

# ROMANS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

## Chapter Seven

(7:1) As we approach the contents of this chapter, Denney's comment is helpful: "The subject of chapter 6 is continued. The apostle shows how by death the Christian is freed from the law, which, good as it is in itself and in the divine intention, nevertheless, owing to the corruption of man's nature, instead of helping to make him good, perpetually stimulates sin. Verses 1-6 describe the liberation from the law; verses 7-13, the actual working of the law; in verses 14-25 we are shown that this working of the law is not due to anything in itself, but to the power of sin in the flesh."

In further pursuing the matter of the Christian's relation to law as a method of divine dealing, Paul recurs to the substance of his statement in 6:14. "You are not under law, but under grace." To be under law is to be an unsaved person obligated to obey God's law. But the law gives neither the desire nor the power to obey its precepts. Instead, it brings out sin all the more, because its very presence incites rebellion in the totally depraved nature of the individual (5:20). To be under grace is to be a Christian, who has had the power of the evil nature broken in his life so that he does not need to obey it anymore, and has been given the divine nature which gives him both the desire and the power to do God's will. As the poet says, "Do this and live, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings."

Paul's purpose now is to press home the point that the believer is not under law anymore (vv. 1-6), that a Christian putting himself under law and thus failing to avail himself of the resources of grace is a defeated Christian, his own experience before he came into the knowledge of Romans 6 (vv. 7-13), and that while the law incites this Christian to more sin, yet the law is not responsible for that sin, but the evil nature, which only can be conquered as the believer cries "who shall deliver me?" and thus looks away from himself and self-dependence to the Lord Jesus (vv. 14-25).

Paul says that it is a matter of common knowledge that the (civil) law can exercise dominion over a person only as long as he lives. When he dies, he has passed out of the realm where that law could have jurisdiction over him. Just so, the law of God can have dominion over a person as long as he remains within the domain where the law has jurisdiction, namely, in his unsaved state. But when a believing sinner has been identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Ch. 6), he has passed out of the realm where the law holds sway. He has ceased to be an unsaved person and has become a saved individual.

Translation. *Or, are you ignorant, brethren, for I am speaking to those who have an*

*experiential knowledge of law, that the law exercised lordship over the individual as long as he lives?*

(7:2, 3) “Hath a husband” is *hupandros*, “under or subject to a husband”. “Is bound” is *dedetai*, perfect in tense, “is permanently bound”. There is no release. “Is loosed,” is *katergazomai*, “to render inoperative, to bring to naught,” literally, “she has been brought to naught as respects the law of her husband” (Vincent). This authority explains the words “the law of her husband”, “her legal connection with him”. He says, “There is an apparent awkwardness in carrying out the figure. The law, in vv. 1, 2, is represented by *the husband* who *rules* (hath *dominion*). On the death of the husband the woman is released. In v. 4, *the wife* (figuratively) dies. ‘Ye are become dead to the law that ye should be married to another.’ But as the law is previously represented by *the husband*, and the woman is released by the husband’s death, so, to make the figure consistent, the *law* should be represented as dying in order to effect the believer’s release. The awkwardness is released by taking as the middle term of comparison the idea of *dead in a marriage relation*. When the husband dies, the wife dies (*is brought to naught*) so far as the marriage relation is concerned. The husband is represented as the party who dies because the figure of a second marriage is introduced with its application to believers (v. 4). Believers are made dead to the law as the wife is martially dead – killed in respect of the marriage relation by her husband’s death.”

Translation. *For the woman subject to a husband, is permanently bound to her husband during his lifetime. But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then, while her husband is living, an adulteress she will be called if she is married to another man. But if her husband is dead, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though being married to another man.*

(7:4) “Are become dead” is *thanatoō*. Vincent says, “Rev., more accurately, *ye were made dead, put to death*; because this ethical death is fellowship with Christ’s death, which was by violence.” Alford says, “The *more violent word* is used instead of *apethanete* (you died), to recall the violent death of Christ, in which, and after the manner of which, believers have been put to death to the law and sin, – and the *historic* aorist, to remind them of the great event by which this was brought about.” Robertson says; “The analogy calls for the death of the law, but Paul refuses to say that. He changes the structure and makes them dead to the law as the husband (6:3-6). The relation of marriage is killed ‘through the body of Christ’ as ‘the propitiation’ (3:25) for us.”

Translation. *So that, my brethren, you also were put to death with reference to the law, through the intermediate agency of the body of Christ, resulting in your being married to another, to the One who was raised up out from among the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.*

(7:5) The expression “in the flesh” refers to the condition of a person in the absolute control of the evil nature, as is clearly seen by a consideration of Paul’s words in 8:9, where he says, “But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God, dwell in you.” That is, in the case where the person is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that person is not in the control of the evil nature. That individual is a saved person. Consequently, the one who is in the flesh is an unsaved person, the flesh here referring to the fallen nature.

“Motions” is *pathēma*, “an affection, a passion, impulse.” Vincent says, “*Motions* was used in earlier English for *emotions* or *impulses*. Thus Bacon: ‘He that standeth at a stay where others rise can hardly avoid *motions* of envy.’” “Did work” is *energeō*, “to be operative, put forth power, be at work.” The emotions or impulses of sin, stirred to activity by the law, were operative in the members of our bodies with the result of the production of fruit, this fruit being with respect to death, identified with death, thus, characterized by death.

Translation. *For when we were in the sphere of the flesh, the impulses of sins which were through the law, were operative in our members, resulting in the production of fruit with respect to death.*

(7:6) By the believer’s death with Christ on the Cross, he was discharged from the law as the woman was discharged from the law which bound her to her husband. The believer is not under the law anymore, nor subject to it. The words “that being dead wherein we were held” could better be rendered, “having died to that in which we were constantly being held down.” That in which the believer was constantly held before he was saved is the evil nature. That is anything but dead. In fact, in the Christian, it is more alive than ever, being the point through which Satan seeks to obtain control over him. The point is, however, as Paul has so clearly shown, that the power of the evil nature has been broken in the believer. Before salvation, he was constantly held down within its grip and control. Paul uses the imperfect tense here to show the absolute control of the evil nature over the unsaved person.

The words “that we should serve” (A. V.) indicate a future purpose, or an obligation on the part of the believer. The Greek text speaks of result. Paul’s thought is, “We were discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were constantly held down, insomuch that (*hōstē*) we are habitually rendering a bondsman’s obedience.” It is a fact that we are doing so, a natural result of having been discharged from the law and having been separated from the compelling power of the evil nature in which we were constantly held down. This is the mechanics of the thing.

We are doing this “in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter,” Paul says. The word “letter” is *gramma*. It was used of a bond, a document, a letter one writes. Here it refers to the written law of God as found in the Old Testament. The Greek has two words for “new”, *neos*, “that which is new in regard to the time in which it has been in existence”, and *kainos*, “that which is new as to quality, as set over against that which has seen service, the outworn, the effete or marred through age”. The second is used here. The word *pneuma* is spoken of as that which is new as compared to the *nomos* (law) which is said to be old. There are two words for “old” in Greek, *archaios*, “that which is old in point of time”, and *palaios*,

“that which is old in point of use, worn out, useless”. The second is used here. The law abrogated at the Cross, is looked upon as outworn, useless, so that it has been set aside. Now, spirit and law are contrasted here. Does the word *pneuma* (spirit) refer here to man’s human spirit or to the Holy Spirit? A logical contrast would suggest that the distinction here is made between the Holy Spirit as the new method of divine dealing and the law, which was God’s old method. Paul’s thought here is not that the believer serves in a new spirit, that is, in a new attitude and with new motives, but that he serves now in the power of the Holy Spirit, under a new energy and control, rather than in an attempt to obey an objective law. It is again the thought expressed by the poet, “Do this and live, the law demands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings.” Wings in Scripture speak of supernatural power, here of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Translation. *But now, we were discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were constantly being held down, insomuch that we are rendering habitually a bondsman’s obedience in a sphere new in quality, that of the Spirit, and not in a sphere outworn as to usefulness, in a sphere of that which was written.*

(7:7) With this verse, we come to a new division of the subject under discussion. In 7:1-6, Paul has shown that the believer is not under law. In 7:7-13, he shows that a believer putting himself under law, thus failing to avail himself of the resources of grace, is a defeated Christian (here he recounts his own experience as a Christian before he came into the knowledge of Romans 6); and in 7:14-25, he teaches that while the law incites this Christian to more sin, yet the law is not responsible for that sin, but his evil nature, which only can be conquered as the believer cries, “Who shall deliver me?” and thus looks away from himself and self-dependence to the Lord Jesus.

We will study Paul’s account of his Christian experience while he was attempting to live a Christian life under law. He poses the question, “What shall we say then to the fact (v. 5) that the desires or impulses in the evil nature in me were stirred into activity by the law. Is that law sinful or evil which does that?” His first answer is “God forbid,” *mē genoito*, literally “may it not become,” that is, “let not such a thing be thought of,” or “away with the thought.” His second answer is, “I did not know sin in an experiential way except through the instrumentality of the law.” That is, it was through the law that I came to know sin in my experience. Therefore, that law which shows me the sin in my life must be holy. “Lust” is *epithumia*, “a passionate craving,” good or bad as the context requires, here evil. “Covet” is again *epithumia* in its verb form. Denney says, “The desire for what is forbidden is the first conscious form of sin. ...He, Paul, says that the consciousness of sin awoke in him in the shape of a conflict with prohibitive law.”

Translation. *What therefore shall we say? The law, is it sin? Away with the thought. Certainly I did not come into an experiential knowledge of sin except through the instrumentality of the law, for I had not known evil desire except that the law kept on saying, You shall not desire evil.*

(7:8) “Occasion” is *aphormēn*. Vincent’s note is helpful; “Emphatic, expressing the relation of the law to sin. The law is not sin, but sin found *occasion* in the law. Used only by St. Paul. See II

Corinthians 5:12; Galatians 5:13; I Timothy 5:14. The verb *aphormaō* means *to make a start from a place*. *Aphormē* is therefore *a starting place, a base of operations*. The Lacedaemonians agreed that Peloponnesus would be *aphormē hikanēn* *a good base of operations* (Thucydides, 1., 90). Thus, *the origin, cause, occasion, or pretext* of a thing; *the means with which one begins*. Generally, *resources*, as means of war, capital in business. Here the law is represented as furnishing sin with the material or ground of assault, 'the fulcrum for the energy of the evil principle.' Sin took the law as a base of operations."

"Wrought" is *katergazomai*, "to accomplish, achieve an end, carry something to a conclusion." "Concupiscence" is *epithumia*, here "evil desire." "Sin" is here the evil nature. Without the incitement produced by the law, the evil nature was relatively dormant. A fulcrum is an instrument in the form of a pole or long stick, which when applied beneath an object, will pry that object loose from its position. Just so, the sinful nature uses the law as a fulcrum by which to pry itself loose from its relative inactivity into activity.

Translation. *But sin, using the commandment as a fulcrum, brought about in me every kind of evil craving. For without law, sin was dead.*

(7:9) The period in which Paul says he was alive without the law is probably his period of childlike innocence and on in life until he came face to face with the law of God and it began its work of showing him the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of inciting in him a rebellion against itself. Vincent says; "Referring to the time of childlike innocence previous to the stimulus imparted to the active principle of sin by the coming of the law; when the moral self-determination with respect to the law had not taken place, and the sin-principle was therefore practically dead."

When the commandment, "do not have evil desire" had come to Paul in all its implications, the evil nature (sin) regained its strength and vigor (*anazaō*). Thayer, treating this word in this place, says; "Sin is alive, indeed, and vigorous among men ever since the fall of Adam; yet it is destitute of power in innocent children ignorant of the law; but when they come to knowledge of the law, sin recovers its power in them also." Alford explains the words "I was alive" as "when I lived and flourished," and the words "I died", as "ceased to live and flourish as before, – fell into a state of unhappiness."

Translation. *But I was alive without law aforesaid. But the commandment having come, sin regained its strength and vigor, and I died.*

(7:10, 11) The literal Greek is, "And there was found with reference to me the commandment which was to the life, this to death." Vincent says, "The A. V. omits the significant *hautē this*. *This* very commandment, the aim of which was *life*, I found unto death. Meyer remarks: 'It has tragic emphasis.' So Rev., this I found. The surprise at such an unexpected result is expressed by I *found*, literally, *was found*." That is, Paul expected his Christian life under law to issue in the production of a testimony and experience that would be a living one, alive with the life of God, and this, accomplished through his attempt at law-obedience. But he found that mere effort at obeying an outside law resulted in defeat. The law,

using the evil nature in him as a fulcrum, brought out sin all the more, and this condition he calls death. He describes this in the words, "For sin, (the evil nature) using the law as a fulcrum, beguiled me and through it (the law) killed me."

Translation. *And the commandment which was to life, this I found to be to death; for sin, using the commandment as a fulcrum, beguiled me and through it killed me.*

(7:12) Vincent says, "Holy as God's revelation of Himself; just (Rev. righteous) in its requirements, which correspond to God's holiness; good, salutary, because of its end."

Translation. *So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.*

(7:13) Denney explains; "The description of the commandment as 'good' raises the problem of verse 7 in a new form. Can the good issue in evil? Did that which is good turn out to be death to me? This also is denied, or rather repelled. It was not the good law, but sin, which became death to the apostle. And in this there was a divine intention, namely, that sin might appear sin, might come out in its true colors, by working death for man through that which is good. Sin turns God's intended blessing into a curse; nothing could more clearly show what it is, or excite a stronger desire for deliverance from it." Robertson comments; "The excesses of sin reveal its real nature. Only then do some people get their eyes opened."

Translation. *Therefore, the good, to me did it become death? Away with the thought. But the sin (sinful nature) in order that it might become evident that it is sin, through the good (the commandment) brought about death, in order that sin (the sinful nature, its impulses and workings) may become exceedingly sinful.*

(7:14, 15) Paul has three words to describe man, "natural" *psuchikos*, the unsaved man whose highest form of life is dominated by his reason and emotional nature, the soulless man (I Cor. 2:14); "carnal" *sarkinos*, the saved man who has not found deliverance from the power of sin in the fullness of the Spirit but is more or less still under the control of the evil nature; and "spiritual" *pneumatikos* (I Cor. 3:1), the believer who is living his life in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Here he describes himself as carnal, as a Christian living, however unwillingly, more or less under the control of the evil nature from which he had been liberated, and under its control, because he was living under law instead of grace. He is sold as a slave under sin. "Sold" is *pipraskō* in the perfect tense. Robertson says; "sin has foreclosed the mortgage and owns its slave."

Now, Paul explains his situation. "Allow" is *ginōskō*, "to know by experience, to understand." He does not understand his experience as a Christian. He says, "For that which I desire, this I do not practice, but that which I hate, this I am doing." That is, the very thing he desires to do, namely, good, this he does not do, and that which he hates, this is the thing he does do. It is clear that Paul is recounting his experience as a saved man. He desires to do good and hates sin. No unsaved man does that. The failure to achieve his purpose is found in the fact that he is attempting in his own strength that which can only be accomplished in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Translation. *For we know that the law is spiritual. But as for myself, I am fleshly, permanently sold under sin. For that which I do, I do not understand. For that which I desire, this I do not practice. But that which I hate, this I am doing.*

(7:16-20) “Consent” is *sumphēmi*, “to speak together with, concur with.” Vincent says, “since the law also does not desire what I do.” Robertson explains, “My wanting to do the opposite of what I do proves my acceptance of God’s law as good.” Denney says, “in doing what he hates, *i.e.*, in doing evil against his will, his will agrees with the law, that it is good.” The distinctive word for “good” here is *kalos*, not *agathos*. Denney says that *kalos* suggests the moral beauty of the law, *agathos*, its beneficial purpose.

The word “now,” *nuni*, Vincent says is “not temporal, pointing back to a time when it was otherwise, but *logical*, pointing to an inference. After this statement you can *no more* maintain that, etc.” The pronoun *egō* appears with the verb. It is, “It is no longer *I* that am doing it.” Vincent explains, “My personality proper, my moral self-consciousness which has approved the law (v. 16) and has developed vague desires for something better.” Denney explains; “*egō* (*I*) is the true *I*, and emphatic. As things are, in view of the facts just explained, it is not the true self which is responsible for this line of conduct, but the sin which has its abode in the man.... ‘Paul said, *It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me; and, I live, yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me;* and both these sayings of his touch on the unsayable’ (Dr. John Duncan). To be saved from sin, a man must at the same time own it and disown it; it is this practical paradox which is reflected in this verse. It is safe for a Christian like Paul – it is not safe for everybody – to explain his failings by the watchword, Not *I*, but indwelling sin.... A true saint may say it in a moment of passion, but a sinner had better not make it a principle.” Sin, of course, here, is the evil nature indwelling a believer.

As to verse 18, Denney is helpful; “It is sin, and nothing but sin, that has to be taken into account of in this connection, for ‘I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good’ in me, regarded as a creature of flesh, apart from any relation to or affinity for God and His Spirit.”

“To will” is *thelō*, in the present infinitive, literally, “the being constantly desirous.” That is, Paul was constantly desirous of doing God’s will. “Present” is *parakeimai*, “to lie beside.” This came from his divine nature (II Peter 1:4). The words “how” and “find” are not in the Greek text, the former word being supplied by the translators of the A. V. to complete the thought, the latter being rejected by Nestle and placed in his apparatus. The literal Greek reads, “but to perform the good, not,” that is, while the desire to do God’s will is always with him, the ability or power to perform it is not. Ignorant of the truth of Romans 6 and 8, Paul was depending upon his own efforts to do God’s will.

Translation. *In view of the fact then that what I do not desire, this I do, I am in agreement with the law that it is good. And since the case stands thus, no longer is it I who do it, but the sin (sinful nature) which indwells me; for I know positively that there does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh, good; for the being desirous is constantly with me; but the doing of the good, not; for that which I desire, good, I do not; but that which I do not desire, evil, this I practice. But in view*

*of the fact that that which I do not desire, this I do, no longer is it I who do it, but the sin which indwells me.*

(7:21-23) The word “law” is preceded by the article. The word could refer to a law such as the constant rule of experience imposing itself on the will such as a modern scientific law, or the Mosaic law, or to the law of sin which Paul speaks of as in his members (Vincent). The last interpretation seems most in keeping with the times in which Paul is writing, and with the context. The law in his members warring against the law of his mind is, of course, the evil nature. Paul finds a condition that when he desires to do good, this evil nature always asserts itself against the doing of that good. He brings out the same truth in Galatians 5:17 where he says, “The flesh (evil nature) has a passionate desire to suppress the Spirit, and the Spirit has a passionate desire to suppress the flesh. And these are set in opposition to each other so that you may not do the things which you desire to do.”

“I delight” is *sunēdomai*, “to rejoice,” “stronger than *I consent unto* v. 16). It is the agreement of moral sympathy” (Vincent). The inward man, Vincent defines as “the rational and moral *I*, the essence of the man which is conscious of itself as an ethical personality. Not to be confounded with *the new man* (Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10). It is substantially the same as *the mind* (v. 23)” Denney explains. “The incongruity between inclination and action has its roots in a division within man’s nature. The law of God legislates for him, and in the inner man (Eph. 3:16) he delights in it. The inner man is not equivalent to the new or regenerate man; it is that side of every man’s nature which is akin to God, and is the point of attachment, so to speak, for the regenerating Spirit. It is called inward because it is not seen. What is seen is described in verse 23. Here also law is not used in the modern physical sense, but imaginatively, ‘I see a power to legislate, of a different kind (different from the law of God) which asserts itself in my members, making war on the law of my mind.’ The law of my mind is practically identical with the inward man, is its chief organ. Paul does not see in his nature two normal modes in which certain forces operate: he sees two authorities saying to him, Do this, and the higher succumbing to the lower. As the lower prevails, it leads him captive to the law of sin which is in his members, or in other words, to itself: ‘of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.’ The end therefore is that man as a creature of flesh, living under law, does what sin enjoins. It is the law of sin to which he gives obedience.

Translation. *I find therefore the law, that to me, always desirous of doing the good, to me, the evil is always present. For I rejoice with the law of God according to the inward man. But I see a different kind of a law in my members, waging war against the law of my mind, making me a prisoner of war to the law of sin which is in my members.*

(7:24, 25) “Wretched” is *talaipōros*, originally “wretched through the exhaustion of hard labor” (Vincent). The literal Greek is, “Wretched man, I.” Denney says, “a wail of anguish and a cry for help.” This was Paul’s cry during the spiritual experience he describes of himself in this chapter, Paul the saint, ignorant of the delivering power of the Holy Spirit, concerning whom he has so much to say in the next chapter. The minute he cries “who” he finds the path to victory,

for he calls upon a *person* for help. The interrogative pronoun in the Greek text is masculine, indicating a person.

The words “this death” refer to the miserable condition of the Christian who is yet dominated more or less by the evil nature which all the while he is desiring to gain victory over. It is the death Paul speaks of in verse 9. The body here is the physical body, as that body in which the sinful nature dwells and through which, when it is in the ascendancy, it operates. Vincent quotes Meyer, “Who shall deliver me out of bondage under the law of sin into moral freedom, in which my body shall no longer serve as the seat of this shameful death?” Paul is not crying out for egress from his body but for deliverance from the condition of defeat which his residence in his physical body makes a possibility, and his lack of spiritual knowledge up to that moment, resulted in.

Paul answers his question as to who shall deliver him from the compelling power of the sinful nature by saying that that deliverance comes through Jesus Christ, and he gives thanks to God for that fact.

Alford, commenting on the rest of verse 25, says: “These words are most important to the understanding of the whole passage. We must bear in mind that it had begun with the question, Is the law sin? The apostle has proved that it is not, but is holy. He has shown *the relation it holds to sin*; namely, that of *vivifying it* by means of man’s natural aversion to the commandment. He has further shown, that in himself, even as delivered by Christ Jesus, a conflict between the law and sin is ever going on: the misery of which would be death itself were not a glorious deliverance effected. He now sums up his vindication of the law as holy; and at the same time, sums up the other side of the evidence adduced in the passage, from which it appears that the flesh is still, even in the spiritual man, subject (*essentially*, not practically and energetically) to the law of sin, – which subjection, in its nature and consequences, is so nobly treated in chapter 8.”

Vincent explains: “Paul says therefore, that, so far as concerns his moral intelligence or reason, he approves and pays homage to God’s law; but, being in bondage to sin, made of flesh, sold under sin, the flesh carries him its own way and commands his allegiance to the economy of sin. It should be carefully noted that this last summation does not describe Paul after he has found the way of deliverance through Jesus Christ, but is a recurrence to his discussion of his state before he found victory, and closes the discussion of the question, Is the law sin?”

Translation. *Wretched man, I. Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ. Therefore, I myself with my mind serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin.*