

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans Chapter 7: The Struggle of the One Who is Justified by Faith

Romans 7:1-3 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? 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. 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.

Some propose that it is to the Jew only which Paul is speaking, but that is not necessarily the case. The first-century church was filled with individuals called “the God-fearing” (Acts 13:26). They were those who adhered to the code of the Jewish Law for reasons of morality and personal values, but would not go all the way for conversion, choosing not to be circumcised. I believe the “*brethren*” to be inclusive to the Jewish, the God-fearer and the gentile converts as we will see in a moment. We must remember that Paul was steering the conversation for unity among the various members of the church, for those with Jewish, gentile and everything in between.

This “*law*” (lower case) has jurisdiction over a person’s life until that life is over. There was a common saying from Paul’s day, “If a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments.” He will use the phrase to build a common discussion point of unity, marital law. Under both covenants, the Old and New, it was the same concerning a wife being bound to her husband.

- Jesus said concerning the Old Covenant in *Matthew 19:6* “*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*” The wife did not have legal permission to go out and hitch up to another man without being an adulteress. She was bound to her husband.
- Paul reinforced the same principle in New Covenant marriages. *1 Corinthians 7:39* *A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.* Once Paul reiterates something from the Old and applies it to the New, then by apostolic authority it is applicable to the New Covenant Christians.

We must emphasize that Paul was not giving a dissertation on marriage or adultery, but the end of one covenant and the beginning of another. Universally the wife was bound to her husband for life. When the husband died, then she could take a new husband. What was the point Paul was making?

Romans 7:4-6 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 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. 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.

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Paul appears to have made a transition from the “universal law” of marriage to the specific “Law of Moses” (upper case L) to drive home the point. He regarded the brethren to have *died to the Law through the body of Christ*. The Law of Moses was the husband of the people of God in the past. They were bound to this Law until it would suffer death in this life.

Jesus predicted in *Matthew 5:18* “*For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*” He “*accomplished*” the whole Law without sin (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22) at the point of His death. When He died on the cross at Calvary on that spring afternoon, He put to death the Law of Moses. When He breathed His last, bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30), the veil of the Temple was split from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) as He spiritually went into the Holy of Holies to offer Himself as the high sacrifice in the form of the High Priest of God (Hebrews 8:1-2). Jesus’ death killed off the first husband of the Law and freed of the people of God to become the *Bride of Christ* (Rev 21:2). As *Colossians 1:22* states “*yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...*”

This was Paul’s last of many attempted assaults on the Law of Moses (3:20, 28; 4:15; 5:20; 6:14, 15) in trying to neutralize the “Jewish pedigree” perspective which had crept into the Roman church. Lest these Jewish converts might be too disparaged to accept what Paul taught, it was necessary for him to say the following:

Romans 7:7-12 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.”⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.¹² So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Once again in diatribe form, Paul pulled the listeners into the logic. The humbled Jewish convert might be saying, “What are you saying Paul, was the Law of Moses a bad thing?” Paul’s logic was that the Law served a noble purpose. According to Galatians 3:24 the Law was only a temporary tutor to train men to know they were imperfect and in need of intervention. If you did not have a rule against coveting, then how could one be convicted of that violation? The Law of Moses was there not so that a man could feel justified, but condemned. Everyone prior to Christ had violated at least a few of the 613 works of the Law. It was the tool for which a person was proven to be worthy of death (*the wages of sin is death Rom 6:23*) and in need of a better, more graceful plan. The Law of Moses served a holy and righteous purpose of conviction.

This is what Paul meant when he said in 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, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.* This introduces us to the title for the lesson: *The Struggle of the One Who is Justified by Faith.*

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Paul had used numerous times the ancient philosophical technique of the duality of the diatribe, playing each side of the argument and come to a conclusion. Ironically he reaches the zenith of this behavior by showing the struggle of two men in one body, the spiritual versus the fleshly.

Romans 7:14-20 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.¹⁵ For what 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.¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good.¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Paul was baring his soul concerning his personal frustration of what it was like living under the Law of Moses. He was doing so to better connect with the Jewish converts of the Roman church. The apostle really experienced a great struggle his entire life under Judaism.

The Jews understood this problem better than anyone. They even had a name for it called *Yetser hatob* and the *Yetser hara*, meaning two men in one skin, the Jewish conviction of the good and bad impulse. They taught that every person had within them a struggle between good and evil. Jewish leaders of the first-century taught that it was through the Law of Moses that this was held in check. Paul appeared to blow the cover on that teaching, revealing that even while under the Law he fought a battle of the spiritual and fleshly with his own soul. The Law of Moses did not tame the evil in Paul, but made it obvious through the constant war in his body. In fact there was not one single Jew in the history of Judaism who could keep the Law of Moses, except Jesus. It is where Paul takes the discussion that we find application for us.

Romans 7:21-25 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,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.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?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.

Paul makes the transition from a struggling Jew trying to live under the Law to the universal principle that all human beings suffer the same struggle. He calls it *the law of God in the inner man*. This refers to the human conscience, something that is in every person. Within it is programmed a basic level of morality anchored in the law of nature and of nature's God. Just like the Jews, the gentiles suffer the same. Paul previously eluded to this in *Romans 2:14-15* "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them..."

This struggle is not just a Jewish thing; it is not just a gentile thing; it is a HUMAN thing. All humans struggle with the inner man. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, Atheists, men,

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

women, blacks, whites, Asians, Latinos, Eskimos, the rich and the poor, the tall and the short, the strong and the weak all must face the inner man which threatens to corrupt their souls. All mankind is in a struggle with the good and evil within them. As Paul asked, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*" Paul understands this struggle of not doing what he should be doing and doing what he should not be doing. Someone needs to intervene and break this wretched cycle, but who?

Paul continued, *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* When Jesus Christ died on the cross He put to death all law which feeds on the conscience. He successfully put to death the Law of Moses, the law of our mind and the law of sin! You name it, He put it to death and freed our inner man from the curse of self-condemnation.

Yes, preachers struggle with the inner man, but Jesus laid a new foundation to build upon. You need to know that elders and deacons of the church also struggle with the inner man, but Jesus gave them a new foundation for this battle of a split identity. Bible teachers and Christians who sit in the pews every Sunday morning are struggling with the inner man! They all are trying to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong just like the rest of the world, but Jesus freed them from that condemnation of the conscience. It was through His power of the cross that He gives us the strength to press on. As Paul would say in the very next verse, *8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Conclusion:

The rest of the world who have not Jesus for the Savior will have to fight whatever law they have put themselves under. They will fight the life-long losing battle which robs them of any confidence and clothes them in eternal condemnation. Jesus wants to free them to walk in the newness of life, but they must make that decision in the end. What will the decision be? What was your decision? Choose wisely in your efforts to be victorious in the war of the inner man.

Robert Lowry poetically summed it up well in his song from 1876.

*What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh! precious is the flow That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*