

Romans 7:1-25

Pastor: Romans 7:1-25: We were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ.

“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? 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. 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. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah, 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. 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. 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. 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’ [Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21]. But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 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. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 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. But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 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*. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 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. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 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. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Yeshua the Messiah 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.”

ch. 7 Romans 7 is one of the most difficult chapters of the Bible for today’s Messianic people to understand (along with Galatians 2-3; Hebrews 7-9), as the statement “you...were made dead to the *Torah* through the body of Messiah” (Romans 7:4, TLV) has been approached and applied in various ways.¹ Frequently, the statement of Believers being “made dead” to the Law of Moses, has been taken to mean that redeemed people do not have to be too concerned with studying or following the Torah’s commandments. Alternatively, though, there have been Christian interpreters of Romans 7 who have taken Believers’ death to the Torah to mean that they are dead to its penalties and condemnation via the sacrifice of the Messiah, not that the Torah’s commandments and principles of holiness no longer apply. Reflective of this view is a Reformed commentator like C.E.B. Cranfield:

“Paul has told the Roman Christians in 6.14 that they are not ‘under the law, but under grace’, in order to encourage them to obey the imperatives of 6.12-13. Now...he elucidates that statement, showing how it is true, how it has come about that they are free from the law’s condemnation. They have been freed from it by

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

their death, that is, by the death which in God's sight and by God's gracious decision they themselves have died...in Christ's death on their behalf."²

Although his view of the Torah in his analysis of Romans ch. 7 is more negative than it ought to be, James R. Edwards is widely correct in his conclusion,

"Justification by faith restored law to its rightful place in the drama of redemption. It retains its function naturally as a straightedge of sin, thus revealing our need for a savior, and after salvation it remains a norm for righteous behavior. But it is no longer—indeed never was—a means of salvation. Its function, in other words, is diagnostic, not therapeutic."³

Paul has previously said that Believers are dead to a life of sin (Romans 6:2); they are free *not to sin*, even though they have the covering of God's grace. Much of the analogy, which Paul provides in Romans ch. 7, is intended to take a set of Torah instruction, and use it to compare the life of the unbeliever in guilt and condemnation, and how the work of the Messiah brings a new life of spiritual fulfillment and service (Romans 7:1-6).

Significant discussions have taken place in contemporary Pauline studies over the specific identity of the "I" sinner of Romans 7:7-25. Frequently, your average Bible reader will just assume that the "I" sinner of Romans ch. 7 is Paul speaking autobiographically of himself. While there are many Romans commentators and examiners who do indeed believe that Paul is speaking of himself in Romans ch. 7, there are others who are not convinced.⁴ Among the various options of who the "I" sinner of Romans 7:7-25 may be, include the following:

1. a pre-salvation Paul
2. a post-salvation Paul
3. Adam
4. a Jewish person, or Israel corporate, wrestling with the Torah
5. a hypothetical pre-salvation person
6. a hypothetical, immediate post-salvation person

The idea that the "I" sinner of Romans 7 is not Paul, is one which has gained significant adherence over the past two to three decades. While there are diverse views about who the "I" sinner may be, should it not be the Apostle Paul, there is growing agreement that Romans ch. 7 employs a form of classical rhetoric known as *prosopopoeia* or impersonation. Ben Witherington III summarizes,

"Impersonation, or *prosopopoeia*, is a rhetorical technique which falls under the heading of figures of speech and is often used to illustrate or make vivid a piece of deliberative rhetoric...This rhetorical technique involves the assumption of a role, and sometimes the role is marked off from the surrounding discourse by a change in tone, inflection, or accept, by form of delivery, or by an introductory formula signaling a change in voice."⁵

Quintilian described how important *prosopopoeia* would be for ancient times:

"Consequently, I regard *impersonation* as the most difficult of tasks, imposed as it is in addition to the other work involved by a deliberative theme. For the same speaker has on one occasion to impersonate Caesar, on another Cicero or Cato. But it is a most useful exercise because it demands a double effort and is also of the greatest use to future poets and historians, while for orators of course it is absolutely necessary."⁶

Whether or not the "I" sinner of Romans 7:7-25 is Paul talking about himself, or is talking about something or someone else, ultimately affects the reading and application of Romans 7:13ff. If Paul as a

² Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 331.

³ James R. Edwards, *New International Biblical Commentary: Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 177.

⁴ Cf. James R. Edwards, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans," in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2020; John Reumann, "Romans," in *ECB*, 1295; T.R. Schreiner, "The Letter of Paul to the Romans," in Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2169; Pamela Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Original Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp 230-231; Kruse, *Romans*, pp 314-322.

⁵ Witherington, *Romans*, 179.

⁶ Quintilian: *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler. Accessible online at <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/home.html>.

regenerated Believer is really speaking about himself—i.e., “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” (Romans 7:15)—then Paul is confessing to his readers that he still lives a life where he struggles with many sins. This can be taken as the Apostle Paul not being too spiritually mature, and applied in contemporary terms to perhaps validate Believers remaining in certain sinful behaviors. *If Paul still struggled with sin, I will struggle with sin.* Yet, the sin that is targeted in Romans 7:7-25 is covetousness (Romans 7:7; Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), and the sin which defined Paul’s testimony of faith was actually murder (Acts 9:4; Galatians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:9; cf. 1 Timothy 1:15).

If the “I” sinner of Romans ch. 7 is viewed not from the standpoint of Paul speaking autobiographically, but instead a hypothetical pre- or immediate post-salvation person, **than the clear advantage is that Romans ch. 7 cannot be used as a text to appeal to by individuals thinking that it is acceptable to remain in certain sinful activities.** Paul, in fact, was able to mature in his own personal faith and conduct. While Paul certainly continued to carry a wide degree of guilt and shame for his actions in once persecuting the *ekklēsia*, that activity halted on the Damascus Road.

7:1 Paul communicates to his audience, “Or do you not know, brothers and sisters...that the law is master over a person as long as he lives?” (Romans 7:1, TLV). It is amazing how many contemporary Christian readers miss the critical statement issued by him: “for I am speaking to those who know the law” or “I am speaking to those who have some knowledge of the law” (NEB). This means that Paul is directing his word to those with some knowledge of the Torah. The debate over whether those intended here are Jewish Believers raised with the Torah from childhood, and/or non-Jewish God-fearers who entered into the Synagogue, is really unimportant. What is important is that without some knowledge of the Torah, readers of Romans 7:1-6 will not have an appropriate frame of reference to understand what Paul is saying. Even in my own seminary exegesis classes on Romans, I was absolutely shocked to see how many students just overlooked the word, “I am, after all, talking to people who know the law” (Kingdom New Testament), and who never considered any set of Torah instruction or commandments as possibly being in view.

What is intended by Paul’s assertion, “do you not know, brethren...the law has jurisdiction [has dominion, NKJV] over a person as long as he lives?” (Romans 7:1, a,c). The verb *kurieuō* (κυριεύω) widely means, “to be lord of, to rule over, have dominion over” (Thayer),⁷ as Paul says that a person is lorded over by the Torah as long as he or she lives: *kurieuei tou anthrōpou* (κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), “lords it over the person” (Brown and Comfort).⁸ Frequently, Christian commentators will make an appeal to a statement appearing in the Talmud, which implies that only living people are expected to follow the Torah:

“For as to what David said, ‘The dead don’t praise the Lord’ (Psa. 115:17), this is the sense of his statement: ‘A person should always engage in the study of Torah and the doing of religious deeds before death, for once one dies, he becomes null as to Torah study and religious deeds, and the Holy One, blessed be He, gets no praise from him’” (b.*Shabbat* 30a).⁹

While taking Romans 7:1 to mean that people must die to the jurisdiction and application of the Torah is one potential way Paul’s statement could be interpreted, we have to keep in mind Paul’s previous remark in Romans 6:9, where the same verb *kurieuō* appears: “Messiah, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master [has dominion, NKJV] over Him.” Here, we are to understand that redeemed Believers have been united to Yeshua by His sacrificial death (Romans 6:6-8), which has enacted a great supernatural change within them: “so [that] we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4), a life that undoubtedly includes obedience to God.

Much of what Paul has intended in stating, “the Law has power over someone only as long as he or she lives” (Romans 7:1, Common English Bible), is determined by his following remark in Romans 7:4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah.” This is speaking of the effect

⁷ Thayer, 365.

⁸ Brown and Comfort, 548.

⁹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

of Yeshua's sacrificial death on redeemed men and women, which nullifies the lordship of the Torah to be explained via an example of marriage (Romans 7:2-3).

7:2 Using his audience's presumed knowledge of the Torah as a point of comparison, Paul says, "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" (Romans 7:2). A woman who is a man's wife is *dedetai nomō* (δέδεταί νόμῳ), meaning that she is bound to him by the Law, the verb *deō* (δέω) meaning, "to bind, i. e. put under obligation, namely, of law, duty, etc." (Thayer).¹⁰ If her husband dies, she is to be "discharged" (RSV) or "released" (NIV), actually being the verb *katargeō* (καταργέω), which could be rendered as "abolished." Various interpreters have viewed Romans 7:2 as implying that the Jewish people were once married to the Torah, but now the Torah as their husband is to be regarded as dead, and because of this Jews are to regard the Torah as "abolished," making them free to marry another husband (Romans 7:4). This is a very bad reading of the verse, because Paul himself said earlier in Romans 3:31 that the Law is not abolished through faith, but is rather to be upheld as worthwhile instruction for Messiah followers.

There are two main views of Romans 7:2-3 that one will encounter among Romans interpreters:

1. The Torah is the husband of the unredeemed (Jews), and dying to the husband means dying to the authority of the Torah. In being married to the Messiah, the Torah now has no authority and little relevance for (Jewish) Believers.
2. The relationship of the unredeemed person is like the law of marriage being applicable to a wife. When the husband dies the law or instruction pertaining to marriage is no longer applicable to the wife. Just like the law of marriage is not applicable to a widow, so is the Torah's condemnation of sinners no longer applicable to the redeemed, and what Believers are actually "made dead" to is the Torah's condemnation, which was taken upon Yeshua the Messiah.

Paul was clear in Romans 7:1 to tell his readers that they must know the Torah in order to understand what he is communicating here. The married woman within Ancient Israel is in view, whose husband has died. Does this mean that with her husband dead, that instructions like the Ten Commandments or those regarding proper business or farming practices are now to be rendered inoperative? Of course not. Paul does not say that the widowed woman has been released from the Law in total; he says that she has been released from *tou nomou tou andros* (τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ἀνδρός), "the law of the husband" (American Standard Version). Cranfield is right to inform us, *tou nomou tou andros* can be "understood as 'the law of the husband' in the sense of that part of the law which deals with the rights and duties of husbands (on the analogy of 'the law of the leper' in Lev 14.2 and 'the law of the Nazirite' in Num 6.13)..."¹¹ This is not difficult to understand: with the husband having died, "the law of marriage" (NIV), "the law regarding the husband" (HCSB), or "the part of the *Torah* that deals with husbands" (CJB/CJSB), is no longer applicable. David H. Stern rightly states, "the death of the woman's husband does not free her from her obedience to other aspects of the *Torah*."¹² The paraphrase offered by the NLT is actually not bad: "the laws of marriage no longer apply to her." The Torah of Moses as a whole is not in view, only "the obligations of the marriage-law" (NEB).

The point of comparison that Paul makes is that the married woman, when her husband dies, is free from "the law of the husband," or "she is free from the law as regards her husband" (Kingdom New Testament). This would be the Torah instructions regulating or governing marriage. In view of Believers being likened unto the wife here, it is proper to conclude that "the law of the husband" represents a sector of Torah commandments from which redeemed people, once bound, are to be released. The Torah regulations concerning marriage are properly concluded as being used by Paul as a placeholder of comparison, for a man or woman's **previous life of sin and its consequences**. John Calvin's observations are astutely to be noted, as he recognized that the release here is not to be a release from the standard of God in the Torah, but rather

¹⁰ Thayer, 131.

¹¹ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 333.

¹² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 376.

a release from the Torah's demand for absolute perfection, which is now to be assured on the basis of faith in the Messiah:

"We must never imagine that the law is in any way abrogated in regard to the Ten Commandments, in which God has taught us what is right and has ordered our life, because the will of God must stand for ever. The release here mentioned, we must carefully notice, is not from the righteousness which is taught in the law, but from the rigid demands of the law and from the curse which follows from its demands. What is abrogated, therefore, is not the rule of good living which the law prescribes, but that quality which is opposed to the liberty which we have obtained through Christ, viz. the demand for absolute perfection. Because we do not display this perfection it binds us under the guilt of eternal death."¹³

It cannot go unnoticed that Paul uses a very different term for marriage in Romans 7:2, than is normally seen throughout the Apostolic Scriptures. The Greek terms one normally encounters for marriage include the noun *gamos* (γάμος), and verbs *gameō* (γαμέω) and *gamizō* (γαμίζω).¹⁴ Making note of the terminology for "married woman" in Romans 7:2, *hupandros gunē* (ὑπανδρος γυνή), Douglas J. Moo is right to assert that it means "under a husband," further indicating this as "Paul's use of the preposition ὑπό [*hupo*] to indicate a relationship of bondage."¹⁵ His inference is that being *hupandros gunē* is like being *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) or "under law" (Romans 6:14, 15), or perhaps even *hupo tēn hamartian* (ὑπὸ τῆν ἁμαρτίαν) or "under sin" (Romans 7:14). He thinks that being dead to the Law (Romans 7:4), though, means that the Mosaic Torah is now basically dead instruction for Believers.

The Greek term *hupandros* (ὑπανδρος), "under a man, subject to him, married" (LS),¹⁶ "strictly under authority of or (legally) bound to a man; hence, of a woman married" (Friberg Lexicon),¹⁷ is a rare term witnessed in the Bible for marriage, being associated in both the Septuagint and Apocrypha in instances where the loyalty of the wife to her husband is suspect on some level, or where there may be a degree of marital discord:

"But if you have gone astray being under your husband [*hup' andros*, ὑπ' ἀνδρός; Heb. *tachat isheikh*, תַּחַת אִשְׁיֵיךָ] of if you have defiled yourself and someone besides your husband has made his bed with you...This is the law of jealousy, in case a woman who is under her husband [*hup' andros*, ὑπ' ἀνδρός; Heb. *tachat ishah*, תַּחַת אִשְׁתִּיךָ] goes astray and is defiled" (Numbers 5:20, 29, NETS).

"[T]o keep you from a married woman [*gunaikos hupandrou*, γυναικὸς ὑπάνδρου; Heb. *m'eishet*, מְעִישֵׁת] and from the slander of a strange tongue" (Proverbs 6:24, NETS).

"With a married woman [*hupandrou gunaikos*, ὑπάνδρου γυναικὸς] do not sit down at all, and do not feast with her at wine, lest your soul incline to her and by your blood you slip into destruction" (Sirach 9:9, NETS).

"[A]nd before turning away from the face of a relative, before taking away a portion and a gift and before ogling a married woman [*gunaikos hupandrou*, γυναικὸς ὑπάνδρου]" (Sirach 41:21, NETS).

How important might the usage of *hupandros* be for the themes of what Paul is communicating in Romans 7:1-6? James D.G. Dunn indicates, "Precisely because the husband has such authority over his wife in Jewish law and society...the word contains a strong note of shame and guilt as denoting one who has been particularly disloyal and false."¹⁸ Witherington further describes, "The term *hupandros* is found nowhere else in the NT and probably means 'under the authority of the husband,' describing the woman's legal position. He

¹³ Calvin, *Romans*, 139.

¹⁴ Cf. LS, 159; *Vine*, pp 394-395; E. Stauffer, "to marry," in *TDNT*, pp 111-113.

¹⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 412 fn#17.

¹⁶ LS, 830.

¹⁷ [BibleWorks 9.0: Friberg Lexicon](#).

¹⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:360.

appears to be drawing on Num. 5.20-29 (LXX), where we find not only the same word but also the matter of the wife's unfaithfulness or adultery."¹⁹ In 1 Corinthians 7:34, Paul used the participle *gamēsasa* (γαμήσασα) to describe the "married woman," but here in Romans 7:2 it is right for readers to consider the overall situation in Romans ch. 7 where guilt for violation of God's Torah is in view, especially in light of the "married woman" or *hupandros gunē* (ὑπανδρος γυνή) being in a relationship with a condemning or suspicious husband. This is a relationship that needs to end. Believers specifically need to be released from "the law of the husband," as it were, as "the law of the husband" represents a condition of presumed sin and guilt on the part of the wife, where the wife could likely face penalties for her violation of a marriage.

7:3 Paul communicates something very important in Romans 7:3: "So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man" (NIV). This depicts a change in relationship for Believers, once being bound to "the law of the husband" (Romans 7:2) as one who was suspicious of the guilt of a wife—to one where such a condemning husband is now dead, and a new marriage of sorts can occur. While readers can deduce here that the Apostle Paul has little issue with widowed persons remarrying, something legal according to the Torah—the point is that the previous relationship that people have had with the Torah of Moses, is to transition to being "set free from the Law of the husband" (Romans 7:2, LITV), in that the husband must die (something that is actually resultant from the Messiah's death, Romans 7:4) and thus be unable to demand an inquiry of the wife's presumed crimes against him. An existence of guilt and condemnation is to be over—"she is free from the claim which the law made" (God's New Covenant-Cassirer)—and a new union is to transpire where there is no more presence of guilt and condemnation (Romans 7:5).

7:4 Paul's description, of the status of Believers changing in relationship to the Torah, continues, with him asserting, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also were made dead to the *Torah* through the body of Messiah, so that you might be joined to another—the One who was raised from the dead—in order that we might bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4, TLV). The husband, representing the Torah in its condemning function (Romans 7:2-3), needs to die. But with Believers dying to this, notably represented by the aorist passive *ethanatōthēte* (ἐθανατώθητε)—which is most probably a Divine passive involving the action of God—the redeemed can be fully joined to the Messiah, His salvation, and the freedom from condemnation available in the good news. The unique feature of Paul's analogy is that this takes place by people *dia tou sōmatos tou Christou* (διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) or "through the body of Messiah," rightly recognized as His bruised and sacrificed self, which took on the condemnation of the Torah (Colossians 2:14), and was consequently resurrected from the dead. Elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, one sees the important parallels,

"For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Messiah; and it is no longer I who live, but Messiah 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 gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:19-20).

"[A]nd He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

When many Christians encounter Paul's word, "We were made to die to the Law..." the implication that is probably asserted, is that the Apostle Paul says that the Torah or Law of Moses is not applicable for born again Believers. If this is indeed the case, and the redeemed have been "made dead" to the Torah's Instruction, then would this not mean that they have been made dead to the eternal truths contained in the writings of Genesis-Deuteronomy? Does it mean that these books of the Bible no longer have any spiritual value for God's people, and that we are not to even be concerned with its moral code and the character of God as demonstrated in the Pentateuch? The Torah's direct words about stark ethical dilemmas facing evangelical Christianity today, such as abortion or homosexuality, should then be ignored. When Romans 7:4 is viewed from the

¹⁹ Witherington, *Romans*, 175.

perspective that the Torah is not to instruct Messiah followers in ways of holiness, the door is *wide open* to lawlessness entering in. Walter C. Kaiser offers some appropriate thoughts for our consideration:

"[T]here are scores of ethical instructions and injunctions given in the Old Testament that are not repeated in the New Testament, but are part of the 'informing ethic,' background, and given assumptions of the new community in Christ. Where, for example, will we find as full a statement as Leviticus gives on the holiness of God? Where will we find the image of God discussed with the implications it has for cases of premeditated murder as in Genesis 9:6? Where will we obtain authoritative materials on the abortion question if the Old Testament is not consulted? This type of question could be multiplied many times over, but the point is clear. Some of the greatest summarizing texts, which are classical teaching passages on the moral law of God, are encapsulated in the Old Testament."²⁰

Thankfully, most good evangelical Christian people—when presented with the idea that being "made dead" to the Law, means no longer following it and ignoring the Torah in one's Bible reading and discipleship—**soundly reject it**. Yet, the Apostle Paul does speak about Believers having died to the Torah. How are we to appropriately understand this? A rather general resource like the *NIV Study Bible* notes, "The law's power to condemn no longer threatens believers, whose death here is to be understood in terms of 6:2-7. There, however, they die to sin; here they die to the law. The result is that the law has no more hold on them."²¹ And, this is true: by Believers dying to the Torah, they are no longer to find themselves in its condemning grasp.

That there is a *specificity* of Torah instruction here, pertaining to the instruction of marriage representing the condemning aspects of the Torah (Romans 7:1-2), is something that is sadly lost on too many readers. Because of the death of the Messiah, the Torah's hold on someone in searching for suspicion and guilt, like a demanding husband, is over. As the Phillips New Testament paraphrases Romans 7:4a, "So, my brothers, the death of Christ on the cross has made you 'dead' to the claims of the Law..."

In dying to the Torah, the whole of Moses' Teaching is hardly to be thrown away as not meaning that much for God's people. Paul states, "you have died to the law through the body of Christ" (Romans 7:4, RSV) or "you also were put to death in relation to the law through the crucified body of the Messiah" (HCSB). The Messiah event and redeemed Believers being changed by it are in view, further reflected in Hebrews 10:10: "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Yeshua the Messiah [*dia tēs proshphoras tou sōmatos Iēsou Christou ephapax, διὰ τῆς προσφορᾶς τοῦ σώματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐφάπαξ*]." The body of Messiah is properly recognized as Him crucified and/or resurrected, and in what His action for sinful humanity has achieved. As Paul would state in Galatians 3:13, "Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE' [Deuteronomy 21:23]."

What was the dilemma that needed to be solved by Yeshua's sacrifice on the tree? *Was it the Law of God or was it the negative effects of sin?* A cursory reading of Romans ch. 7 easily demonstrates that sin is the problem which needs to be fixed. A variety of commentators recognize that being made dead to the Torah in Romans 7:4, has nothing to do with the commandments of Moses' Teaching being rendered inoperative—but that the condemnation pronounced upon sinners is something that the redeemed have been "made dead" to. Cranfield explains, "Their being made dead to the law's condemnation through the body of Christ is a matter of God's merciful decision: they died in His death in that the death which He died was died for them.... They were thus set free from the condemnation pronounced by the law, in order that they might belong to Christ."²² F.F. Bruce concurs, "It is by virtue of this death (death-with-Christ and death-to-sin) that believers have been 'discharged' from their former liability under the law."²³ John R.W. Stott also agrees, "to die to sin and to die to the law are identical. Both signify that through participation in the death of Christ the law's curse of condemnation on sin has been taken away."²⁴ In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, Stern properly concludes,

²⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp 33-34.

²¹ *NIV Study Bible*, 1755.

²² Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 336.

²³ Bruce, *Romans*, 138.

²⁴ Stott, *Romans*, 194.

“It is not the *Torah* that has been made dead (abrogated), nor is a believer made dead in the sense of no longer responding to its truth. Rather, he has been made dead not to all of *Torah*, but to three aspects of it: (1) its capacity to stir up sin in him (vv. 5-14), (2) its capacity to produce irremediable guilt feelings (vv. 15-25), and (3) its penalties, punishments and curses (8:1-4).”²⁵

After being joined to the Messiah and with the Torah’s condemnation nullified, Paul says that this has occurred to the redeemed “in order that we might bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4) or “that we may be productive for God” (Phillips New Testament). What is this to mean? Noting the emphasis of Romans 8:4 and how “the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us,” Bruce astutely observes, “the gospel age [is] that in which the new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is realized,”²⁶ a time in our lives when God’s commandments are to be supernaturally transcribed upon regenerated hearts. The NLT renders Romans 7:4b with the rather poignant paraphrase, “As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God.” The fruit that Believers are to have, being united with the Messiah, are good works of obedience to the Torah spurred on by the Holy Spirit implanted within redeemed hearts.

How are today’s Messianics to approach Romans 7:4, and the fact that Believers “were made to die to the Law through the body of Messiah”? If Paul regards the instruction of God’s Torah as being abolished, then we should have some problems with Paul. Paul himself would be inconsistent in his letter to the Romans, saying in Romans 7:4 that Believers are dead to the eternal truths of the Torah, only to have said earlier in Romans 3:31 that Believers are to uphold the Torah by faith, and later in Romans 8:4 and Romans 13:8-10 that the Torah is to be fulfilled in us—by appealing to the Ten Commandments no less! Paul would be contradicting his own words, and Paul saying that the Law is dead would most certainly contradict the Messiah’s words in Matthew 5:17-19 about the Torah not passing away. Thankfully, a much better explanation than this can be offered.

Before coming to faith in the Messiah, every one of us was held in the clutches of sin—a result of our disobedience to God’s Law. As the example of the sinner of Romans 7:7-25 will explore, we carried guilt with us, instinctively knowing that something was amiss in our relation to the Creator. Even if we tried to obey Him, we would inevitably disobey and get frustrated—not really knowing what to do. Such guilt, frustration, harassment, and angst—but coupled with a proper recognition that God’s commandments are holy and upstanding—will inevitably cause us to cry out to Him **so that we can be freed from the condemnation hanging over us**. This should include a recognition of how the Torah demands that each one of us receive the death penalty—first being the loss of our lives here on Earth,²⁷ to be followed by eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire. Yeshua the Messiah absorbed the Torah’s capital punishment due to each of us onto Himself at the cross (Colossians 2:14), and by receiving Him into our lives, we can be “released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound” (Romans 7:6), saved from sin! Yet we have only been discharged from the penalties of the Torah; **we have not been discharged from the need to obey the Torah**.

When Paul writes that Believers have been “made to die to the Law” or “released from the Law” (Romans 7:4, 6), he is not implying that Messiah followers should cast aside Moses’ Teaching. If Believers have actually been “released” from the Torah in the sense that its principles of righteousness and holiness are to be disregarded, then we really should have the freedom to live exactly the way we want—including worshipping other gods by committing idolatry, even if just alongside of the God of Israel. This certainly cannot be the case, and we have properly concluded that when Believers have been released from the Torah, it is in the sense that the redeemed can be freed from the penalties of the Torah pronounced upon sinners, via the atonement of the Messiah Yeshua accessible in the good news.

7:5 The Apostle Paul describes the pre-salvation dilemma of Believers, stating, “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

²⁵ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 375.

²⁶ Bruce, *Romans*, 139.

²⁷ Note that the loss of one’s physical life need not necessarily (or always) occur via the death penalty required of the Torah’s high sins, as sin manifesting itself can lead to death. Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 5:5, “*I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua.” This indicates how sinful behavior can lead to physical detriment.

bear fruit for death” (Romans 7:5). The Greek of notice is *tōn hamartiōn ta dia tou nomou* (τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τὰ διὰ τοῦ νόμου), “of sins through the law” (Brown and Comfort),²⁸ with “*aroused*” notably added in *italics*, but justifiably so by a version like the NASU. The presence of the Torah can have an ability to stir up or arouse the sin within a person, because once people are often told what they cannot do by their Creator, the natural or fleshly human tendency is to immediately disobey—and without the salvation in Yeshua this can only lead to a life of condemnation and death. Paul, however, has previously stated that born again Believers are to regard themselves as dead to sin (Romans 6:2), and that they are to “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13). Obedience to God’s commandments is surely expected, but it is to be done because one is united to the Messiah Yeshua and the redemptive work He has accomplished.

7:6 Romans 7:1-6 closes with Paul’s claim, “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” (Romans 7:6). What is “that which held us captive” (ESV) or “confined” (TLV)? The verb *katechō* (κατέχω) means “**to prevent the doing of someth. or cause to be ineffective, prevent, hinder, restrain**” (BDAG).²⁹ Did God’s Torah *in total* actually prevent people from being blessed, productive, and happy (cf. Psalm 119)? Or, did the power of sin prevent people from being all that God intended (Romans 7:5)? If the latter is the case, then surely the release/abolishment (Grk. verb *katargeō*, καταργέω) to be witnessed in the Messiah is the removal of the Torah’s condemnation upon lawbreakers.

The redeemed individual is to “serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the letter” (Romans 7:6, TLV), or “render service in a new manner, according to the spirit, not according to the letter as of old” (God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). This is widely recognized, by interpreters across the spectrum, as involving a reference to the promised New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34—where God is to supernaturally write His Instruction onto the hearts and minds of His people—although there are differences in details to be noted.

Martin Luther would actually, and most surprisingly, observe, “We are delivered from the Law in the sense that by faith in Christ we obey the Law, and by grace freely and willingly do what the Law demands of this. For this we need (*divine*) love which seeks what is God’s and which is given to all who in true faith ask for it in the name of Christ.”³⁰ John Calvin would also say, “we are delivered from the law, when God looses us from its rigid demands and curse, and endues us with His Spirit, in order that we may walk in His ways.”³¹

Romans 7:6 certainly communicates a transition of service from an older to a newer way, for the redeemed in Messiah. Paul asserts that such service is *ou palaiotēti grammatos* (οὐ παλαιότητι γράμματος), which is literally “not in oldness of letter” (YLT/LITV), although it is extrapolated by multiple versions as something along the lines of “the old way of the written code” (NIV, NRSV, ESV), or even “the old way of obeying the letter of the law” (NLT). The range of thoughts involving those who think that *grammatos* can be represented as “written code” and not “letter,” varies from thinking that it speaks of general obedience to the Torah, to a strict adherence to the Torah without the decisive presence of grace in Yeshua, to various strict interpretations of the Torah involving ancient Jewish Rabbinics. Reflective of this third view is Edwards, who concludes,

“By the **written code** he evidently understands the scrupulous interpretation of the Torah characteristic of the rabbinic tradition, the ‘tradition of the elders’ according to Mark 7:3, which later developed into the elaborate legal systems of Mishnah, Gemara, and Talmud. The **written code** is what religion becomes when the word of God is separated from the Spirit of God.”³²

The view that the “letter” is actually the Torah in its condemning function for the unredeemed, finds support in Paul’s statement of 2 Corinthians 3:6, where he states, “[God] made us adequate *as* servants of a

²⁸ Brown and Comfort, 548.

²⁹ BDAG, 532.

³⁰ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), pp 109-110.

³¹ Calvin, *Romans*, 141.

³² Edwards, *Romans*, 181.

new covenant, not of the letter [*ou grammatos*, οὐ γράμματος] but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." If *ou palaiotēti grammatos* were to at all be properly paraphrased, then it should be along the lines of something like "not in the oldness of the *strict* letter," which often demands immediate penalties when the Torah's commands are disobeyed.

Redeemed people, having been released from the Torah's condemnation via salvation in Yeshua, are to "serve in newness of the Spirit," *en kainotēti pneumatos* (ἐν καινότητι πνεύματος), actually paraphrased by the Montgomery New Testament with, "we are now in thralldom in new and spiritual conditions." Bruce asserts, with 8:4 coming, "This antithesis between 'letter' (*gramma*) and 'spirit' (*pneuma*) points to the gospel age as that in which the new covenant foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is realized."³³ Dunn, referencing both Jeremiah 31:32-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27, observes, "Paul evidently has in mind an ethically responsible lifestyle which in its immediacy of direct awareness of what is ethically responsible conduct stands in sharp contrast to his old pattern of living 'by the book.'"³⁴ Stott also confirms, "the new covenant which is one of 'Spirit' (*pneuma*), for the new age is essentially the age of the Spirit, in which the Holy Spirit writes God's law in our hearts."³⁵

Even an interpreter like Witherington, who thinks that the Law of Moses has been abolished, in saying "The era of the Torah covenant is over," still has to state, "The era of the new covenant, characterized by the full endowment of the Spirit, has dawned."³⁶ **The challenge for many is in failing to recognize that the New Covenant promise, in the Tanach no less (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), will enable obedience to God's Torah.** The challenge, for many Messianic people, is in recognizing that the Torah's instruction—albeit with born again Believers considered dead to its condemnation and penalties (Romans 7:2, 4)—is not the end-all of what God expects of His people. A life of sin in bondage, to the deeds of sin, is to give way to a new life in service to the fruit of the Spirit—which can only be produced by the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23).

7:7 Having just communicated that sinful human passions have been aroused or awakened by the Torah's Instruction, Paul makes it clear to his audience that the Torah is not sin: "What shall we say then? Is the *Torah* sin? May it never be!" (Romans 7:7a, TLV). The problem, as will be explained in Romans 7:7-25, is not with God's Torah, as the Torah originates from God and is to be regarded as "holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12, 16) and "spiritual" (Romans 7:14). The problem is with the presence of sin within the life of a person. Sin is something that is awakened or revealed by the presence of Torah instructions; sin is increased by a human person unable in his or her own strength to conquer it; only with the salvation available in Yeshua and the sanctification power of the Holy Spirit can sin be fully conquered.

Romans 7:7b communicates the significant role in the Torah revealing the sin of a person: "I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'" (NIV). The Tenth Commandment, the prohibition against covetousness, is noted as the example here which reveals sin. One may be reminded of the sentiment of James 1:15 here: "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." The plague of covetousness is certainly one which has run rampant across fallen humanity, with the Jewish philosopher Philo having observed,

"Every passion is open to and deserving of blame, inasmuch as every immoderate and violent impulse, and every irrational and unnatural emotion of the soul is also faulty and blameable, for what is either of these things but an ancient passion spread over a wider extent? If any one, therefore, does not set limits to these feelings, nor put a bridle on them as on restive horses, he will be afflicted by an evil difficult to remedy, and then, without being aware of it, he will, because of their unrestrainable character, be carried away by them, as a charioteer sometimes is by a chariot, and hurried into ravines and pits from which it is difficult to rise up, and very hard to escape with safety" (*Special Laws* 4.79).³⁷

³³ Bruce, *Romans*, 139; cf. Kruse, *Romans*, pp 292-297.

³⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:366.

³⁵ Stott, *Romans*, 196.

³⁶ Witherington, *Romans*, 177.

³⁷ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 623.

While Paul himself would obviously have agreed personally with the assessment, as is paraphrased by the Moffat New Testament, “That ‘the Law is equivalent to sin’? Never!”, the bigger issue is whether the “I” voice of Romans 7:7-25 is actually Paul himself. If Paul is speaking autobiographically about himself here as (currently) struggling with sin, then to what degree has the sanctification process not taken root within Paul in seeing sin and its power conquered? There are very good reasons to think that the “I” sinner of Romans 7:7-25 is not, in fact, the Apostle Paul, a view shared by many interpreters. An obvious factor is that the sinner in view struggles with covetousness (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), and the sin which stigmatized Paul was actually murder (Acts 9:4; Galatians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:9). If Paul does use some form of impersonation or *prosopopeia* in his argumentation, then the “I” sinner who wrestles with sin in his life—whether someone in an immediate pre- or immediate post-salvation state—is **not to be regarded as the norm for the condition of Believers**, who are to instead be committed to a course of steady obedience toward ultimate righteousness (Romans 6:16-22).

7:8-9 Paul writes of the sinner’s dilemma: “But sin, taking an opportunity, worked in me through the commandment all kinds of coveting. For apart from the *Torah*, sin is dead” (Romans 7:8, TLV). Being aware of the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21), the person in Romans 7 testifies that the knowledge of the Torah’s instruction was seized upon by the presence of sin, and consequently as a human being a diverse manner of coveting sins ensued. “But sin grabbed its opportunity through the commandment, and produced all kinds of covetousness in me” (Romans 7:8, Kingdom New Testament). As a consequence, the sinner expresses the reality that “Once I was alive apart from the *Torah*; but when the commandment came, sin came to life and I died” (Romans 7:9, TLV). With the standard of the Torah present before him, and with sin hijacking a good commandment from God, the human person in his or her own strength will inevitably disobey, be condemned by the Torah as a Law-breaker, and suffer death or excision from God.

7:10 The sinner’s dilemma is a stark one: “The commandment that was intended to bring me life was found to be bringing me death!” (Romans 7:10, CJB/CJSB). A prohibition, such as the Tenth Commandment, is to facilitate a society whereby people learn to control their wants and desires. The thrust of Leviticus 18:5, “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD,” is that the people who keep the Torah are to be found in a realm of life and proper communion with the Creator (cf. Deuteronomy 30:15-20), **not** a realm of death and constant struggle with Him. Yet as can be easily deduced, the sinner of Romans 7 is one who exists in a condition of condemnation and struggle, not quite knowing where he stands before God.

7:11 Having been previously employed in Romans 7:8, the statement is once again echoed in Romans 7:11: “For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death” (NIV). Sin hijacks God’s commandments, and will use human disobedience to them to see people condemned as Law-breakers. The term *aphormē* (ἀφορμή) “has such various senses as ‘start,’ ‘origin,’ ‘cause,’ ‘stimulus,’ ‘impulse,’ ‘undertaking,’ ‘pretext,’ ‘possibility,’ ‘inclination,’ ‘opportunity,’ and even ‘aversion” (TDNT).³⁸ Lattimore renders *aphormē* as “starting point,” with the Montgomery New Testament having “a vantage-ground.” The point to be made is that sin, almost like a strategist, waits to act when people learn what God’s instructions are, and they have little or no human power to resist the temptation to disobey.

7:12 One could expect the “I” sinner to declare something along the lines of, “The commandment, which is inherently good, is ultimately bad, having caused my death”—but even if possibly thought by some of Romans’ intended audience when the letter was being read aloud, this is not something at all witnessed, and the “I” sinner immediately interjects a thought contrary to this. What is asserted is, “So the *Torah* is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good” (CJB/CJSB). The Phillips New Testament offers the useful paraphrase, “It can scarcely be doubted that the Law itself is holy, and the commandment is holy, fair and good.” While sin will take advantage of the Torah’s instruction, this is the problem caused by sin and not caused

³⁸ G. Bertram, “*aphormē*,” in TDNT, 731.

by the Torah. The Torah is not at all to be viewed as the vehicle of sin; an unregenerated heart that cannot obey the Torah is the vehicle of sin. Craig S. Keener fairly summarizes,

“For Paul, the law is good (7:12, 14); the problem is not the law but flesh, which law was designed to control, not transform (8:3). Nevertheless, the regulations of the law pointed God’s people to his righteousness. When approached the right way, as God’s message and witness rather than as a standard to achieve, the law supported the truth of the gospel (3:31; 10:6-8). Thus the law must be approached by faith rather than works (i.e., trust in God instead of flesh, 3:27; 9:31-32). Its content must be inscribed on the heart by the Spirit rather than depending on efforts of the flesh (8:2-4). Paul teaches not only moral truths, but even the way of the gospel itself, from the law. This ‘faith’ approach to the law differs, however, from attempts to achieve righteousness by works (10:3, 5-8). The status of the law appears problematic so often in Romans precisely because it is the abuse of the law that is most at issue.”³⁹

7:13 Having just asserted the inherent goodness of God’s commandments in the Torah (Romans 7:12), the sinner of Romans ch. 7 interjects the clarification that it is not the commandment which is responsible for death, but sin taking advantage of the commandment. “Therefore did that which is good become death to me? May it never be! Rather it was sin working death in me—through that which is good—so that sin might be shown to be sin, and that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Romans 7:13, TLV). As is rendered by the NASU, Romans 7:13a reads, “Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me?”, with “*a cause of*” notably added in *italics*. While not an unuseful addition (the RSV/ESV has the slightly better, “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?”), more literally the sentence *To oun agathon emoi egeneto thanatos* (Τὸ οὖν ἀγαθὸν ἐμοὶ ἐγένετο θάνατος) reads, “Then that which is good, has it become death to me?” (LITV). The presence of sin hijacks a good commandment of God, so that “sin can be recognized as sin” (NIV) and reveal the mortal faults of the sinner. But, the real disaster is that God’s commandment **is to bring a condition of life** which sin has impeded.

7:14 The “I” sinner recognizes his plight, but also recognizes the intrinsic, Divine nature of God’s Torah and its high value. He expresses his frustration: “For we know that the *Torah* is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold to sin” (Romans 7:14, TLV), “For we know that the *Torah* is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave” (CJB/CJSB), “So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin” (NLT). The issue is not with God’s Torah, as it is *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός), “**having to do with the (divine) spirit, caused by or filled with the (divine) spirit, pert./corresponding to the (divine) spirit**” (BDAG),⁴⁰ which “In Rom. 7:14 ‘the law is spiritual’ means it is according to the mind and will of the Spirit” (AMG).⁴¹ Unfortunately for the sinner, without the salvation of Yeshua to redeem him from his condemnation (Romans 8:1), *egō de sarkinos eimi pepramenos hupo tēn hamartian* (ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν), “but~I am carnal having been sold under - sin” (Brown and Comfort).⁴² We should be reminded of Paul’s previous assertion in Romans 3:9: “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin [*pantas huph’ hamartian einai, πάντας ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίαν εἶναι*].”

7:15-16 The sinner is at a real loss as to what is going on inside of him. “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15, NKJV). Some of what is communicated here has been thought as being crafted as the classic Jewish position of the good inclination versus the evil inclination, manifesting and fighting within a person’s psyche.⁴³ Textually speaking, rendered as either “what I am doing” or “my own actions” (RSV), the verb *katērgazomai* (κατεργάζομαι) means “*to effect by labour, to achieve, accomplish*” (LS),⁴⁴ with LITV having, “For what I work out, I do not know.” This

³⁹ Craig S. Keener, *New Covenant Commentary Series: Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), pp 88-89.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 837.

⁴¹ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, pp 1185-1886.

⁴² Brown and Comfort, 549.

⁴³ Mark Nanos, “The Letter of Paul to the Romans,” in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 267.

⁴⁴ LS, 420.

same verb appears in Philippians 2:12 where Paul admonishes, “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” But in Romans 7:15, it would seem best to acknowledge that the “working out” taking place is probably an unregenerated sinner, having acknowledged and working through the negative force of sin. A secondary option would be a newly redeemed individual, trying to see the presence of sin steadily purged from himself. The sinner’s aim is actually conformity with the standard of God as seen in His Instruction: “But if I do what I do not want to do, then I agree with the *Torah*—that it is good” (Romans 7:16, TLV). If the sinner recognizes that he is in violation of the good commandment of God’s Law, then “I am consenting to the Law, that it is right” (Montgomery New Testament).

7:17-18 The sinner is one who knows the right thing to do in accordance with God’s Torah, but struggles with it. Resultant from this is a life or a life-condition of agony and discontent. It is observed how sin has completely taken over: “In reality, it is not I that do these things; it is sin, which has possession of me” (Romans 7:17, Goodspeed New Testament). That the “I” sinner of Romans 7 is most probably an unredeemed person on the way to salvation, is evidenced by his claim, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18, NIV). This is a person for whom the flesh, thoroughly imbued and saturated with sin, is everything. This is a person who has not yet been washed clean by the good news, and is being regularly penetrated and transformed by the Spirit of God.

7:19-20 Unlike many people, who when confronted with their fallen sinfulness do not desire a change, and are content to live in a condition of death and separation from their Creator—the “I” sinner of Romans 7 knows that there is a problem which needs resolution. “I cannot be good as I want to be, and I do wrong against my wishes. Well, if I act against my wishes, it is not I who do the deed but sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:19-20, Moffat New Testament). The sinner who is confessing his faults, and who wants conformity to the standard of God, is lamenting to his hearers that something has to be done in order to see the power and presence of sin removed. As Paul’s letter would have been read aloud to the Believers in Rome, one should be able to detect that the decisive answer to the sinner’s problem, salvation in Yeshua the Messiah, is soon to be announced as having broken in and changed the situation (Romans 7:25).

7:21 The sinner’s statement does bear a translation-perspective issue to be considered: “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good” (Romans 7:21, NKJV). The presence of evil within the sinner is crafted as *euriskō ara ton nomon* (εὐρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον), “I find then the law” (LITV). Here, it is appropriate to recognize, as is seen by many English versions, that *ton nomon* is not speaking of the Torah of Moses or Pentateuch or even Tanach proper, but instead “the principle” (NASU, TLV) or “rule” (Common English Bible), meaning a spiritual law or constant of sorts, of what happens when sin is present within a person. “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (NIV).

7:22 The “I” sinner of Romans ch. 7 recognizes the high value of God’s Torah. He exclaims, “For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self” (Romans 7:22, RSV), “For I delight in the *Torah* of God with respect to the inner man” (TLV), “For I am in hearty agreement with God’s Law so far as my inner self is concerned” (Phillips New Testament). The sinner’s personal knowing, perhaps with *ton esō anthrōpon* (τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον) involving the human conscience impressed with enough knowledge about the nature of God and His Instruction, bearing witness to the Torah’s spiritual origins (Romans 7:14), is that God’s Law is something to greatly appreciate. The sentiment of Romans 7:22 is something that can be seen echoed in a variety of passages from the Book of Psalms on the Torah:

“The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:8).

“I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word” (Psalm 119:14-16).

“Your testimonies also are my delight; *they are* my counselors” (Psalm 119:24).

“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it” (Psalm 119:35).

“I shall delight in Your commandments, which I love” (Psalm 119:47).

“Their heart is covered with fat, *but* I delight in Your law” (Psalm 119:70).

“May Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight” (Psalm 119:77).

“If Your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction” (Psalm 119:92).

7:23 Romans 7:23 witnesses three uses of the term *nomos* (νόμος) or “law.” English versions often do render these three appearances uniformly as “law,” but what is intended is an obvious contrast to the Law or Torah of God, in which the inner self is supposed to rejoice (Romans 7:22) but has problems implementing. The sinner, who does in fact rejoice in the instruction of God’s Torah, is nonetheless besides himself, because different principles control him: “but I see another ‘law’ in my limbs and organs, fighting a battle against the law of my mind, and taking me as prisoner in the law of sin which is in my limbs and organs” (Romans 7:23, Kingdom New Testament). The sinner is ultimately caught *en tō nomō tēs hamartias* (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας), “in/by the law of sin,” and its subsequent guilt and condemnation. The Williams New Testament is unique, in how it renders *nomos* as “power” in Romans 7:23: “but I see another power operating in my lower nature in conflict with the power operated by my reason, which makes me a prisoner to the power of sin which is operating in my lower nature.” What Romans 7:23 communicates can be observed to parallel Paul’s previous statement of Galatians 5:17, “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”

7:24-25 The “I” sinner of Romans ch. 7, knowing what is right and not being able to do it, comes to the conclusion that he is a wretched mortal in need of dire help: “I’m a miserable human being. Who will deliver me from this dead corpse?” (Romans 7:24, Common English Bible). The person eventually has to acknowledge the ongoing internal conflict **and finally come to Yeshua as Savior** for resolution: “Thanks be to God—it is through Messiah *Yeshua* our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself serve the *Torah* of God; but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:25, TLV). Such a bad dichotomy, where the human mind mentally knows the Instruction of God and **wants** to keep it, but internally because of human flesh the principles of sin are instead being served—can only be fixed by the salvation of Yeshua, *which is to transform the entire person!* When the sinner comes to Yeshua, he or she can be freed from condemnation (Romans 8:1), and a life in Spirit-compelled obedience to His Torah can begin (Romans 8:4).

When the “I” sinner of Romans 7:7-25 is properly recognized as a hypothetical person, then the situation largely describes a person who is on his or her way to salvation. This individual knows what God’s commandments are, recognizes their Divine origin and supernatural inspiration, and sincerely wants to keep them. But because of a weakness in the heart and mind, obedience to the Lord is a major struggle. The person has to come to the end of himself or herself, a “death” to self if you will, and recognizes that the way for deliverance has been provided in the good news or gospel: “The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does” (Romans 7:25, The Message). The duality of obeying the Law only in the mind, but serving sin via the flesh, can be remedied.

Think of how many people today, either Jews who were reared in the Torah from time of birth, or many evangelical Christians who were raised with a healthy appreciation for the Old Testament—who feel condemned as they struggle to obey God—**and who have yet to have an experience with the Living Yeshua (Jesus)**. Eventually, through whatever circumstances the Father has ordained, such people are able to see *the Torah point to the Messiah*. (Sadly, though, a wide variety of these persons only realize who the Savior is in their final days, when they know that they have to make their peace with the Creator God, and they are reminded of what they may have been told as children from the Bible.)