22 *"What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe."*
- It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin,<sup>28</sup> – the problem isn't the law, but the sin that was in me. Sin is always the problem. The anti-God part of us ruins everything. The rebellious nature in us is what wrecks stuff. That sin was using the good law to do bad things.

---

<sup>26</sup> "the notion that the law has life-giving potential is asserted in the OT itself. While God never intended the law to be a means of salvation, the law did come with promises of life for obedience (cf. Lev. 18:5 [?] [cf. Rom. 10:5]; Ps. 19:7–10; Ezek. 20:11; Luke 20:28). From these verses, it seems fair to conclude that the law would have given life had it been perfectly obeyed. In this sense the law "promises life," even though God did not give it with this intention—for he, of course, knew that the power of sin made it impossible for any human being to fulfill the law and so attain the promised life. Thus, although the commandment was "unto life," this same commandment<sup>63</sup> "proved to be" a cause of death for Israel." NICNT

<sup>27</sup> "When Paul speaks of sin as 'deceiving' or 'beguiling' him, there is an echo of Eve's complaint: 'The serpent 'beguiled me, and I ate.'" (F.F. Bruce, commentary on Romans).

<sup>28</sup> "'But' introduces Paul's counterassertion and is probably here (contrast v. 7) fully adversative: 'this death is not at all the fault of the law; on the contrary, it is sin that is responsible.' The syntax of the sentence that follows is convoluted but should probably be resolved along the lines assumed in our translation: 'sin, in order that it might be manifest as sin, through the good produced death in me, in order that sin might become exceedingly sinful through the commandment.' Continuing his main theme from vv. 7–11, Paul places full responsibility for the death of ego on sin, absolving the law from blame by making it an instrument ('through the good') used by sin. The two purpose<sup>31</sup> clauses state the divine and ultimately positive purpose behind sin's destructive use of the law." NICNT

- and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure – and in the end the point of sin in us was to keep going until we died. Through the law, we realized that we were far more broken than we knew and in an impossible situation.
- Battle for the Ages
  - Paul's war of the flesh and spirit
    - Romans 7:14-25 – *"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. <sup>15</sup> For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin."*
    - A complex, mysterious and controversial passage<sup>29</sup> - Because of the interpretation issues mentioned at the beginning this is a controversial and mysterious passage because some really believe Paul is talking about Christians in this situation and many don't.

---

<sup>29</sup> "As we approach this controversial paragraph, we must keep in mind that Paul's focus is still on the Mosaic law. And what Paul says about the Mosaic law comes to much the same thing, whatever we decide about the identity and spiritual condition of the person whose situation is depicted in these verses. The law, Paul insists again, is God's law (cf. vv. 22, 25), "spiritual" (v. 14a), "good" (v. 16). Yet, because "I" am unable to do what the good law requires (vv. 15–20, 21), "I" find myself to be a "prisoner" of sin (v. 23), a situation from which only God in Christ can deliver me (v. 24; cf. 8:1–4). In these verses Paul shows again that the Mosaic law is impotent to rescue people from their sin. For the law informs us of our duties before God, but it does not give us the ability to fulfill those duties. As good as God's law is, it encounters people when they are already "fleshly" (v. 14b), indwelt by sin (vv. 17, 20). From this situation the law does not, and cannot, rescue us; on the contrary, it reveals the depth of the division in our beings, between willing and doing, the "mind" and the "flesh" (vv. 15–20, 25). Paul's essential teaching about the inability of the Mosaic law to rescue sinful people from spiritual bondage is the same whether that bondage is the condition of the unregenerate person—who cannot be saved through the law—or that of the regenerate person—who cannot be sanctified and ultimately delivered from the influence of sin through the law. I emphasize this point both in order to get started in my exegesis with the right perspective and in order to relieve undecided exegetes of some degree of strain. One can preach this paragraph, in its basic intention, without even making a definite identification of the ἐγώ... The diversity in interpretation that we have just sketched is due not only to differing theological agendas and concerns; the exegetical data do not all point in one direction. Much will depend on the particular perspective from which one approaches the passage and which arguments are given greater weight. Interpreting Rom. 7 is like fitting pieces of a puzzle together when one is not sure of the final outline; the best interpretation is the one that is able to fit the most pieces together in the most natural way. Because of this, it is inconclusive, and even misleading, to cite several arguments in favor of one's own view and conclude that the issue has been settled. The best interpretation will be the one that is able to do most justice to all the data of the text within the immediate and larger Pauline context." NICNT

- Who is Paul talking about?<sup>30</sup> – I think the evidence is that Paul is talking about Jews under the law here and we are supposed to apply it to any tensions between us and God, including as Christians wrestling with sin. The context isn't Christian's wrestling with sin but we can use some of the language and concepts. Ultimately it was Paul talking about the need for Jews to come to Christ and be rescued.

---

<sup>30</sup> "while not substantially affecting the main point of the text, our identification of the person whose struggle Paul depicts in this text does have an impact on several theological and practical issues. One of the most important of these is the nature of the Christian life. Should we expect Christian existence to be characterized by the sort of severe struggle described here? Or is this struggle one from which we believers have been rescued by Christ (chap. 8)? Can a Christian suffer the experience described here if he or she fails to live by the Spirit? It is partly because expositors of Rom. 7 exegete this text with an eye on these larger issues that they have divided so sharply over its interpretation. And it may be generally said that the interpretation of few passages has been more influenced by one's broad theological perspective, experience, and sheer *a priori* assumptions than Rom. 7:14–25. Most of the early church fathers thought that these verses described an unregenerate person... This interpretation was adopted by almost all the Reformers. None gave it more theological significance than Luther, who saw in these verses the classic statement of his view of the believer as "at the same time a justified person and a sinner" (*simul iustus et peccator*)... A different approach was taken by those theologians, usually called "pietists," who at the end of the seventeenth century reacted against what they perceived as "dead orthodoxy" in the churches of the Reformation. Thinking perhaps that the "normal" Christian view of this paragraph opened the door too widely to a complacent Christian lifestyle... Similar concerns led Wesley to conclude that vv. 14–25 depict the experience of the unregenerate... The nineteenth century saw a bewildering welter of viewpoints, while scholarly study in the twentieth century has been dominated by the 1929 monograph of W. G. Kümmel. He sought to demonstrate that *egō* in Rom. 7 is a rhetorical figure of speech and need not have any autobiographical reference. Paul is not, therefore, rehearsing his own experience in this chapter, and vv. 14–25 describe an unregenerate person, under the law, from a Christian perspective. This interpretation, endorsed and embellished by Bultmann, was for years almost the "orthodox" view in scholarship... the last thirty years have witnessed considerable criticism of the interpretation inaugurated by Kümmel among scholars as well. Many are insisting that autobiographical elements cannot be eliminated... Our conclusion, already indicated in the exegesis of 7:7–12, is that vv. 14–25 describe the situation of an unregenerate person. Specifically, I think that Paul is looking back, from his Christian understanding, to the situation of himself, and other Jews like him, living under the law of Moses. Of course, Paul is not giving us a full picture of that situation; he is concentrating on the negatives because this is what he must do to prove how useless the law was to deliver Jews from their bondage to sin. We might say, then, that Rom. 7:14–25 describes from a personal viewpoint the stage in salvation history that Paul delineates objectively in Gal. 3:19–4:3... Decisive for me are two sets of contrasts. The first is between the description of the *egō* as "sold under sin" (v. 14b) and Paul's assertion that the believer—every believer—has been "set free from sin" (6:18, 22). The second contrast is that between the state of the *egō*, "imprisoned by the law [or power] of sin" (v. 23), and the believer, who has been "set free from the law of sin and death" (8:2). Each of these expressions depicts an objective status, and it is difficult to see how they can all be applied to the same person in the same spiritual condition without doing violence to Paul's language. In chaps. 6 and 8, respectively, Paul makes it clear that "being free from under sin" and "being free from the law of sin and death" are conditions that are true for every Christian. If one is a Christian, then these things are true; if one is not, then they are not true. This means that the situation depicted in vv. 14–25 cannot be that of the "normal" Christian, nor of an immature Christian. Nor can it describe the condition of any person living by the law because the Christian who is mistakenly living according to the law is yet a Christian and is therefore not "under sin" or a "prisoner of the law of sin." Other points are significant also—the lack of mention of the Spirit, the links with 7:5 and 6:14, and the connections between vv. 7–12 and 13–25—but I think these arguments are the most important. I do not deny that advocates of other views can marshal good arguments of their own. But when all the data have been weighed, I think that the balance tilts toward the interpretation of the *egō* in these verses as unregenerate. This conclusion does not mean that Christians do not struggle with sin. Paul makes it abundantly clear, both explicitly—for instance, Gal. 6:1—and implicitly—by the amount of time he spends scolding Christians in his letters!—that believers are not delivered from the influence of sin. While "transferred" into the new realm, ruled by Christ and righteousness, believers are still prone to obey those past masters, sin and the flesh. I do not, then, deny that Christians struggle with sin—I deny only that this passage describes that struggle. For, while the believer continues to be influenced by both "realms," Paul makes it clear that he belongs to the new realm. In identification with Christ, he has died to sin (6:2), been taken out of the enveloping power of the flesh (8:9), been made a slave of God (6:22). Either these assertions or the force of what Paul says about the *egō* in vv. 14–25 must be watered down to make them "fit" together. Dunn, for instance, takes the first alternative when he claims that vv. 14–25 depict the regenerate person "in his belongingness to the epoch of Adam"; Cranfield, the second, arguing that vv. 14 and 23 describe the believer's "continuing sinfulness."

- For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin<sup>31</sup> – the law is a good thing and trying to help us understand God's expectations and heart. But before we have Christ (and to a lesser extent even after we have Christ) we are still in the flesh and powerless to do what is right. We are sold, captured, bound by sin and can't please God.
- For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. – As a Jew Paul is reflecting on that experience under the law: I don't understand why this is so impossible to follow the law. I don't understand why I can't do it. I don't do the righteous decrees, but end up doing sinful things, the very thing I NEVER want to do (violate God).
- Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. – Of course if I am sinning, I totally agree, I should get busted for that and the law is condemning me rightly, I am guilty.
- So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. – But here's the thing: It is no longer me in charge and doing it (I want to do the right thing), but the sin inside me is propelling and compelling me to do the wrong thing.
- For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. – I am clear that in my own sinful nature, my human nature broken by original sin, there is nothing good in me. Only God is good. Only God-stuff is good and if I'm apart from Him I can do nothing good. That's obvious.
- For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. – I may have the desire to do good things, but I can't. Why? Because I don't have the presence or power of God to help me do God-stuff. How can I love someone in a God-like manner if I have not been loved by God first? How can I extend grace to another if I have not experienced the grace of God?

---

<sup>31</sup> "In calling himself 'fleshly,' Paul may mean no more than that he is human, subject to the frailty of all human beings, whether Christian or not. But the contrast with 'spiritual' points to a more negative meaning. As in 1 Cor. 3:1–3, where 'fleshly' is contrasted with 'spiritual,' 'fleshly' means 'carnal,' subject to, and under the influence of, 'this world.' Since 'fleshly' in 1 Cor. 3:1 is applied to Christians, it is clear that this adjective itself does not require that the ego be unregenerate. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that v. 5, which anticipates the argument of 7:7–25, describes the non-Christian state as being 'in the flesh.' But it is the additional description, 'sold under sin,' that clinches the argument for a description of a non-Christian here. Cranfield is representative of those who argue that this language can appropriately be applied to the Christian, inasmuch as the Christian continues to be sinful, and can therefore be said to be 'under the power of sin.' However, while it is true that Christians are still very much influenced by sin, and will, perhaps, never finally overcome sin's influence in this life, Paul appears to say more than that here. His language points to a condition of slavery under sin's power.<sup>38</sup> And I question whether Rom. 6 allows us to say that the Christian is 'under the power of sin' in this sense. In fact, Paul is saying just the reverse in that chapter; Christians have 'died to the power of sin' (v. 2) and are therefore no longer 'slaves of sin' (vv. 18, 22). However much it is true, as chap. 6 also asserts, that this freedom from sin's power must be lived out, appropriated, and put into action, and that Christians will sometimes fail to do this (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 3:1–3), that freedom from sin's power is absolute and irreversible (cf. 6:8–10). Yet v. 14b asserts, in what certainly appears to be an objective assessment of status, that this ego has been sold so as now to be 'under sin.' Earlier in Romans (3:9), Paul summarizes his teaching about people outside of Christ by asserting that they are all 'under sin.' Christ delivers the believer from this condition, but the ego here in Rom. 7 confesses that he is still in that condition." NICNT

"He is like a person living simultaneously on two planes, eagerly longing to lead a life in keeping with the higher plane, but sadly aware of the strength of indwelling sin that keeps on pulling him down to the lower plane. Here is a picture of life under the law, without the aid of the Spirit, portrayed from the perspective of one who has now experienced the liberating power of life in the Spirit. The inability persists only so long as I fight the battle in my own strength, for then I serve the law of God with my mind, but my body willy-nilly goes on rendering obedience to the law of sin. Must I always know defeat? Must I always know this incubus? Will deliverance never come? Thank God it will through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (F.F. Bruce, commentary on Romans).

- For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.<sup>32</sup> – Even the good stuff in the law that I want to do in order not to get in trouble, or to try to be a good person, I can't do. Yet the evil stuff that I'm trying to avoid, I find habitually in my life pulling me away further from God. It's maddening! We all like to think that our rational mind is in charge, but our sin nature is way stronger.
- Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. – and each time that I'm failure to do the right thing or doing the wrong thing, it's clearly not me but the sin in me that is causing it. It's far too powerful in me.
- So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. – So, I've noticed this pattern in me: when I want to do the right thing, sin is always lurking to ruin it. It's like the more I want to be good, the less I am good because something hijacks it. That something is sin.
- For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, - And as a Jew (or application: As a Christian) I want to honor God. The deep down part of me knows it's the right thing and the right way to live. I want to be a good person to some degree. I see the value and benefit.
- but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind – But sure enough, I see in my body (my members) that war waging against my mind forcing me to sin. It's like my mind wants to go one way but my passions and cravings are more intense.
- and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. – and then I realize that I am stuck. I am in a habit pattern I can't break. I am locked in a law of sin that is in me making it IMPOSSIBLE to live for God the way that I am.
- Wretched man that I am! – I am hopelessly and helplessly unable. I am so disappointed and sickened by my own behavior. I am frustrated and want to give up, but to what? I am in a wretched place.
- Who will deliver me from this body of death?<sup>32</sup> – Who has the power to break that habit pattern of sin and the bondage that I'm in? Who can fix this impossible situation? Who can free me from the death that is in me and pulling me toward eternal death?

---

<sup>32</sup> "Paul has now concluded the description of his pre-Christian situation, as a Jew who reverences the Mosaic law but finds that the power of sin is too strong to enable him to comply with the demands of that law. As he has put it in v. 14b, "I am fleshly, sold under sin." No wonder, then, that he decries his condition and calls out for deliverance: "Wretched person that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Certainly the Christian who is sensitive to his or her failure to meet God's demands experiences a sense of frustration and misery at that failure (cf. 8:23); but Paul's language here is stronger than would be appropriate for that sense of failure. Nor is it fair to say that this cry of despair is contrived and "theatrical" if Paul is not describing his own present feelings. First, as I have argued, Paul is describing an experience he has, to some extent at least, shared. Second, Paul well knows that this very condition characterizes most of his "kinfolk according to the flesh" as he writes. Third, however, we must recognize that, while this cry is uttered by a Jew under the law, it is written by a Jew who in Christ has discovered just how "wretched" his past condition really was; and this Christian insight undoubtedly colors the narrative. Paul's cry for deliverance from "the body of this death" might express his longing, as a Christian, for physical resurrection (cf. 8:10) or his desire, as a non-Christian, for rescue from spiritual frustration and condemnation. In light of Paul's use of "death" language throughout this chapter, and especially in v. 13, which is the immediate launching pad for vv. 14–25, I think the latter is preferable. Paul has been showing how egō, through, and despite, the law, has been brought into condemnation because of the reigning power of sin. Here, in the personal plea that brings to a climax the narrative of vv. 7–23, the condition from which deliverance is sought can be nothing but the condition Paul has depicted in these verses: the status of the person under sentence of spiritual death, condemned, bound for hell." NICNT

- Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! – Praise the Lord, Jesus Christ is that ONE! He can do it. He's able. He's the only one able. He's my savior and my rescuer.
- So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. – So, at the end of the day I realized this: If I'm left to my own power I want to serve God intellectually, but because of being human and broken I'm going to continue to sin and ruin it. I need Jesus not just to save me but to break this habit pattern.
- Important Application – as I mentioned above I think that Paul is talking as an unregenerate Jew who is hopeless without Jesus. But **we can apply many of the same principles to us who ARE Christians today and still struggling with our sin nature that Christ freed us from. While we are in this world we are still in the process of sanctification** (becoming more like Christ and less controlled by sin). **We are not done transforming and in every area that is still sinful we are going to have a war go on in us.** We want to do better but we keep messing up. It's maddening for us as well, but we do have hope and that is, **'He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it.'** (Phil 1:6).
- Key Points and Concepts
  - Rules have their place, but if we're relying on our obedience to save us, we are in trouble.