

Romans Seven^{1,2,3}
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Due to the confusion existing in the early churches over the role of the Law in the life of the child of God, Paul continues to elaborate and make some personal applications that will make the issue clearer.

Rom 7:1 “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

Rom 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

Rom 7:3 So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man.

Rom 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.

Rom 7:5 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.

Rom 7:6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”

Verse one seems rather obvious but it has been the origin of a lot of trouble within the church over the years and at this time. Certainly I know that speeding will not be something that I have to worry about after I am dead! So what is the big deal here? Paul is referring to The Law and notice the word “jurisdiction” which appears as “authority” in some translations. The point is that we have to understand that we have really died with Christ on the Cross. Since we are dead in this realm, the Law no longer is the rule by which we must be found guiltless to enter Heaven. Christ truly paid for all of our transgressions of the Law and we died with Him on the Cross. So truly we are not under the authority of the Law. Paul uses the analogy of adultery in verses 2 and 3 to make the point clear about how death affects a person’s responsibilities under the Law.

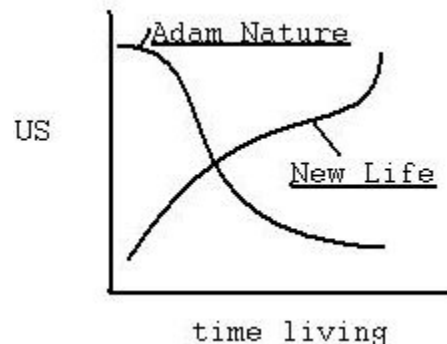
But notice in verse four that he states that there is a purpose **here** and **now** for us having been joined to Christ in this death and resurrection. The purpose is to bear fruit for God. In verse four he makes it clear that we have died to the Law through the death of Christ and thus we are now joined to Him who was then raised from the dead. In verses 5 and 6 he elaborates on this concept. Before our identification with Christ we were actually aroused by the Law. Tell a child not to touch something and see what happens! He/she is very much aroused with a desire to touch that something. Similarly before our rebirth we also were aroused by the desires to break the Law. I am sure that all of us have experienced the desire to lie about ourselves or something for reasons that are usually related to making ourselves seem more competent than we really are. Something like 60% of college students admit to having cheated on tests! One can buy a meaningless

diploma now in just about any subject and at any level (B.S., M.S., Ph.D., etc.) and certainly that is lying on a big scale. Why are so many companies making these fake diplomas available? They succeed at this endeavor because they know about the basic sinfulness of mankind. Over 50% of marriages end in divorce and adultery is commonplace in America. Again, the reason for the world being in such an awful state is because of the basic sinfulness of mankind and the arousal that results in a person by the existence of the Law. If we are not supposed to do it then it must be fun!

But after our rebirth we are no longer under the authority of the Law and we no longer **have** to break the Law as we did before. However the Law is still very important in the life of the Christian because it reveals to us some essence of the character of God. He wants us to be Holy because He is Holy:

1 Peter 1:16 "because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy. ""

The process of sanctification is the attaining to the character of God. It is only at our death that glorification actually occurs so that we will truly have the character of God. So, as verse 6 says, we are serving in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter of the Law. However I certainly don't want to play games with myself by hiding behind the "wait until glorification" excuse. We are told to expect perfection from ourselves now! I will borrow my diagram from chapter six of Romans to illustrate again that while perfection is expected now, such will not occur until our death:



We certainly should observe in our daily behavior more effects of the New Life rather than the Adam Nature, although we do painfully experience the pull of the Adam Nature.

I mentioned above that the concept of our being dead to the Law produces problems for some people. They say that now the Law is meaningless to them and they can ignore it. However, the purpose of God relieving us from the authority of the Law is so that we can bear fruit for Him. The Law then is a measure for our daily life as we attain the character of God within ourselves and in our interaction with the world. The world should see something of the character of God by our behavior. Being released from the Law and being bound by the Law at the same time is certainly impossible for the non-Christian to understand. However we are now bound by the Law only in the sense that it is a standard for our daily living and not in the sense that obeying any of it earns us any special

privileges in Heaven. We, and others, should observe the New Life dominating our behavior.

**Rom 7:7 “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.”
Rom 7:8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.”**

Certainly the Law is not sin for God gave man the Law and God will not give sin!

James 1:13 “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

There is no evil in God for God is Holy. God does not give the Law as a temptation to man, but rather as a peep at the Holy character of God. If God had not revealed to us that coveting was evil then we, at war with God, would not have been interested in coveting. Before our rebirth we were at war with God and hated Him so we wanted to do whatever we could to offend Him. Now He reveals some of His character to us and so we see that there are now 10 ways to offend His Holy Being (actually each of the “top ten” have many manifestations so that the ways to offend God are many). Sin is anything done opposite to the character of God, so if we don’t know what God demands of us then we have no way of knowing how to behave in an opposite manner to what God demands; so then, indeed without the Law sin is dead.

**Rom 7:9 “And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died;
Rom 7:10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;
Rom 7:11 for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.
Rom 7:12 So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”**

Paul is not introducing this concept only once. He also discussed the concept of us being dead to sin and alive to Christ in his letter to the Galatians:

*Gal 2:15 “We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;
Gal 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.
Gal 2:17 “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!
Gal 2:18 “For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*

Gal 2:19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God.

Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Gal 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

We also see the result for Christianity if Jesus were not raised from the dead:

1Cor 15:16 "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;

1Cor 15:17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

1Cor 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1Cor 15:19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

If the Law were a way to salvation then there was no need for Jesus to come, live a perfect life, die for our sins, and be resurrected to show the acceptance of God's method of salvation. If Christ were not resurrected, then He would not have been who He claimed to be, and we would all be lost forever in our sins. If Jesus were just a great prophet (as indicated by verse 19), then we would be forever lost and to be greatly pitied. Of course, if people really examine what Jesus taught and said and did then they are really left with only two choices: either Jesus was insane or He really was the Messiah. He certainly was not revealed to be just a great teacher.

Continuing with this letter to the Corinthians, we see that Paul clarified the matter:

1Cor 15:20 "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1Cor 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

1Cor 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive."

So Jesus certainly was raised from the dead and became the first fruits of those who died before this event. We also see again the teaching of Federalism in that Adam was our representative in sin and Jesus was our representative in our salvation. Paul then summarizes and concludes our discussion on the matter of the Law in Romans 7:12.

Rom 7:13 "Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

Rom 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."

Now Paul begins to get into a discussion that has produced much debate over the years. Paul has shown that Law cannot justify a person and that Law cannot sanctify anyone. People left to themselves will not naturally think that they are sinners. In fact “sin” is very much misunderstood today. People may recognize that if they break the moral codes of a society in which they live that they have committed a criminal act. But it takes the introduction of the Law of God to show that acts are actually sin. *The Westminster Catechism, Answer 14* tells us that sin is “any want of conformity or transgression of the law of God. So we, as members of a PCA church, should better understand some of the messages of Paul for we do know the true meaning of sin. Or do we really understand? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught us that the breaking of the law extends to what we think as well as to what we do. So nobody is capable of totally keeping the Law of God except Jesus Christ. It is good at this point for all of us to do a deeper study of all ten of the commandments as they affect all of our being. It is also important to understand that mankind is not responsible for having a perverted instinct, but we are responsible for indulging it even if only mentally.

Paul then mentions the beginning of a problem for many theologians throughout the ages and that is Romans 7:14. We see from this verse a significant problem in that the law is spiritual but we are fleshly. Since when we are born again we are born spiritually but we continue to live as a fleshly person, we are going to have a severe problem of a battle between the two aspects of our person.

Rom 7:15 “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

Rom 7:16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good.

Rom 7:17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.

Rom 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

Rom 7:19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

Rom 7:20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.”

The question these verses bring to our minds is “what is the spiritual status of the person saying these things?” There have been four answers to this question as stated below.

1. The Person is unsaved.
2. The Person is a “carnal” Christian.
3. The Person is under conviction.
4. The Person is a mature Christian.

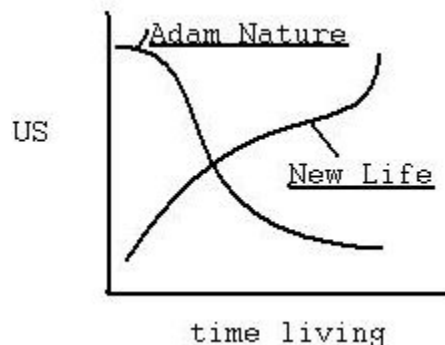
The Reformed theological perspective is that the person is a mature Christian. Let’s look at all four of these briefly.

The first one is easily dismissed by most Christians for nobody who is an unsaved person will have such a struggle in their life. Paul's delight in God's laws that he has expressed cannot be found in unbelievers. Such comments are totally out of character for the other writings of Paul in which he has said that he was "faultless" in regard to the Law (Phil 3:6) since he was a Pharisee of Pharisees.

The second understanding has been popular with some organizations and is an easy way out if it were true. People who believe this "carnal" Christian fable believe that one can accept Jesus as their personal Savior now and as their Lord later and such is strictly not taught in Scripture. We will see in Chapter eight that if a person has a carnal mind then he is not a Christian at all.

The third understanding has been put forward by non other than Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of my favorite Biblical authors. However it does not account for the change in verb tenses from the past tense in verses 1 -13 to the future tense in verse 14. It is also not true that the person writing this does not already know the person who can deliver him from such turmoil.

We are left with one understanding and that is that this person is a mature Christian and, in fact, I would say the most mature Christian who ever lived: Paul in his present state when he wrote this entire book. This is the view of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans. This conclusion is somewhat bad news for us in that it means that these verses portray the standard life of child of God for the entire time that he/she is living here on earth. We are brought back to the diagram that I have used many times:



A Christian told me the other day that she was having a terrible time forgiving herself. She was tormented because she had sinned. She had repented of it before God and she knew that the death of Jesus paid for that sin but she was still miserable because she had done what she knew she should not have done. Does that sound familiar? It sounds just like what Paul wrote above to me. It also sounds like what goes on in my life often also. Of course it is Satan that condemns us of our sin, and it is God who cleanses us of our sin. We have to learn to forgive ourselves after we have repented of the sin before God and done any reparations necessary on earth for the sin. God is indeed faithful to forgive us of our sin:

1John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

So when we sin, we need to immediately repent before God, do whatever might be needed to correct some situation here caused by our sin, learn from the situation, remember the above drawing, and forgive ourselves as we continue in the world as the representative child of God.

Rom 7:21 “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.

Rom 7:22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

Rom 7:23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

Rom 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

Verse 22 is another verse that proves that version four of the person is correct. Nobody but a born-again child of God is capable of joyfully concurring with the law of God in his inner man. We recognize that there is indeed a war going on, a spiritual war, and we will be fighting that battle all of our lives.

But, praise God, there is a solution to our dilemma as Paul states in the next verse:

Rom 7:25 “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

The answer to our problem of needing justification with Holy God is Jesus Christ and the solution to our need for sanctification resulting eventually in glorification is also Jesus Christ!

Other Scriptures that we should read related to this last part of Romans chapter 7 are

EPH 6:10 ¶ Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

EPH 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

EPH 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

EPH 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

*Eph 6:14 “Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
Eph 6:15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
Eph 6:16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.
Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
Eph 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
Eph 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,
Eph 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

Phil 3:12 “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Phil 3:13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

Phil 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Phil 3:15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Phil 3:16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

Phil 3:17 ¶ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Phil 3:18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,

Phil 3:19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”

What does Phil 3:15 mean? Who are those who are already perfect? I am one of them! I am perfect before the Father because of the double imputation. Note the next verse also. Our standard is the standard to which we have already attained! And what is that standard? It is perfection! Those of us who have Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior have already spiritually attained perfection. Now we are in the process of living here by that standard. Of course that standard is the absolute holiness of Jesus Christ.

Heb 12:1 “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb 12:3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

It is a bit of a mystery as to the identity of the great cloud of witnesses. Some think that the cloud refers to those Christians who have preceded us to Heaven. Some think that they are the many Christians walking beside us in our war here. Others think that the cloud refers to the angels that are with us all. All explanations certainly give me comfort, but all of these verses add up to great comfort and guidance for me. I should always keep my focus on Jesus, my perfect example and Lord. Considering all that Jesus went through to remove the wrath of God from me to Him, I can press on without growing weary and without losing my drive to the finish line. We should always give everything that we have to push ourselves in that one direction: Be Holy because He is Holy.

Press on. Comfort one another with the good news of Jesus Christ. Be anxious for nothing. Relax knowing that God is sovereign and that He cares about each of us as individual children of His and that His love for us is tender but firm.

References

1. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Moody Press, 1975.
2. James Montgomery Boice, "Romans, Volume II, The Reign of Grace, Romans 5-8, Baker Book House, 1992.
3. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Law: Its Functions and Limits, Exposition of Chapter 7", Zondervan Publishing House, 1971.