

YOU WON'T GET TO HEAVEN BY BEING GOOD

There are 20 references in Romans chapter 7 to the Law of God. So let's make sure that we all start out here on the same page. What is the Law of God? We'll define it for our purposes here as The Ten Commandments. When we're all ready for a course in advanced theology we'll get into a little more detail. But for our present study, when we use the term Law, just think of The Ten Commandments. And let us understand one more thing as we begin our study of Romans chapter 7. The Law of God is a *glorious thing* even though believers have been set free from it. And the reason it's so glorious is that in a special way it reflects the holiness of God. If you'll remember back in chapter 6, verse 14, Paul told believers that **they were no longer under law**, but under God's grace, which means we no longer have to obey the Law to be saved. Instead God offers us salvation and eternal life even though we don't deserve it. That is what is meant by the term, *God's grace*. He does this because He loves each one of us.

But even though believers are no longer under the Law, that doesn't mean that the Law of God isn't a *glorious thing*, and you'll see that later on. Go with us to the Psalms for a moment and we'll see just how **glorious** a thing God's Law was considered to be. Psalm 19:7-10:

*The law of the Lord is **perfect**, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are **trustworthy**, making wise the simple.
8 The commandments of the Lord are **right**, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are **clear**, giving insight to life.
9 Reverence for the Lord is **pure**, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are **true**; each one is **fair**.
10 They are more **desirable** than **gold**, even the finest gold. They are **sweeter** than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.*

Psalm 119:12,16,18,77,97,136,142,165,174:

*12 Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your principles (law)¹.
16 I will delight in your principles (law)² and not forget your word.
18 Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law.
77 Surround me with your tender mercies so I may live, for your law is my delight.
97 Oh, how I love your law! I think about it all day long.
136 Rivers of tears gush from my eyes because people disobey your law.
142 Your justice is eternal, and your law is perfectly true.
165 Those who love your law have great **peace** and do not stumble.
174 O Lord, I have longed for your salvation, and your law is my **delight**.*

Deuteronomy 27:26:

26 'Cursed is anyone who does not affirm the terms of this law by obeying

¹ Parentheses added.

² Ibid.

them.’ And all the people will reply, ‘Amen.’

Ecclesiastes 12:11-14:

11 A wise teacher’s words spur students to action and emphasize important truths. The collected sayings of the wise are like guidance from a shepherd.

*12 But, my child, **BE WARNED:** There is no end of opinions ready to be expressed. Studying them can go on forever and become very exhausting!*

*13 Here is my final conclusion: **Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person.***

14 God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.

When God gave The Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai back in the year 1445 B.C., God instructed Moses to tell the people what we find written in Deuteronomy 6:1-15. Here Moses is speaking to the people of God:

*“**These are all the commands, laws, and regulations that the Lord your God told me to teach you** so you may obey them in the land you are about to enter and occupy,*

*2 and so you and your children and grandchildren might fear the Lord your God as long as you live. If you obey all his laws and commands, you will **enjoy** a long life.*

*3 Listen closely, Israel, to everything I say. Be careful to obey. **Then all will go well with you**, and you will have many children in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.*

*4 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, **the Lord alone.***

*5 And you must love the Lord your God with **all** your heart, **all** your soul, and **all** your strength.*

*6 And you must **commit yourselves wholeheartedly** to these commands I am giving you today.*

*7 **Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey**, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.*

8 Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead.

9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

10 “The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build.

11 The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land,

*12 **be careful not to forget the Lord**, who rescued you from slavery in the*

land of Egypt.

13 You must fear the Lord your God and serve him. When you take an oath, you must use only his name.

14 “You must not worship any of the gods of neighboring nations,

15 for the Lord your God, who lives among you, is a jealous God. His anger will flare up against you and wipe you from the face of the earth.

And finally we hear from God through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 42:21 (NAS):

*It pleased the Lord for the sake of his righteousness to make his law **great and glorious.***

Now the Jews to whom the Law was originally given somehow, someway, somewhere along the way developed a religion that said you can earn your own salvation and eternal life by keeping the Law of God. This by the way, as we'll see later, was not God's intent in giving the Ten Commandments to them. But this was the situation Jesus found when He arrived on the scene and it was a very big stumbling block for the Jews in accepting Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Savior. It was also a major stumbling block for the apostles of Jesus in teaching the Gospel message after Jesus' death. And thus it was for the apostle Paul as he wrote this letter to the Romans around 57 A.D.

It is simply a basic fact of the human sinful nature that people throughout history have wanted to believe they can earn their own salvation by what **they** do. Many churches throughout our country and the world support this same type of belief today, and it is a total contradiction and violation of the teachings of God and Christ. Humankind, because of their own lust for money and power, used the church in order to control the masses of people and provide for their own personal desires. They developed false doctrine and manipulated the Word of God to support that doctrine. They told people they could be saved by performing various rituals and penance for their sins, and it was nothing more than a lie. God is love and He made salvation very simple. In fact, you're about to see that He made it so simple that it requires nothing more than reaching out and accepting a free gift of love.

Now we've been confirming the truth of the Gospel message in our study of Romans that a person can be saved by faith in Jesus and not have to keep a bunch of laws by exercising their own self-will alone. Does that mean that if God accepts you by faith alone that He makes His Law null, void, and useless? The answer is no, and as we study chapter seven we'll see that **Paul is very careful in establishing the exact place and purpose of the Law.** Paul has already told us in Romans 3:20 (NIV):

*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, **through the law we become conscious of sin.***

Paul also told us in Romans 6:14 that “*we are not under Law.*” But if you can't be saved

by the Law, then what is the Law for? Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? We'll soon get to that, but for now we just need to understand that it was essential for Paul to deal with this issue in chapter 7 because the Jews of his time weren't about to listen to anything he would say if he couldn't explain why they were not responsible to keep the Law of God on their own. So let's take a look at the first verse of Romans 7:

*Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that **the law applies only to a person who is still living?***

Paul simply states something here that he knows everyone else knows. He is saying that he knows he's talking to people who understand the Law and that know it only affects living people. It would be foolish to think that the Law could have any effect on a dead person. If a drunk runs his car into a tree and is killed, you don't see a police officer bending over his body writing a ticket. The law does not apply to a dead person. That is just something that is obvious to everybody. Now let's go on to Romans 7:2:

*Let me illustrate. When a woman marries, the **law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive**. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her.*

If a woman's husband dies she is no longer bound by law to her husband. She is released from her legal obligation. She is not married and legally bound to a corpse the rest of her life. The law binds people only while they're alive. This is just another way of expressing what he said in verse 1. Paul continues in Romans 7:3:

So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

This verse simply confirms what was said in verse 2. The law only applies to the marriage as long as both partners are alive. Now Paul starts to get into the application of these first 3 verses in Romans 7:4:

*So this is the point: **The law no longer holds you in its power, because YOU DIED TO ITS POWER when you died with Christ on the cross**. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, you can produce good fruit, that is, good deeds for God.*

You may remember that Paul described a **believer's death** when they came to believe in Jesus as their Savior back in Romans 6:3-7:

*Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, **we died with him?**
4 **For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism**. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we*

also may live new lives.

5 Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was.

*6 **Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.***

*7 **For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.***

If you believe in Jesus as your Savior, you died on the cross with Him at Calvary. We learned in chapter 6 that when you put your faith in Christ, you are united with Christ and you die with Him in a real spiritual death. When you hear the term “*born again Christian*,” this is what that term is referring to; you die with Jesus in His death and you rise again with Him, just as He rose to new life. Is that difficult for you to understand? You bet it is, but if you stay with us all the way through this study of Romans, I believe you will see it more clearly with each passing chapter.

If you’re not a believer in Christ, the Law, the Ten Commandments, has no ability to save you. Trying to keep all ten of them all the time is not what will save you. Trying to be a pretty good person, even a very good person is not what will get you into Heaven. The only thing that the Law can do is condemn you because **it shows you that no one could possibly keep all of the Law.**

How does the law work in our judicial system? First it tells you what the rules are, and then it tells you that if you break those rules, you’ll pay the penalty. **THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT THE LAW OF GOD TELLS US.**

Now let me use an illustration that might be helpful in understanding your relationship to God’s Law. If I committed a murder and the law of the state of Illinois saw fit to execute me for that crime, that is precisely what I would deserve and receive. But if after I was executed, I rose from the dead, I would be free, because the law would no longer have any authority over me. I paid its required penalty for the crime by dying in the electric chair. I am now a free man.

So in a similar manner believers die with Christ. The Law can then no longer condemn them. Before a person comes to Christ, the Law CANNOT save them, but IT CAN CONDEMN them, and thus they are under its control and authority. When they die in Christ, the Law no longer has any authority over them. That’s what we’re being told in Romans 7:4, we “*died to the Law **through the body of Jesus Christ.***”

By dying on the cross, Jesus satisfied the Law. He paid the penalty the Law demanded for sin. He paid the penalty in full for all of us and freed us from the Law. We through faith died with Him and also therefore paid the penalty for sin the Law demands. Look at what 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 tells us:

*For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, **no longer***

counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.

20 We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!"

*21 For **God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.***

When we come to believe in Jesus as our Savior we make a trade: **our sin for His goodness.** Our sin is poured into Christ at His crucifixion on the cross. His righteousness is poured into us at the moment we believe. That is what is meant by Christ's atoning death for sin. Galatians 3:10-13 says:

But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God's Book of the Law."

11 Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever be right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

*12 How different from this way of faith is the way of law, which says, "If you wish to find life by obeying the law, **YOU MUST OBEY ALL OF ITS COMMANDS.**"*

*13 **But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.***

Galatians 2:20

I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This brings us right back to Romans 7:4:

The law no longer holds you in its power, because you died to its power when you died with Christ on the cross. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead.

Salvation is a complete change of relationship. In verse 2, Paul said that a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living but is no longer bound to him by law if he's dead. That is the same for anyone who comes to faith in Christ. Before they come to faith they are bound to obey the Law, but when they come to faith in Christ, they die with Christ, are buried with Christ, and rise from spiritual death with Christ to become a new person. **Through the Holy Spirit who comes to live within the new believer, that new believer is united with Christ.** The believer is then no longer bound to obey the Law because they died and the Law therefore has no authority over them.

You are no longer under the bondage of the Law, you have been freed from your obligation to obey the Law And because of the power of the Holy Spirit you can now live a life that accomplishes things that please God. You'll still sin now and then, but if you work at submitting your will to the will of God, you'll be amazed at how your life will change for the better. You'll also reflect the light of God in the way you live and you will become a positive influence for Christ with other people. And it's only because you are now united to Jesus Christ as one is in a marriage. Will Christ ever die again? Will we ever lose that new relationship that Paul compared between a wife and a husband? Never. We died with Christ because of the mysterious miracle of our union with Him by God's grace through faith, and we rise to walk in newness of life. Salvation is a total transformation.

We are given security according to Romans chapter 5; holiness is produced in us according to Romans chapter 6; and we have liberty from the Law according to Romans chapter 7.

Now Romans 7:4 also tells us the **reason** that God has developed this process:

As a result, you can produce good fruit, that is, good deeds for God.

That is the **reason** plain and simple. Because of Christ **we bear fruit**, we do the good things that God wants His children to do. There is no such thing as a no-fruit Christian. Salvation has a product. Because of a transformed life we are able to do and do do what God originally intended people to do before we were contaminated by a sin nature.

What actually is fruit? Well let's go to the scriptures to help us answer that question. First we'll look at Galatians 5 :22,23:

*But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of **FRUIT** in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control.*

Now let's take a look at Hebrews 13:15 (NAS):

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, **the FRUIT of lips that give thanks to His name.***

If you'd like additional examples you can read: Titus 2:7,8; 3:8,14; James 3:13, and 1 Peter 2:12.

Any right attitude or right behavior is fruit.

When Christ transforms your life and you are dead to the Law and you come alive to God through Jesus Christ, it's not just because of some event that occurred. It's because of the presence of the living Christ, in the form and presence of the Holy Spirit, with whom you

are one. He produces **fruit** (right attitudes and right behavior) in you to the glory of God.

He is the vine and we are the branches and the vine produces fruit through the branches as we're told in John 15:1-5:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

3 You have already been pruned for greater fruitfulness by the message I have given you.

*4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a **BRANCH** cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me.*

5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

True salvation brings holiness and fruitfulness. What kind of fruit is hanging off your branches? Is your fruit nourishing, tasty, and appealing, or is it rotting because it's disconnected from the vine?

In Romans 7:5 (NAS), Paul describes what it was like before a person became a believer:

*For while we were in the flesh, the **sinful** passions, which were aroused by the **Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for **death**.*

Now this is a very key verse because it's just packed with meaning. There are 4 key elements in this verse and they deal with:

- [✧] Flesh
- [✧] Sin
- [✧] Law
- [✧] Death

Flesh

The **flesh** produces **sin** which is aroused by the **Law** which results in **death**. These 4 terms describe humankind's fallenness and sinful nature. What does Paul mean by *in the flesh* at the beginning of verse 4?" Before answering that we should understand that in the Bible the word "*flesh*" is used in 2 different ways. We need to understand the difference between the 2 meanings. When *flesh* is used physically in the Bible it has no evil meaning, for Jesus came in the flesh according to John 1:14. When "*flesh*" is used in the ethical and moral sense it always has an evil meaning. You can see examples of this in Romans 8:4-9,13. In these references the term speaks of humankind's sinful human nature. So when we're in the *flesh* it means we're unsaved. If you are a Christian you are no longer in the "*flesh*." So if you are in the "*flesh*," seeking only the pleasures of the

“*flesh*,” you are not reconciled to God and you are in an unsaved state.

Sin

Being in the “*flesh*” produces sinful impulses according to verse 5.

Law

THESE SINFUL IMPULSES OR DESIRES ARE PRODUCED OR STIMULATED BY THE LAW OF GOD. Now I would wager that statement comes as a real shock to most of you. How could a good law create a sinful passion? There are 2 ways:

- ⌘ First **the Law makes evident what is evil**. Without a law or rule you wouldn’t understand what it meant to break the law or rule. In other words if there wasn’t a commandment that said, “*You are not to steal*,” you wouldn’t know that it was wrong to steal. So **the Law reveals** sin by setting up the standard by which to identify sin. When a person comes to know these Ten Commandments, which are considered the Law of God, and then doesn’t obey them, then they know they’re committing a sin.
- ⌘ Secondly, **the Law excites evil** because nothing seems more appealing to people than to do something that is forbidden. If you question that, just turn on the television, pick up a magazine, or go to a movie. You might even want to become a politician for a little while. Just tell people they can’t do something and watch them rush to try it. So in that way the Law excites sin and we’ll also see more about that later in chapter 7. Instead of us living up to the Law of God, **the Law of God simply shows us evil**. Rather than wanting not to break the Law, we instead want to break the Law. There is something in the make-up of most humans that seeks to rebel. Remember now that I’m speaking of a person’s general attitude before they are saved.

This is probably a good time to understand God’s purpose in giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. We will try to do this in as clear a manner as possible and we encourage you to stop us and ask any questions you might have along the way. We’ll take whatever time is necessary for everyone to understand this because it is a key element in understanding “*salvation by grace through faith*.”

The Law was given to prepare the way for Christ, Galatians 3:23–26:

Until faith in Christ was shown to us as the way of becoming right with God, we were guarded by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until we could put our faith in the coming Savior.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God.

25 But now that faith in Christ has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

26 So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul uses an illustration that was familiar to all his readers—**the child guardian**. In many Roman and Greek households, **well-educated slaves** took the children to and from school and watched over them during the day. Sometimes they would teach the children, and sometimes they would even discipline them. This is what Paul means by *teacher* or in other translations, *schoolmaster* (Gal. 3:24); but please do not read into this word our modern idea of a schoolteacher. The translation of the original Greek gives us our word *pedagogue*, which literally means “*a slave that escorted children to school.*”

By using this illustration, Paul is saying several things about the Jews and their Law. First, he is saying that the Jews were brought up by the Law. They were taught the Law from the time they could sit up and make a fist. And the slave who took the child to school and watched over him was the child’s guardian, teacher, and disciplinarian. So, the Law was not given to Israel so they would obey it in order to gain salvation. The purpose of the Law was to regulate life. It was the Jewish Pharisees who made the Law into a religion of their own and taught that the Law was necessary for life and righteousness, and Paul’s argument shows their error. It also shows the error of any church today that teaches salvation by good works.

But the second thing Paul says is even more important: **the work of the guardian was to prepare the child for maturity**. Once the child came of age, he no longer needed the guardian. So the Law was a preparation for the nation of Israel until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ. The ultimate goal in God’s program for the salvation of all people for all time was in the coming of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:22). But before Christ came the nation of Israel was given a *schoolmaster* to help them understand God’s ultimate plan and that *schoolmaster* was the Law (the Ten Commandments).

The Law separated Israel from the Gentile nations (Eph. 2:12–18), in other words all the other people in the world. It governed every aspect of their lives. During the centuries of Jewish history, the Law was preparing the people for the coming of Christ. The demands of the Law reminded the people that they needed a Savior. The *types* and *symbols* in the Law were pictures of the coming Messiah (see Luke 24:27).

A good example of the purpose of the Law is in the account of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16ff). This young man had everything anybody could desire, but he was not satisfied. He had tried to keep the commandments all his life, but still something was missing. Yet it was the commandments that got his attention and motivated him to go and talk with Christ. This is one of the purposes of the Law, to create in lost sinners a sense of guilt and need. The sad thing is that the young man could not place Jesus above the pleasures in this life and he went away without eternal life.

The Law performed its purpose: the Savior (Jesus) came and the *schoolmaster*, the Law, is no longer needed. It is tragic that the nation of Israel did not recognize their Messiah, Jesus, when He appeared. God finally had to destroy their temple and scatter the nation in 70 A.D. because all the practices in association with the Law were fulfilled

in Christ and were no longer necessary. In fact for anyone to continue the traditional Jewish worship, as it was conducted under the Law before the coming of Christ, would now be idolatry.

So now any person, Jew or Gentile, who trusts Christ becomes a child of God, receives salvation and a guarantee of eternal life in Heaven.³

Now we'll close by discussing the fourth item discussed in Romans 7:5, and that is **death**. Let's look again at the whole verse:

*For while we were **in the flesh**, the **sinful** passions, which were aroused by the **Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for **death**.*

We see that before a person is saved they're in the flesh and the flesh produces sinful desires which are heightened and intensified by the Law. The result is "*fruit for death.*" These sinful impulses excited by the Law work in our members (the members of our body, or *flesh*). In the unsaved person this brings about spiritual death which means a person is not saved and will not go to Heaven. But back in verse 4, Paul says that for the believer this has all changed. The believer is now dead to the Law and alive in the risen Christ. The believer no longer produces "*fruit for death,*" but "*fruit for God.*"

I hope you're feeling as overwhelmed right now as we are at the absolute mastery and perfection of God's plan for those who are willing to trust in His judgment, His goodness, His love, and His power. Next week on to Romans 7:6 and more wonders. You won't want to miss it.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1989. The Bible exposition commentary. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.