

# EXPLANATION OF 45<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## ROMANS 7:1-13 (April A.D. 67)

### INTRODUCTION

In Rome the majority of Christians came from Gentile background. The minority came from Jewish background. This situation caused tension among the Gentile and Jewish Christians in Rome.

- On the one hand the Christians from Gentile background had not grown up with the Law of Moses, while the Christians from Jewish background had grown up with the Law of Moses<sup>1</sup>. The Law of Moses consisted of moral, ceremonial and civil laws in the Old Testament Scripture especially as interpreted by the extended traditional explanations of the Jewish religious teachers.
- On the other hand the law caused tension among the Christians from Jewish background themselves, because they realised that they could not keep the law even when they tried hard to keep the law (8:7-8)! Because they religiously and emotionally still tried to live 'under law', they remained as it were 'slaves' or 'prisoners of war' of the law.

In Romans 3:20-22,28-30 and 4:5-6,14 Paul shows that people need to be freed from the bondage to the law in the sense of God's holy and righteous requirement for justification and condemnation in order to be declared righteous before God. People need to be freed from trying to be justified (saved) by doing the works of the law (the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) in their own power.

In Romans 6:14-16 and 7:21-25 Paul shows that people also need to be freed from the bondage of the law in the sense of God's holy and righteous requirement for holiness and sanctification in order to live a holy life before God. The people need to be freed from trying to be sanctified (transformed) by doing the works of the law (the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) in their own power.

In Romans 7:7-25 Paul shows people the benefit and effect of the law.

Release from bondage to the law is essential, not because something is wrong with the law, but because people have turned the law into *a means (an instrument)* of justification and sanctification before God. Release from the law is necessary, because the law cannot make a person righteous or holy! The moral law can only make people experience their depraved sinful nature and give them knowledge of sin and a deep realisation and conviction of their sinfulness.

Romans 6 describes the position of the Christian with regard to sin. The Christian is free from *the bondage to the power of sin*. Justification by grace through faith does not give the Christian a license to continue to do sin or live in sin! The *state of righteousness (justification) and holiness (sanctification)*<sup>2</sup> by grace through faith must and will lead to the *process of living a holy life (sanctification)*<sup>3</sup>!

Romans 7 describes the position of the Christian with regard to the law. The Christian is free from *the bondage to the law* (as a means of justification and as a means of sanctification). He is no longer 'under law', but 'under grace' (6:14). This results in a change from a formal (impersonal) relationship to the law to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. Previously the person under law bore fruit for death, but presently the Christian under grace bears fruit to God.

### OUTLINE

#### **Theme. The Christian's legal state (position) with regard to the law.**

The Christian is no longer doomed (consigned to destruction) by the law.  
He is free from the bondage to the law (as a means to righteousness and holiness).  
He lives no longer under law, but under grace.

(I) 7:1-6. The function of faith (in Christ): it leads to freedom from the law.

- a. A person is bound to the law as long as he lives (7:1-3a)
- b. He is released from the law when someone dies (7:3b)
- c. When the Christian died in solidarity with Christ's death he died to the law (7:4a)
- d. When the Christian was resurrected in solidarity with Christ's resurrection he can bear fruit to God (7:4b)
- e. Before regeneration a person under law bears only fruit for death (7:5)
- f. After regeneration the Christian (under grace) serves in the way of the Spirit and no longer in the way of the law (7:6)

(II) 7:7-13. The function of the law: it causes sin to come to life and leads to death.

- a. The law gives knowledge of sin (7:7)
- b. The law activates sin (7:8-9)
- c. The law produces death (7:10-11)
- d. The law can never produce what is good (7:12-13)
- e. The relationship between the law and sin (5:13; 4:15b; 7:8)
- f. What phase of Paul's personal experience is portrayed in this passage (7:7-13)?

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Ephesians 2:11-18

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 1:15

## EXPLANATION

In the letter to the Romans, the word 'law' in absolute sense refers to the holy and righteous requirement of God that all people must live a perfect holy and righteous life in order to be saved and that all the sins of people must be completely punished. The law is God's whole rule of duty and God's absolute condition for salvation (cf. 10:5).

In a more general sense the law refers to the absolute righteous and holy demands or requirements of God that are expressed in the moral laws, the ceremonial (ritual) laws and the civil laws of Israel especially as they have been interpreted by the extended traditions of the Jewish religious teachers.

The moral laws (the Ten Commandments) taught the people during the Old Testament period how God demanded that they should live righteous and holy lives as God's (saved) people towards God and their neighbours.

The ceremonial laws (with regard to holy people, holy places, holy times and holy actions) taught the people during the Old Testament period how they might approach and worship God.

The civil laws (with regard to the king and judges, the penal and compensation laws) taught people during the Old Testament period how they should function as God's theocratic nation among the Gentile nations.

### (I) 7:1-6. The function of faith (in Christ): it leads to freedom from the law.

#### a. A person is bound to the law as long as he lives (7:1-3a)

**7:1.** Or do you not know<sup>4</sup> (vipa), brothers, - for I am speaking (vipa) to those who know (by study, observation, experience)<sup>5</sup> (vppa) the law – that the law continuously is lord (has authority) over (vipa) a man for the time he lives (vipa) (i.e. only as long as he lives)?

**7:2.** (For example), a married (literally: one under a husband) woman is bound (virp) by law to her husband as long as he lives (vppa), but if the man dies (vsaa), she is released (virp) from the law of the husband (i.e. in so far it binds her to her husband).

Romans 7:1-6 illustrates Romans 6:14, "A believer in Jesus Christ is no longer 'under law', but 'under grace'." A person must be liberated from law in order to be justified and to bear fruit for God.

In Rome there lived many Jews and Gentile converts (proselytes) to Judaism. They lived 'under law', that is, they tried in vain to be justified by keeping the moral, ceremonial and civil law. They did not realise that they were bound to obey the law<sup>6</sup> perfectly<sup>7</sup>. As long as they lived 'under law', the law had authority over them and ruled uncompromisingly over them.

However *God intended the authority and dominion of the law to be temporary, only during the Old Testament period until the first coming of Christ<sup>8</sup>.*

The relationship of a person with the law is like a marriage relationship. As long as both marriage partners live, they are bound to the law of marriage. But when one marriage partner dies, the other is released from the law of marriage and is free to marry again<sup>9</sup>. The law has no authority over a dead person!

#### b. He is released from the law when someone dies (7:3b)

**7:3.** So then, while the husband is still alive (vppa) she would be called<sup>10</sup> (vifa) an adulteress if she would belong (become, marry)<sup>11</sup> (vsad) to another. But if the husband died (vsaa), she is (vipa) released from the law, so that she is (vnpa) not an adulteress when she belongs to (marries)<sup>12</sup> (vpad) another man.

However, if the person marries a second person while his spouse is still living, he commits adultery. But if his spouse dies, he is released from the law of marriage and is not an adulterer if he marries again. The principle of death severs the former marriage relationship and sets him free to engage in the next marriage relationship.

Likewise, a person cannot be justified by faith in Jesus Christ while he is still trying to be justified by keeping the law! A believer cannot belong to two owners at the same time.

#### c. When the Christian died in solidarity with Christ's death he died to the law (7:4a)

**7:4a.** So, my brothers, you also once for all died (viap) to the law through the body of Christ, so that you might once for all belong (vnad) to another.

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<sup>4</sup> G: agnoeó

<sup>5</sup> G: ginóskó

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 18:5

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 3:10-11; James 2:10

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3:23 - 4:7

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:39

<sup>10</sup> G: chrématizó

<sup>11</sup> G: ginomai

<sup>12</sup> G: ginomai

Just as the woman is released from the law of marriage to her husband by the death of the husband, likewise by implication the believer in Christ is released from the 'law' (God's righteous requirement for justification and condemnation) by the death of the law.

However out of respect for the Jews, Paul does not say that 'the law died', but that the person who became a believer in Jesus Christ died to the authority and domination of the law. Paul is referring to the death of the Christian in solidarity with Christ and consequently his death with respect to trying to be justified by keeping the moral, ceremonial and civil laws as interpreted by the Jews. The Christian's former relationship to the law (God's righteous requirement and his trying to keep that moral, ceremonial and civil laws) has once for all been severed. He has been set free from the authority and dominion of the law in order to start a new relationship with Jesus Christ by grace through faith.

**The Christian died to sin. He is set free from the guilt and power of sin. He lives a holy life.** Romans chapter 6 teaches that by the *literal* death of Jesus Christ and the *spiritual* death of the Christian in solidarity with Jesus Christ, the Christian has 'died to sin' (6:2). That is, he has been set free from *the guilt and power* of sin. He has renounced his allegiance to his sinful nature and has said 'no' to the allurements and enticements of the sinful world<sup>13</sup>. Only his death can sever his former relationship with his sinful nature.

**The Christian died to the law. He is set free bondage to the law. He is justified.** And Romans chapter 7 teaches that by the *literal* death of Jesus Christ and the *spiritual* death of the Christian in solidarity with Jesus Christ, the Christian has also 'died to the law' (7:4a). The termination of his first bondage to the law sets the Christian free to enter into a second bondage with Jesus Christ. The termination of being 'under law' sets the Christian free to be 'under grace' (6:14). The end of the first bondage to God's law sets the Christian free to enter into the second bondage to Christ's grace. The fulfilment of God's righteous requirement that condemned him sets the Christian free to enter into Christ's completed work of salvation that justified/saved him.

d. When the Christian was resurrected in solidarity with Christ's resurrection he can bear fruit to God (7:4b)

**7:4b.** to him who was *once for all* raised (v<sub>pap</sub>) from the dead, in order that we (note: the change to the first person) might bear fruit (v<sub>saa</sub>) to God.

**The Christian is raised to a sanctified life.** Romans 6 teaches that by the *literal* resurrection of Jesus Christ and the *spiritual* resurrection of the Christian in solidarity with Jesus Christ, the Christian was raised 'to live a new (sanctified) life' (6:5-7).

**The Christian is raised to bear fruit for God.** Romans 7 teaches that by the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ and the spiritual resurrection of the Christian in solidarity with Christ, the Christian was raised, 'no longer to serve in the old way of the law' (7:6) and 'to bear fruit for death' (7:5), but 'to serve in the new way of the Spirit' (7:6) and 'to bear fruit for God' (7:4).

In solidarity with Christ, Christians now bear fruit to God. 'Fruit' in the Bible is associated with trust in God<sup>14</sup> and with a constant personal relationship to Christ<sup>15</sup>. 'Bearing fruit' refers to practising God's will<sup>16</sup>, to doing good works<sup>17</sup>, to bearing the fruit of the Spirit (manifesting Christian character)<sup>18</sup>, to bringing new believers to Christ<sup>19</sup> and to making mature disciples<sup>20</sup>. It refers to a transformed inner nature<sup>21</sup>, transformed thinking<sup>22</sup>, transformed speaking<sup>23</sup>, transformed behaviour<sup>24</sup>, transformed sharing of means<sup>25</sup> and transformed practices<sup>26</sup>.

**The Christian no longer lives under a guardian and supervisor.** The Old Testament believer lived as an immature child under the guardianship and supervision of the law. But the New Testament believer is led and controlled by the Holy Spirit as a mature son or daughter of God<sup>27</sup>!

e. Before regeneration a person (under law) bears only fruit for death (7:5)

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<sup>13</sup> Colossians 3:3

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 1:1-3; Jeremiah 17:7-8

<sup>15</sup> John 15:1-8

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 7:15-23

<sup>17</sup> Luke 3:8-14; Ephesians 2:10

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>19</sup> Colossians 1:6; Proverbs 11:30

<sup>20</sup> John 15:16

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 7:17-18

<sup>22</sup> Philippians 4:8

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 12:33-36

<sup>24</sup> Romans 6:22; Ephesians 5:9

<sup>25</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

<sup>26</sup> Philippians 4:9

<sup>27</sup> Galatians 3:23 - 4:7; 5:16-26

**7:5.** For when we were (viia) in the flesh (the sinful nature), the passions of sin were continually aroused (viim) in our members, so that<sup>28</sup> we continually bore fruit (vnaa) for death.

*Before regeneration* every person was under law (God's righteous requirement) and they were controlled by their sinful nature. The law (i.e. God's moral law) aroused sinful passions in their members so that they bore fruit for death (7:5)<sup>29</sup>. They served in the old way of the written law (the moral, ceremonial and civil laws written in the Old Testament) (7:6).

f. After regeneration the Christian (under grace) serves in the way of the Spirit (7:6).

**7:6.** But now, having once for all died (vpaa) to what used to hold us fast (to hold down, to confine)<sup>30</sup> (viip), we (the believers) have once for all been released<sup>31</sup> (viap) from the law, so that<sup>32</sup> we continually serve<sup>33</sup> (vnpa) in the newness of (the) Spirit, and not in the oldness of (the) letter (the written code of the law).

But *after regeneration* Christians died to the law (God's righteous requirement as expressed in the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)(7:4). They are *once for all* released from the law that used to suppress them and no longer serve in the old way of the letter (the written code of the law)(7:6). They no longer try to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws in the Old Testament Scripture in order to be justified. They are no longer under law (6:14).

After regeneration Christians are under grace (6:14). They have the state of righteousness and holiness by God's grace through faith. They now serve in the new way of the Spirit (7:6). The Holy Spirit produces the new and holy life in them. The law no longer rules over them from the outside, but the Spirit rules in them from the inside<sup>34</sup>.

(II) **7:7-13. The function of the law: it causes sin to come to life and leads to death.**

a. The moral law produces experience, knowledge and conviction concerning sin (7:7)

Paul shows from his own experience what the moral law does.

**7:7.** What shall we say (vifa), then? (Is) the law sin? May (this) not be<sup>35</sup> (voad) (i.e. Certainly not)! Indeed I would not have come to (ingressive) know (by experience)<sup>36</sup> (viaa) sin, (had it) not been through the law. For I would not have known (what it meant)<sup>37</sup> (vila) to covet (bad or forbidden desire) if the law had not said (viia), "You shall not covet (desire) (vifa)."

**What is sin?** 'Sin' can only be defined in relationship to the God who revealed himself in the Bible. Sin is what misses God's purpose, what falls short of God's perfect standard for life (3:23), what transgresses God's righteous boundaries (4:15), what rebels against God's way of life<sup>38</sup>, what twists God's truth and Word<sup>39</sup> and what fails to carry out God's will. Sin is a self-sufficient life independent from God! Sin is not believing and not obeying God<sup>40</sup>.

**What is the function of the law?** The law is not sin, but has a purpose with respect to sin. The law in the sense of the moral laws in the Bible (for example, the Ten Commandments) does not miss God's intention and purpose! Its purpose is to teach people what 'sin' is in the eyes of God. And its purpose is to arouse the sinful passions (excite the evil desires)(7:5) in a person's sinful nature and thus make him aware of how depraved his sinful nature is.

The law cannot cause any person to be justified before God and also not cause him to live a sanctified life before God. Instead, the law only gives him experience, then knowledge and finally conviction of sin. The law makes him acutely aware of his lack of righteousness and holiness!

This was also Paul's personal experience. Paul would not have experienced coveting as a sin apart from the tenth commandment, "You shall not desire" (7:7). Apart from that law Paul would not have known, believed or have the conviction that harbouring bad or forbidden desires was a sin in God's eyes.

**What is the sin of desiring (7:7)?** 'Desiring' may mean *desire* or *intense longing* in a good sense<sup>41</sup>, but is mostly used in a bad sense as *a forbidden desire*. In the Bible, forbidden desires are *sexual desires* towards people outside one's

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<sup>28</sup> G: eis to

<sup>29</sup> cf. Galatians 6:19-21

<sup>30</sup> G: katechó

<sup>31</sup> G: katargeó

<sup>32</sup> G: hóste

<sup>33</sup> G: douleuó

<sup>34</sup> cf. Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:27

<sup>35</sup> G: ginómai

<sup>36</sup> G: ginóskó

<sup>37</sup> G: oida

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 1:2-4

<sup>39</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2

<sup>40</sup> Hebrews 4:2,6; cf. John 16:8-10

<sup>41</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:17

marriage (passionate lust)<sup>42</sup>, *foolish desires*<sup>43</sup>, *deceptive desires*<sup>44</sup>, *worldly desires*<sup>45</sup> and *corrupt desires* of people who commit vice and crime<sup>46</sup>. God's law exposes all such evil desires in the human heart<sup>47</sup>.

Without the moral law (the Ten Commandments), people would not have known that such desires are evil and they would not have been aware of the hidden source of sin in their own human nature. When people become conscious that they have such evil desires in their own heart, they become aware that they have *a sinful nature*, that is, a nature that misses God's purpose and that opposes God's will. And they become more and more convinced that their whole human nature is depraved.

There are several examples of wrong desires in the Bible: Eve desired the fruit of a tree, which was something *forbidden* by God<sup>48</sup>. The brothers of Joseph desired his *position* in their family<sup>49</sup>. Achan desired the *spoils or treasures* of Jericho, which were devoted to God<sup>50</sup>. Ahab desired the vineyard which was the *possession* of Naboth<sup>51</sup>. Amnon desired *a woman that was not his wife*<sup>52</sup>. Absalom desired *the throne* of David<sup>53</sup>. Ananias and Sapphira desired *prestige* in the church<sup>54</sup>. Simon desired *what was in his eyes the magical power* to bestow the Holy Spirit<sup>55</sup>. Demas desired *the present world*<sup>56</sup>. Many people desire *things they see* in shops or in the possession of others<sup>57</sup>. And Diotrefes desired *pre-eminence* (the position with power and control) in the church<sup>58</sup>! The sin of desiring is a sin against the tenth commandment, "You shall not desire!"<sup>59</sup>.

#### b. The law activates sin (7:8-10a)

**7:8.** But sin grasping (vpaa) the opportunity<sup>60</sup> through (afforded by) the commandment (i.e. "You shall not covet or desire"), produced (brought about, worked out)<sup>61</sup> (viad) in me every kind of coveting (bad and forbidden desires). For apart from law (i.e. the moral law), sin (is) dead (i.e. inactive).

**7:9.** Once<sup>62</sup> I was alive (viia) apart from law; but when the commandment (in the moral law) came<sup>63</sup> (vpaa), sin sprang to life (was revived, activated)<sup>64</sup> (viaa).

**7:10a.** and I died (with respect to self-righteousness) (viaa).

**The law causes indwelling sin to spring to life.** 'Desiring' (coveting) is some kind of bad or forbidden desire to possess what belongs to another. Besides the sin of desiring, the sins of murder, adultery, theft and lies lie dormant within the sinful nature of man. Apart from the moral law, sin within the sinful nature of man remains inactive. The sinful person thinks that he is 'good' and he is self-righteous (he believes that God cannot punish him) or he is self-sufficient (he does not need God for salvation). He is unaware of sin crouching at his door<sup>65</sup>. And he does not fear punishment for sin.

But when he hears the moral law: "you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not give false testimony; you shall not covet (desire)", the moral law activates the sin that is lying dormant in his heart. The moral law excites the sinful nature in him to life and rouses every kind of sinful passion (killing, sexual immorality, stealing, lying and coveting) in him.

As long as he takes little account of God's moral law, the sin dwelling in his sinful nature is *inactive*. But the more he takes note of God's moral law, the more the sin dwelling in his sinful nature *becomes active*. Then the sin dwelling in

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<sup>42</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:5

<sup>43</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9

<sup>44</sup> Ephesians 4:22

<sup>45</sup> Titus 2:12

<sup>46</sup> 2 Peter 2:7-10

<sup>47</sup> Mark 7:20-23

<sup>48</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>49</sup> Genesis 37:4

<sup>50</sup> Joshua 7:21

<sup>51</sup> 1 Kings 21:1

<sup>52</sup> 2 Samuel 13:1

<sup>53</sup> 2 Samuel 15:1f

<sup>54</sup> Acts 5:1f

<sup>55</sup> Acts 8:18f

<sup>56</sup> 2 Timothy 4:10

<sup>57</sup> 1 John 2:16

<sup>58</sup> 3 John 9-10

<sup>59</sup> Exodus 20:17

<sup>60</sup> G: aphormé

<sup>61</sup> G: katergazomai

<sup>62</sup> G: pote

<sup>63</sup> G: erchomai, eleusomai, élthon, elélutha

<sup>64</sup> G: anazaó

<sup>65</sup> Genesis 4:7

his sinful nature becomes a powerful tyrant in his body and a terrible master in his conscience that deceives him and uses God's good law to excite evil desires in him.

When sin springs to life in a person, he experiences that he 'dies', that is, that his fancied state of goodness, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency comes to an end, his false security dies and that he has come into a state of misery and danger of eternal condemnation.

### c. The law produces death (7:10b-11)

**7:10b.** and it was found by me (i.e. I found)(viap) that the very commandment (which was intended to bring or to lead to<sup>66</sup> life, this (actually brought or led to)<sup>67</sup> death.

**7:11.** For sin, grasping (vpaa) the opportunity through (afforded by) the commandment, deceived (viaa) me, and through her (i.e. the commandment) killed (viaa) me.

In Leviticus 18:5 God says, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them."

**The law before the fall.** Before the fall, the purpose of the moral law (the commandments) had originally been, not to gain eternal life, but to maintain everlasting life<sup>68</sup>. Adam and Eve were created sinless and if they would keep the law (i.e. Genesis 2:15-17), they would continue to have eternal life. That was the first sense of Leviticus 18:5. If Adam and Eve would have kept this law, they would have "lived by it", that is, they would have maintained the eternal life which they already possessed.

**The law after the fall – what God intended.** However since the fall of man into sin, Leviticus 18:5 in that sense is no more possible. (See the explanation in Romans 10:5). After the fall, man was given the law (the Ten Commandments)<sup>69</sup> as the way how believers should live their lives. This is the second sense of Leviticus 18:5. If the Old Testament believers would have kept the Mosaic Law, they would have "live by them", that is, they would have shown how they lived the new life as believers.

**The law after the fall – what man assumed.** Nevertheless, self-righteous religious people with little self-knowledge, like the Jewish religious teachers and leaders, continued to imagine that they could earn or attain everlasting life (justification, salvation, paradise) by keeping as much of the law as possible! They believed that God is one; prayed three times a day; fasted twice every week; gave at least one tenth of their income; made three pilgrimages to Jerusalem every year; were circumcised; participated in religious ablutions; only ate ceremonial clean food and wore religious clothing and a cover on their heads. Before his conversion to Jesus Christ the apostle Paul had the same opinion<sup>70</sup>. This was the third sense of Leviticus 18:5. These Jewish religious teachers and leaders wrongly assumed that if they kept the Mosaic Law, they would "live by them", that is, that they would gain eternal life (justification or salvation) by keeping them.

**When the law is not taken into account, sin lies dormant.** As long as a person does not reckon with God's moral law, he regards himself as 'alive', that is, he remains in a false state of security and a fancied state of goodness, in which he is not painfully aware of his sinful nature and also does not dread punishment for sin (7:9). *Before his regeneration* he often gives himself over to these sins without even realising what he is doing.

**When the law is taken into account, sin is activated.** But as soon as this person begins to reckon with God's moral law, the law powerfully activates his sinful nature and makes him painfully aware how depraved he actually is. The more he tries to keep the law, the more he experiences his total moral and spiritual depravity. He realises that he is completely unspiritual (7:14-15).

**When the law is taken into account, the man dies.** *Then "he dies", that is, his pride in his so-called 'goodness' and his claim to self-righteousness and self-sufficiency comes to an abrupt end. He becomes acutely aware that he is lost and in need of a Saviour. It is only when he dies to his own inflated good opinion about himself, that he sees his own so-called 'good deeds' as nothing more than 'filthy rags'<sup>71</sup>.*

**When the law is taken into account, man realises that he needs a Saviour.** It is only when the person sees himself as he really is, as God sees him, that he realises that he needs to be delivered from depending on the law for righteousness and holiness. He realises that the law can never produce righteousness and holiness! The law can only produce experience of sin, which leads to knowledge of sin and finally becomes a deep conviction of sin.

**The law cannot function as a Saviour (justify or sanctify anyone).** Nevertheless, there are always religious people, like the Pharisees, that still believe that they can be justified and sanctified by keeping the law. The sinful nature in them completely misleads them to think that the law can still justify and sanctify them. But *how can God's law that demands perfect (100%) obedience at all times justify a person that has at least disobeyed God's law once<sup>72</sup>? After the*

<sup>66</sup> G: eis

<sup>67</sup> G: eis

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 2:15-17

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 20:1-2; Galatians 3:18

<sup>70</sup> Philippians 3:6

<sup>71</sup> Isaiah 64:6

<sup>72</sup> James 2:10; Galatians 3:10

*fall of mankind into sin, justification by the works of the law is completely impossible! Also trying to live a holy and obedient life according to the law is completely impossible!*

**The law can only function as a mirror (exposing his sin) and as a judge (condemning him).** Instead, the law has become God's instrument to bring all people to a deep conviction of their sins, their depraved nature and their consequent state of spiritual death<sup>73</sup>. *The law has become God's means to show people that they are completely lost, that they need a Saviour outside themselves and that all their own religious efforts cannot save them!*

**d. The law can never produce what is good (7:12-13)**

**7:12.** For this reason<sup>74</sup>, the law (i.e. God's moral law) (is) holy, and the commandment (is) holy, righteous and good.

**7:13.** Did that which is good then become (viad) death to me? May (this) not be (voad)(i.e. By no means)!

But the sin, in order that it might appear as (become visible, be revealed, stand out as)(vsap) sin, through what was good (the moral law) again and again produced (brought about, worked out)(vppn) death in me, in order that through the commandment sin might become (vsad) sinful beyond measure (extremely).

**The law is good.** Although the law in itself is holy, righteous and good (7:12), it cannot produce holiness, righteousness and goodness in people (7:8). Because the law is God's instrument to arouse sin to life in the sinner, the law can never function as God's instrument to bring eternal life to the sinner! So, instead of being an instrument that produces life, the law is an instrument that excites the sinful nature in a person to produce death.

**The law activates the sinful nature (the indwelling sin).** It is not the law that causes spiritual death, but sin dwelling in the sinner that causes spiritual death. The law causes people to realise their own unholiness, unrighteousness and depravity. The law makes them aware of their spiritual death and it causes all their self-righteousness and false security to 'die'.

**The law convinces a person that he is morally and spiritually totally depraved.** The law causes sin to become "sinful in the extreme", that is, the law causes people to become painfully aware how great sinners they are and how completely unspiritual their human nature is. The law becomes the mirror in which people become aware of their total moral and spiritual depravity (3:20). The moral law brings the extreme sinfulness of their sinful nature into the open. The moral and spiritual purity of God's commandments make the moral and spiritual depravity of man's sinful nature stand out all the more sharply (5:20)!

**The law is God's instrument to expose sin and to activate sin.** God's purpose with the law is to show to people how unrighteous and how unholy they really are! Because the law is only an instrument that exposes sin and incites the sinful nature to activity, it can never be the instrument to justify or save people!

**The law is also God's rule or standard of how believers should live.** *God had never intended the law to be an instrument to bring life (justification, salvation) to people.* When God gave the law (the Ten Commandments) to his people in 1447 B.C., they were already saved (delivered from the house of slavery) and they were already God's people<sup>75</sup>! God gave them the law (the Ten Commandments), not as an instrument to bring life, but as God's rule or standard how God's saved people should live as the people of God in the world.

Since the exile of Israel to Babylon in 586 B.C. *it was the Jewish religious party of the Pharisees who changed the law into the means of justification (salvation)!* Other religions in the world followed the wrong example of the Jews.

Conclusion. The law is good, but can only produce what is utterly sinful (7:12-13)!

**e. The relationship between the law and sin (5:13; 4:15b; 7:8).**

What is the difference between the three statements about the law in Romans 5:13, Romans 4:15 and Romans 7:8?

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul uses the word 'law' in several different senses.

*Generally, the law is God's just requirement that all people must live complete and perfect lives from beginning to end and that all the sins of all people must be punished. It is God's whole rule of duty and God's condition for complete salvation, no matter whether it existed as the law written on the hearts of people or as the law written in the Bible. It is God's spiritual and moral standard, to which all his rational creatures are bound to conform. It is God's absolute standard for both justification and holiness (sanctification). It condemns all lack of conformity to its own inflexible standard of perfect obedience and a completely holy life. Galatians 3:10 says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." And James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*

By making a statement in the negative in all three the statements, Paul emphasises the positive. Paul emphasises that the law always shows people that they have sin and that God has condemned them for their sins. But because these three statements speak of different aspects of the law, they need to be interpreted separately.

**(1) Romans 5:13. The law as God's requirement for Adam to remain righteous.**

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<sup>73</sup> Ephesians 2:1

<sup>74</sup> G: hóste

<sup>75</sup> Exodus 20:1-2

The statement in the negative says: “When there is no law, sin is not taken into account”.

The statement in the positive means: “When there is law, sin is taken into account”.

In the period between Adam and Moses there was no written Law of Moses. So the people living between Adam and Moses were not personally condemned to death for transgressing any of the written laws of Moses. Nevertheless, they were all condemned and they all died! Because the compensation of sin is death (6:23a), there must have been sin. The people living between Adam and Moses were not condemned to death for their personal sins, but for the one sin of someone who represented them and did transgress a law. To which law and to whose sin was Paul referring?

The only possible conclusion is that the people living between Adam and Moses were condemned and punished with death for the transgression of the one law which God gave to Adam before he fell into sin: Genesis 2:15-17!

*God regards Adam as the representative head of the whole human race. When Adam sinned and was punished with death, the whole human race was regarded as having sinned in solidarity with Adam and were condemned and punished to die in solidarity with Adam (5:17a, 18a, 19a)<sup>76</sup>! The Greek text of Romans 5:12 says: “Therefore, it is just like (this): sin entered the world through one man (Adam) and death through sin. And in this way death came to all people, because all (people) *once for all* sinned (aorist tense) (in and through Adam, their representative)”! Although the people living between Adam and Moses certainly committed personal sins by breaking the law written in their heart (2:14-15), they did not sin by breaking the one commandment that God gave to Adam alone: Genesis 2:15-17.*

*In this context, the emphasis is on the one law that God gave only to Adam - Genesis 2:15-17 - as his legal requirement for remaining righteous. This law was God’s absolute legal requirement (condition), for Adam only, to remain justified and not be condemned to death. Adam alone broke this law with the consequence that all his descendants suffer death. The emphasis is on Adam’s representative responsibility for the fall of mankind into sin!*

When God gave this one command (law) to Adam, Eve had not yet been created<sup>77</sup>. But when Satan later came to tempt Adam and Eve, he addressed the woman<sup>78</sup>. One could argue that Eve did not know God’s command, but the Bible says that Adam “*was with her*” when she was tempted<sup>79</sup>! Adam knew God’s command. Adam was the responsible head of his family and the responsible representative of all human beings!

Therefore the apostle Paul could say in a statement in the negative: “When there is no law, sin is not taken into account”. The statement in the positive means: “When there is a law, sin is taken into account”! The one law which Adam transgressed, Genesis 2:15-17, was taken into account and the whole human race was condemned (5:17a, 18a,19a)!

## **(2) Romans 4:15b. The law as God’s legal requirement for justification condemns every individual.**

The statement in the negative says: “Where there is no law, there is no transgression (sin) (4:15b).”

The statement in the positive means: “Where there is law, there is transgression (sin).”

And when there is transgression of the law, there is condemnation and God’s wrath (4:15a)! If there were no law in this sense, there would also not have been any transgression and consequently there would have been no condemnation and no wrath of God. Paul speaks about the law as God’s legal requirement (absolute condition) for justification (salvation) and condemnation (judgement): namely, that all people must live perfect lives and all sins must be punished.

Every human being has the law in the sense of God’s legal requirement for justification and condemnation, either written in his heart (2:15) or written in his Bible (2:20b; 3:10-19b). *Because no individual in the history of the world is without the law in this sense, the sins of every individual are taken into account and every individual is judged according to the law he possesses*. “Where there is law, it brings God’s wrath” (4:15a). The law requires absolute obedience to the requirement of perfect righteousness and holiness. And because no individual has kept this law or can keep this law, every individual is condemned as a sinner. And God’s wrath remains on every individual in his natural state<sup>80</sup>, unless his sin is atoned for!

If there would have been an individual who could keep the whole law perfectly, one would expect that he would have been justified, that is, he would have been judged as a righteous person and would have received eternal life. But that would only be possible *before* the fall of Adam and all mankind into sin<sup>81</sup>.

Because everyone has the law in the sense of God’s legal requirement for justification and condemnation and not a single individual has kept the law in this sense, not a single individual will be justified by trying to keep the law. Instead every mouth is silenced and the whole world is held accountable to God (3:19). The law in the sense of God’s absolute condition for justification (salvation) and God’s absolute standard for condemnation (judgement) only brings God’s wrath over every individual.

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22

<sup>77</sup> Genesis 2:18-23

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 3:1-5

<sup>79</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>80</sup> John 3:18,36

<sup>81</sup> Genesis 2:15-17; cf. Leviticus 18:5; Romans 10:5



*In this context, the emphasis is on the moral law that God gave to each individual, either in his heart (2:15) or in the Old Testament revelation (2:20b; 3:10-19b) as his legal requirement for justification (salvation). The moral law is God's absolute legal requirement for the perfect holy and righteous state (position) in God's eyes. In order to qualify, a person must be sinless and he must live a perfect (100%) holy and righteous life. Because no one (except Jesus Christ) qualifies, every individual has broken God's law and suffers under God's wrath. The emphasis is on the individual responsibility of every human being for his own sins.*

**(3) Romans 7:8. The law as God's legal requirement for sanctification activates sin in every individual.**

The statement in the negative says: "Apart from law, sin is dead".

The statement in the positive means: "By means of the law, sin becomes alive and active".

Paul is here not speaking of the law as God's requirement for attaining the holy and righteous *state* in God's eyes (justification), but is speaking of the moral law as God's requirement for living the holy and righteous lifestyle (sanctification). Especially the Ten Commandments revealed what is right and what is wrong in God's eyes and showed how God's saved people should live the life of a saved person (a believer).

Paul says that *apart from the moral law (the Ten Commandments), sin within the sinful nature of man is inactive*. Sin is 'dead'. Although the person may be doing very evil things in his body, his human spirit is 'dead'<sup>82</sup>. Therefore he has no conscious awareness of God's reality or presence, his conscience and intuition with respect to what is right and wrong is inactive and he feels no guilt or shame for the evil he is doing. The sin dwelling in his sinful nature may express itself actively in all kinds of evil in his behaviour and yet lie dormant in his spirit.

However, when the moral law is given serious attention, then the sin dwelling in the sinful nature of man becomes very alive and active. It springs to life and acts in his spirit! Another way to say this is: "The power of sin (i.e. the power that activates sin) is the law (i.e. the moral law which a person hears)"<sup>83</sup>. And yet another way to say this is that the Holy Spirit is using the truths in the Bible to convict him of sin, righteousness and judgement<sup>84</sup>.

The more a person tries to keep the moral law, the more the moral law arouses the sinful passions lying dormant in his sinful nature (7:5), incites every kind of evil desire in him (7:8) and causes him to experience how depraved he really is (7:23-24). He feels guilty and ashamed, a failure and lost and says: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" When the moral law activates sin in the sinful nature of man, he 'dies', that is, *the Ten Commandments kills his self-righteousness, self-sufficiency (independence from God) and fancied state of goodness. His false security comes to an end and he comes into a state of misery and danger of eternal condemnation (7:9b)*. Instead of being an instrument of life, the moral law is an instrument of death. The moral law is God's means to cause people to realise that they are depraved and unspiritual.

*In this context, the emphasis is on the moral law that God gave to each individual, either in his heart (2:15) or in the Old Testament revelation (2:20b; 3:10-19b) as his moral requirement for sanctification. The moral law is God's absolute moral requirement for living the holy and righteous lifestyle. But because there is not one person who does not break the moral law (except Jesus Christ), every individual suffers under the realisation that he (his human nature) is completely depraved. The emphasis is on every individual experiencing his depravity.*

#### **f. What phase of Paul's personal experience is portrayed in this passage (7:7-13)?**

Does Romans 7:7-13 describe the experience of an unregenerate person or of a regenerate person?

It seems most likely that this passage describes Paul's experience just before, during and shortly after his conversion.

When Paul was still an unregenerate Pharisee<sup>85</sup>, he was self-complacent and regarded himself as someone who was very religious and completely righteous through outwardly keeping the written law of Moses<sup>86</sup>. For a long time, he occupied himself intellectually with the written Law of Moses and tried to keep the 613 laws that the Pharisees derived from the Law of Moses. However, the moral law of God that demands perfect righteousness and perfect holiness simply did not function in his life. Paul "lived apart from the moral law" in the religious self-righteousness and spiritual pride of a Pharisee (7:9a).

Paul says that *apart from the moral law, sin in the sinful nature is inactive (7:8)*. He does not tell us *when* in his life he began to take the moral law of God serious, *when* in his life he began to realise what sin and covetousness really was (7:7) and *when* the moral law caused his indwelling sin to become active and to produce every kind of covetous desire in him (7:8). *That it happens is much more important than when it happens*. It must have started when he was still unregenerate before his conversion. The experience of "sin springing to life and he died" (7:9b) should most probably be associated with either his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, or with his contact with Ananias in Damascus, or with the events during his three year stay in Arabia<sup>87</sup>. It was then that this former persecutor of the Christian Church had *time to reflect on the kind of person he had been before his conversion, to think about the testimony of Stephen and the other Christian martyrs, whom he helped to kill, and to listen to the teaching of Ananias and other Christians in his early Christian life*.

It was then that he had time to meditate on the words of Jesus himself to him on the way to Damascus and to study the Bible passages that summarise the way of salvation<sup>88</sup>. It was then that Paul was aroused from his *spiritual apathy*, that he became painfully aware of how sinful he really was and that his *sinful pride* and *vaunted self-sufficiency* 'died', that is, came to an end (7:9b). It was then that he realised that the moral commandments, which were intended to guide God's people how to live, actually brought death to religious people who wanted to be justified by keeping the law. By trying

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<sup>82</sup> cf. Ephesians 2:1

<sup>83</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:56

<sup>84</sup> John 16:8

<sup>85</sup> Acts 26:5

<sup>86</sup> Philippians 3:4-6

<sup>87</sup> Acts chapters 9, 22, 26; Galatians 1:13-18

<sup>88</sup> Genesis 15:6; Psalm 32:1-11; Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Habakkuk 2:4

to keep the law, he realised that he could not keep the law and that he was totally depraved in his unregenerate nature (cf. 3:10-20). *He realised that he was spiritually dead*<sup>89</sup>.

It was not God's moral law that had deceived him, because the moral law is holy, righteous and good (7:12). It was his own indwelling sinful nature that had deceived him to believe that he could be justified by keeping the law. His indwelling sinful nature used the knowledge of God's moral laws to actually do the things forbidden by the moral law. Knowledge of the moral law caused him to realise how utterly sinful he was, how depraved he was, how much he had missed God's purpose for his life (7:10-11,13).

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<sup>89</sup> cf. Ephesians 2:1-4