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### The Relationship Between Law and Sin in Romans 7

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**SHORT TITLE:**

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW AND SIN  
IN ROMANS 7

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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June 1965

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this thesis to develop an answer to the question, "What is the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7?" It is important to note that this inquiry is based on two presuppositions. The first is that there really is a relationship between law and sin in Romans 7. The second is that Romans 7 can validly be studied in the light of this relationship. The second assumption is based on the fact that the relationship between law and sin is a central theme in the epistle to the Romans.

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The nature of the question before us makes it necessary to investigate three major concepts of Pauline theology: namely, law, sin, and man. For the reasons we do not intend, however, to present complete statements of Paul's concepts of law, sin, or man. First of all, a thorough discussion of any one of these aspects of Pauline theology could easily be the subject of an individual thesis. Secondly, for our present



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this thesis to develop an answer to the question, "What is the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7?" It is important to note that this inquiry is based on two presuppositions. The first is that there really is a relationship between law and sin in Romans 7. The second is that Romans 7 can validly be studied in the light of that relationship. The second assumption is based on the first and is more significant, because it determines the method to be used in answering the problem to which this thesis proposes to address itself. It is this second presupposition which makes it unnecessary to present a detailed exegesis of every aspect of Romans 7 within this dissertation. Our method will consist, therefore, in defining the terms law and sin as they are used by Paul and proceeding from there to show how law and sin interact when they meet in man.

The nature of the question before us makes it necessary to investigate three major concepts of Pauline theology; namely, law, sin, and man. For two reasons we do not intend, however, to present complete statements of Paul's concepts of law, sin, or man. First of all, a thorough discussion of any one of these aspects of Pauline theology could easily be the subject of an individual thesis. Secondly, for our present



purposes we are interested in these terms only to the extent that they relate to the question under investigation in this thesis. Therefore our reason for investigating the concepts of law, sin, and man is to isolate their meaning as they are used in Romans 7. We shall do so by making a study of the meaning of these concepts as they occur elsewhere in Paul.

Such a statement of purpose may appear to have raised an irrelevant question and have failed completely to take into consideration what Anders Nygren has called "one of the greatest problems of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> The difficulty Nygren refers to is, "To whom does the 'I' in Romans 7 refer?" If the failure to consider this problem in a discussion of Romans 7 were an oversight, it would be inexcusable. Such a deficiency could only call into question the reliability of the rest of the material presented.

The omission of this topic from the general plan and purpose of this paper is no oversight. Its exclusion is deliberate and reflects the basic position that is presented in this thesis; namely, that in Romans 7 Paul is not discussing anthropology. Instead he is presenting a theological discussion of the law and its relationship to sin. Furthermore, the relationship that exists between law and sin is, according to Paul, dependent upon the nature of law and sin as he understands these terms. The interaction of law and

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<sup>1</sup>Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1949), p. 284.



sin is, therefore, the same whenever they come into contact with one another regardless of whether the man in whom they meet is a Christian or a non-Christian. Because the relationship between law and sin is not subject to change, we suggest that the question, "Who is the 'I' in Romans 7?" and the anthropological emphasis this question gives to a discussion of this chapter obscure the meaning of what Paul is saying in Romans 7. This is the position that is presented and defended in this thesis as we move in chapter two to discuss the meaning of law as it is used in Romans 7, in chapter three to the meaning of sin, in chapter four to the nature of man in whom law and sin meet. In chapter five, finally, we shall present a concluding analysis of the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANING OF LAW IN ROMANS 7

Paul uses the term νόμος<sup>1</sup> with a variety of meanings. Since we want to understand the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7, it is essential that we determine in what sense or senses Paul uses law in that chapter. It is to this particular problem that we address ourselves in this chapter. Our investigation of the meaning of law in Romans 7 is presented in three stages: First, we will demonstrate the variety of meanings law has as it is used by Paul. Secondly, we will discuss the significance of law in the argument Paul presents in Romans. Finally, in view of the variety of meanings of law and its usage in the context of Romans 7, we will attempt to show what Paul means by law as he uses the term in Romans 7.

Paul uses law both with and without the article. Although no readily applicable principle has been devised to distinguish the exact significance of the anarthrous use of law in specific passages,<sup>2</sup> it is significant that abstract nouns tend to be

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<sup>1</sup>In an effort to make this thesis more readable, we will use as little Greek as possible. When discussing the meaning of a Greek term we will introduce the Greek word but thereafter refer to its English equivalent. Since the anarthrous use of νόμος is a significant feature of Paul's use of the term, we will refer to the anarthrous νόμος as law while ὁ νόμος will be referred to as the law.

<sup>2</sup>James Hope Moulton, Wilbert Francis Howard, and Nigel



anarthrous when there is a greater emphasis on their abstract quality.<sup>3</sup> Law is not to be understood to mean "a" law as opposed to "the" law.<sup>4</sup> The omission of the article seems rather to stress the essential quality of law as law.<sup>5</sup> For

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Turner, Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, c.1963), III, 177. Herman Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, Law, in Bible Key Words, translated from the German by Dorothea M. Barton, edited by P. R. Ackroyd (London: Adam & Charles Black, c.1962), XI, 102, 103. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, The Epistle to the Romans (Seventh edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 58. A. Wakefield Slaten "The Qualitative Use of νόμος in the Pauline Epistles," American Journal of Theology, XXIII (1919), 216. Archibald Thomas Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, c.1934), p. 796 says "In general when νόμος is anarthrous in Paul it refers to Mosaic law. . . ." But Robertson also cites exceptions to this general rule thereby suggesting that the context of individual passages is a better guide to Paul's meaning than is Robertson's rule. There is little doubt but that when Paul uses the anarthrous law the specific law that he has in mind is the Mosaic law. But to say simply that anarthrous law refers to the Mosaic law runs the risk of failing to see the significance of Paul's careful use of the article.

<sup>3</sup>F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament, translated from the German by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1961), p. 134. Moulton, Howard and Turner, p. 176. Slaten, p. 217: "Insistence upon the recognition of the qualitative force of νόμος in Paul is more than a mere grammatical punctilio; it is a necessary element in correct interpretation. Its recognition enlarges the apostle's religious philosophy from an anticodal polemic to a wide-sweeping assertion of spiritual freedom."

<sup>4</sup>Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, p. 103. Sanday and Headlam, p. 58.

<sup>5</sup>Slaten, p. 216: "Of the 71 anarthrous instances, nearly all (61) are qualitative, the omission of the article having the effect, not of assigning the law referred to to a class of laws, as if it were one of many, but of emphasizing its quality as law. In many instances where the noun is limited by a qualifying genitive, itself anarthrous, it is the quality expressed by the whole compound expression, or especially that which is expressed by the genitive, which is emphasized."



example, in Galatians 4:21 the point is not if you want to be judged by "a" law you should listen to what "the" law says, as if law were in some way subordinate and inferior to the law. Instead Paul means to say that if you want to be under legal principles, under law as law, in the sense of requirements and demands, you should hear what the law says, as it is written out in the full Torah, which contains also the story of Abraham. So also in Romans 2:23, the Jews, who make their boast on the basis of having met the requirements of law, in fact dishonor God by transgressing the law as they have it in the Torah. Again, in Romans 6:14,15 the qualitative sense of law as law is emphasized by the omission of the article. The man baptized into Christ's death no longer lives under a legal principle, but under the structure of grace. The contrast is not between a specific instance of law and a specific act of grace, but between the two structures, or systems, one of which is characterized by laws and the other by God's grace. The principle that the anarthrous use of a noun puts emphasis on its abstract quality applies also when law is limited by a qualifying genitive which lacks the article. The effect of such a construction is to stress the quality represented by the compound expression. Romans 3:20 illustrates this principle.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Slaten, p. 217: "Similarly in the oft-recurring phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, while Paul no doubt has in mind the Old Testament Jewish Law as the concrete thing by legalistic obedience to which men were expecting to be justified, yet it is its quality as a legalistic system upon which he throws emphasis, and the proper translation would be 'by works of law.'"



For Paul that which distinguishes law as law is the element of requirement. Law consists of demands, requirements, stipulations, and commands. Law defines the relationship between persons as well as between persons and things in terms of required acts and attitudes. Law confronts man with a demand for action, as for example in Romans 2:13 and 10:5, where it is the doer of the law and of the righteousness which the law requires who will be justified and live. In Galatians 3:10 it is the man who fails to do what the law requires that is under a curse. These same passages illustrate the fact that law employs threats of punishment and promises of reward to insure that what it requires will be done.

Paul's use of law in a qualitative sense is not intended to deny the fact that the particular law Paul usually has in mind is the Mosaic law,<sup>7</sup> where the essential nature of law, as Paul saw it, was most clearly defined and confronted.<sup>8</sup> Although Paul refers to the Mosaic law as "the law of Moses" only once (I Cor. 9:9), the contexts in which the law is used usually indicate clearly that the Mosaic law is understood to be the particular expression of law referred to. In Romans 2:17-23, for example, the law referred to is

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<sup>7</sup>Slaten, p. 217.

<sup>8</sup>Kleinknecht and Gutbrod, p. 102. Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1951), I, 259.



explicitly that one which is the embodiment of knowledge and truth, comprising the special revelation of God to the Jews. This is the Mosaic law. The law which came four hundred and thirty years after the promise given to Abraham (Gal. 3:17-22) is the law of Moses.

Paul also uses law to refer to the Torah in a wider sense; namely, as the Jewish scriptures in which the codes of Moses were contained. Law is used of the Pentateuch in the phrase "the law and the prophets" (Rom. 3:21). In Galatians 4:21 those who want to be under law are asked if they hear the law. Paul answers his own rhetorical question with an interpretation of the story of Abraham. Paul is here using the law to refer to the Pentateuch itself rather than to the legal codes contained in it. Paul also uses law to refer to the whole Old Testament. He quotes the prophet Isaiah and gives the law as his source (I Cor. 14:21). In Romans 3:19 he uses the expression to refer to a series of quotations from the Old Testament; and most of them come from the Psalms.

Paul uses law in a few places where the context makes it clear that he is speaking neither of the Mosaic law nor of the Old Testament. In these contexts law is usually modified by a noun in the genitive or by some other word of explanation that shows what law is being referred to. Law in this sense could be translated "norm, principle or rule." Paul uses the term law of these principles because they confront man as rules which describe how certain persons



or things function. Law as used in Romans 8:2 fits into this category. There "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" means the principle according to which the Spirit works. In the same verse "the law of sin and death" refers to the way in which sin functions. The context of Romans 3:27 suggests understanding νόμος as "principle." The Revised Standard Version reflects this understanding in its translation, "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith." In Galatians 6:2 ὁ νόμος is modified by τοῦ Χριστοῦ. This law of Christ, the context tells us, is fulfilled by bearing one another's burdens. This seems to refer to a law given by Jesus such as "Love one another" (John 13:34).

Although Paul uses law in various ways, in each instance there is an element of requirement which can properly be called law. When Paul wants to stress the characteristic quality of law as law, he uses law without the article. Paul also uses the term law to refer to the law of Moses. When Paul speaks of the Scriptures in which the Torah is found, he may use law. Law is also used of various rules and principles that may properly be called law because they partake of the distinguishing characteristic of law. It should be noted, however, that the distinctions between the uses of law in Paul are a matter of emphasis rather than contrast. For when Paul speaks of the abstract quality of law, he is no doubt thinking of the Mosaic law as the



particular law within which the distinguishing feature of law is most clearly evident.

Since Paul uses the term law in several ways, it is necessary to see the meaning and implications of the term as used in the argument of the Epistle to the Romans so that the meaning of the term as used in Romans 7 may be clearly understood. We turn, therefore, to a discussion of the significance of law in the context of Romans 7.

In Romans 1:16,17 Paul formulates the theme which he develops in the rest of the book. Paul's thesis is that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to each one who believes. He cites Habakkuk 2:4 as the basis for this observation. By stating his thesis in terms of the gospel as power for salvation to believers, he implies an antithesis to legalistic Judaism. For the Jew, Torah was power;<sup>9</sup> and the Jew interpreted Habakkuk 2:4 to mean that the faithful doer of the Torah would live.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Franz J. Leenhardt, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1961), p. 49: "Judaism had cultivated the idea that the Torah is 'power.' In the life of the Jew, the Torah, the revelation of the will of God, became a power of salvation. Grundmann, Th. Wb. NT, II, pp. 298-299. Paul overthrows the whole scheme by saying that the gospel is power."

<sup>10</sup>Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans, translated by Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1949), p. 82: "In the synagogue the declaration that 'the righteous shall live by his faith' came to play a very significant role. It was interpreted as the summary and highest expression of the righteousness of the law. This is illustrated very well in the following Talmudic tradition: On Sinai Moses received



The antithesis between such righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith is explicitly stated in the concluding remarks of the first major section of Romans. After quoting Scripture to prove that all men are sinners (Rom. 3: 9-18), Paul states, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19-20). In the phrase *διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας* (verse 20) one might expect the use of *τοῦ νόμου*, instead of *νόμου*, as a parallel to *ὁ νόμος* in verse 19. This would make it clear that it is through the Torah that the knowledge of sin comes. Although it is consistent with Paul's argument that the Torah reveals sin, the

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613 commandments. King David came and summed them up in eleven (Ps. 15). Then came Isaiah and summed them up in six (Isa. 33:15f.). Micah came and summed them up in three, 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' (Mic. 6:8). Again came Isaiah and summed them up in two, 'Keep ye judgment, and do justice' (Isa. 56:1). Finally came Habakkuk and summed them all up in one, 'The just shall live by his faith.'

"It should be noted that the Old Testament commandments themselves are looked upon as coming to their highest expression in this prophetic word. In Habakkuk 2:4 the synagogue finds the adequate expression of righteousness by the law and its works. It sees here a witness to the saving power of the law. He who keeps the commandment shall live. The righteous have the right to life because of their fidelity to the law and the covenant. It is by such a faith, by faithfulness, that the just shall live." Hans Joachim Schoeps, Paul, translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1961), pp. 202, 203.



omission of the article here highlights the fact that it is the element of requirement in the Torah which reveals sin.

As Paul proceeds in Romans 3:21,22 to develop the positive side of righteousness through faith, he clarifies his thesis by contrasting it to the righteousness based on law.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Here as in 3:19,20, law is used once with and once without the article. In the phrase "the law and the prophets," the law means the Pentateuch. To assume, however, that law in the phrase "apart from law" is to be understood in exactly the same way would be an unwarranted assumption which distorts the meaning of the passage. Here the anarthrous use of law means that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from any system of requirements and stipulations. That is, the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from any system or relationship which has as its distinguishing characteristics the qualities implied by the term law. The Torah is a concrete example of such a legal system, but to understand "apart from law" as meaning apart from the Torah is to run the risk of misunderstanding what Paul is saying. Paul's message is opposed to the Torah only inasmuch as it seeks to establish the relationship between God and man on the basis of requirements and demands. For the same Torah that has the essential qualities of law also bears witness to the righteousness of God manifested "apart from law." It can also offer



corroborating evidence for the righteousness of God "apart from law," as in the case of Abraham (Rom. 4).

Paul anticipates that he will be charged with overthrowing law. But he insists that he puts the law in its proper place as in Romans 3:31. Here an anarthrous νόμος occurs in both instances. To try to determine whether Paul here means law in the abstract or the law of Moses is to pose a false and misleading antithesis. Paul directs his argument against the Torah in the sense that he finds in it a legalistic system of obtaining the righteousness of God. It is the legalistic system of the Torah that Paul overthrows. But Paul claims that by destroying this legalistic system he is really putting the law of Moses into its proper place. In Romans 7 Paul shows in what sense it is that he upholds the requirements of the Torah.

After having presented his case for the system of obtaining righteousness by grace through faith (Rom. 3:21-5:21), Paul answers at length the rhetorical question asked in Romans 3:31. This answer is presented in five parts, as the expansions of answers to the rhetorical questions in Romans 6:1,15; 7:1,7,13. All five questions reflect the same basic concern; namely, will not Paul's teaching of faith-righteousness and its implications about the law destroy the basis for all responsible moral action?<sup>11</sup> To four of these

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<sup>11</sup>Leenhardt, pp. 151, 152. Commenting on Rom. 6:1 Leenhardt says, "Paul was not able to avoid the inevitable. When it is said that what constitutes the value of human



five questions Paul gives the same answer: μή γένοιτο !<sup>12</sup>

The statement in Romans 5:20 "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," leads to the first of this series of rhetorical questions: "Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1) Paul answers with an emphatic negative. He gives as the reason for his answer the fact that those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.

After the statement that "sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14), comes the question: "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Μή γένοιτο is Paul's reply. In the explanation of his answer, Paul speaks of obedience that leads to righteousness (verse 16). Paul goes on to explain that believers

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behavior in the sight of God is not material obedience to law, even though it were the law of God, but the attitude of heart which is transparent to God, or in other words the faith which inspires conduct, it is certain that the speaker will incur the reproach of encouraging immorality; he will have every appearance of being a master of libertinism, since the moral agent is thus released from the strict obligations which the law implies and the springs of moral conduct are slackened by the discrediting of merit. The contemporaries of the apostle must have felt alarmed by a type of preaching which was so threatening to the well established structure of a moralism that had been substituted for the obedience of faith."

<sup>12</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 157. Bauer suggests "by no means," "far from it," or "God forbid" as possible translations for the strong negative μή γένοιτο which literally means "may it not be."



are to yield their members to that righteousness which leads to a holy life. In so doing it would seem that Paul is referring his readers back to the law. It becomes necessary, therefore, for Paul to present his understanding of the proper function of the law. This is what he does in Romans 7.

Now that we have traced the significance of law in the argument in Romans, it is evident that, in Romans 1 through 6, Paul has used the term law in three distinct but related ways. Keeping this background to Paul's use of law in mind, it is possible to distinguish the meaning of law in Romans 7. Law occurs twenty-three times in the chapter, six times without the article and seventeen times with the article. In view of the variety of usage described, it is necessary to examine each of the occurrences of law in Romans 7 in its context to determine what Paul meant to convey by the use of the term.

The subject under discussion in Romans 7 is the law.<sup>13</sup> This matter is discussed in three stages. Paul argues that (a) the law only claims a temporary function (Rom. 7:1-6), (b) the law does not pretend to do more than give knowledge

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<sup>13</sup>Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West," Harvard Theological Review, LVI (July 1963), 211. "While much attention has been given to the question whether Paul here speaks about pre-Christian or Christian experience of his or about man in general, little attention has been drawn to the fact that Paul here is involved in an argument about the Law; he is not primarily concerned about man's or his own cloven ego or predicament."



and the occasion of sin (Rom. 7:7-12), (c) the law is unable to produce the obedience it demands (Rom. 7:13-20).<sup>14</sup> In this context Paul's statement about the law serves a dual function. It clearly states that law does not produce righteousness, not even in the Christian. But at the same time Paul defends and upholds the law (Rom. 3:31) by ascribing to it its proper function.<sup>15</sup>

In the first stage of his discussion of the law in Romans 7, Paul says that the law serves only a temporary function. The law has no power over a person after that person is dead, just as a wife is not bound by law to her husband after his death. The man who has died in Christ is free from the law. In making his point, Paul assumes an understanding of the nature of law (verse 1). Here law does not refer to any particular law<sup>16</sup> but to the truth which readers acquainted with law would know; namely, that when a person dies he escapes the jurisdiction of law. People who understand this principle of law will realize that the law is binding on a person only during his life (verse 1). The law (verse 1) could refer to any particular law, but judging from the use of the law in Romans, there

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<sup>14</sup>Leenhardt, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup>Stendahl, p. 212: "In Rom. 1-3 the human impasse has been argued and here every possible excuse has been ruled out. In Rom. 7 the issue is rather to show how in some sense 'I gladly agree with the Law of God as far as my inner man is concerned' (v. 22); or as in v. 25, 'I serve the Law of God.'"

<sup>16</sup>Sanday and Headlam, p. 172.



is no reason to believe that Paul means any other than the law of Moses.<sup>17</sup>

The temporary jurisdiction of law is evident in the marriage relationship. A wife is bound to her husband by law (verse 2). Law here does not refer to a particular law. The omission of the article points to the fact that there are legal stipulations binding together a husband and wife. Because there is a legal side to marriage, it can serve to illustrate the fact that law has only a temporary function. When the husband dies, the wife is released from the law of the husband (verse 2). Here the meaning of the law is defined by τοῦ ἀνδρός . The law here is the law about the husband.<sup>18</sup> The same law about the husband is referred to in verse 3. In the same way that death releases a woman from her legal obligation to her husband, so those who die through the body of Christ are dead as far as the law is concerned (verses 4-6).

In Romans 7:4-6 law is used with the article three times. After saying,

While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death, . . . (verse 5)

Paul explains that the law does not equal sin but is indeed

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<sup>17</sup>Bauer, p. 544.

<sup>18</sup>Moulton, Howard, and Turner, p. 212.



holy (verses 7-12). The fact that Paul felt an explanation was necessary after verse 5 is evidence enough that by the law in verses 4-6 he means God's special gift to his people, the Torah, the law of Moses.

In verses 7-13 law is used six times, three times with the article and three times without it. The law in this stage of the discussion is referred to as the law that needs defending (verse 7). In verse 8 the law says, "You shall not covet." And in verse 12 the law is described as holy. The only law a Jew would feel called upon to defend is the holy law of Moses that contains the command forbidding covetousness. In verses 7-12, therefore, the law obviously refers to the law of Moses.

Law without the article in verses 7-9 has been understood as referring to the Mosaic law.<sup>19</sup> Any interpretation of law in these passages must offer an explanation of what Paul means when he says, "I was once alive apart from the law [*χωρὶς νόμου* ], but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. . . ." (verse 9) W. D. Davies suggests that Paul is referring to the time in his life when at the age of thirteen he was made a morally responsible member of the Jewish community.<sup>20</sup> Davies considers this to have been the second stage of Paul's life,

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<sup>19</sup>Bauer, p. 544.

<sup>20</sup>W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: SPCK, c.1948), pp. 24, 25.



the period when the commandment came and with it sin sprang to life. Hitherto sin was not known as sin; it was revealed as such by the Law. The latter, moreover, not only brought into being the awareness of the sinfulness of sin but also, on the principle that forbidden fruits are sweetest, actually gave an impetus towards sin. Paul is driven into the painful state that Aristotle called *ἀκρασία* (incontinence) in which a man knows what is right and desires it and yet cannot do it. He becomes a Jekyll and Hyde.<sup>21</sup>

This is hardly the picture Paul gives of the life he lived before the Spirit of God came to deliver him.

In Philippians 3:6 Paul claims that he was blameless with respect to righteousness under the law. Davies' unsatisfactory solution is derived from the incorrect assumption that, in Romans 7, Paul wants to offer a psychological description of the activity of sin within his own soul,<sup>22</sup> rather than present a discussion of the law.

In Romans 7 Paul is engaged in a theological evaluation of law. Since we have seen elsewhere (Romans 3:21) that Paul's use of the anarthrous law is significant, we would expect Paul to have a reason for his use of both the law and law in Romans 7:7-12. The idea in Romans 7:7 that "if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin" is paralleled in Romans 3:20, "since through the law [*διὰ νόμου*] comes knowledge of sin." In both cases law is used without the article. Similarly, the anarthrous law

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<sup>21</sup>Davies, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



is used where related ideas are expressed in Romans 5:13,20. The absence of the article in each case puts the emphasis on the abstract quality of law, the point being that it is law in its "lawness" as requirement and demand that makes sin known.<sup>23</sup> To say that the emphasis is on the essential quality of law as law does not exclude the Torah as the revealer of sin. Rather, this emphasis makes it possible to illustrate the point that law reveals sin with a specific command from the Torah because the Torah contains commands and requirements that constitute the essential nature of law.

In Romans 7:8,9 Paul uses law in the genitive with the prepositional adverb *χωρίς*. The only other instance in Paul of *χωρίς* with law (Rom. 3:21) uses law without the article. This anarthrous use of law in Romans 3:21 is critical for our argument because Paul says that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from law as requirement. The righteousness of God has not been revealed apart from Torah as Old Testament, since "the law and the prophets" (Rom. 3:21) bear witness to it as in the case of Abraham (Rom. 4). This righteousness of God which is

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<sup>23</sup> If law here were understood to mean the Torah, one might think that Paul was saying that the Torah tells men that they are sinners. The Torah does make sin known in this way, and that is the way Paul uses Psalms 14:3 in Romans 3:12. But that is not what is meant here. The example cited here is not one of a man being told he is a sinner, but a man who comes to know sin as a sinner. See chapter five below for a discussion of how law makes sin known.



manifested apart from law is characterized by grace and is received in faith (Rom. 3:24,25).

In the same vein Paul can say, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law," (Rom. 3:28) and again, "So also David pronounces blessings upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works." (Rom. 4:6) To be "apart from law," "apart from works of law," "apart from works" is to be removed from requirements and demands as a means of obtaining the righteousness of God. To be "apart from law" is to be under grace (Rom. 6:14). Paul's use of law to emphasize the requirements that characterize law does not detract from the fact that it is in the law of Moses that man is confronted with God-given requirements. Therefore, it can be said that a man who is apart from the law of Moses is alive. For what is true of law in the abstract is illustrated by the concrete expression of law in the Torah. But to fail to see the significance of the anarthrous νόμος is to risk missing the point that it is apart from the requirements of law that a man is alive.

Understanding the use of law in Romans 7:8,9, as stressing the abstract quality of law, does not excuse one from offering an explanation of what Paul means when he says, "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." When Paul speaks of a man as being alive "apart from law," he is speaking of a man who is dead as far as the law is concerned and is therefore apart from the jurisdiction of the law (Rom. 7:1-6). The man who is dead



with respect to law is alive in Christ (Rom. 6). When a man is "apart from law," sin is really dead. Sin cannot kill the man who is "apart from law," because sin gets its killing power from the law (I Cor. 15:56). But when the commandment comes in, the man is no longer "apart from law" and no longer alive. He is no longer "apart from law" because a requirement has been made where there had been none before. Man is no longer alive because when he is confronted with a command, sin has the opportunity it needs with which to kill him.

Paul presents the third stage of his discussion of the law in Romans 7:13-20. Romans 7:11,12 suggests the rhetorical question in Romans 7:13: "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?" *Τὸ καλόν* (verse 13) is the same law and its commandment, which in verse 12 is described as holy, just, and good. The good is the law of Moses. Paul argues that it was not this good thing, that is, the law, which worked death, but sin working through what is good. In verse 14, moreover, Paul says the law is *πνευματικός*. That is, it belongs to the realm of God, as opposed to the realm of the flesh, *σαρκινός*.<sup>24</sup> And in verse 16 he says that his experience confirms the fact that the law is good. With these two occurrences of the law Paul refers to the same law described as holy in verse 12; namely, the law of Moses.

On the basis of sin's misuse of the law, as described

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<sup>24</sup>Infra, p. 40.



in Romans 7:7-20, Paul finds that there is a principle, ὁ νόμος, (verse 21) at work. This rule is stated: "when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand" (verse 21). The principle stated in verse 21 is illustrated in verses 22-25. Paul says that he delights in the law of God (verse 22). That is, he knows that the Torah given by God is good and he wants to do what it commands (verses 14-15). In his members, however, he sees another law at work (verse 23); namely, the principle that evil is close at hand waging war with the law of his mind (verse 23). By waging war with the law of his mind the principle that evil lies close at hand makes Paul a captive to the law of sin (verse 23). The law of God (verse 22) is the same law referred to as "the law of my mind" (verse 23). This law is the Torah which Paul can acknowledge as good when he wants to do the good but does not do it (verse 16). In verses 22-25 Paul modifies the law with τοῦ θεοῦ and τοῦ νοῦς μου to distinguish it from the law in verse 21 which refers to another law. The ἕτερον νόμον in verse 23 is the same principle referred to as the law in verse 21. ἕτερον νόμον is not, however, to be identified as "the law of sin" since Paul says the ἕτερον νόμον makes him a captive to the law of sin which Paul serves with his flesh. The law of sin is the principle according to which sin works when confronted with the requirements of law. This law of sin will be discussed in detail in chapter five of this paper.



## CHAPTER III

### THE MEANING OF SIN IN ROMANS 7

Having established the meaning of the term law as it is used in Romans 7, we now proceed to determine the significance of the term ἁμαρτία as it is used by Paul in that chapter. Our discussion will be presented in three sections. First we will state the ways in which Paul uses the term sin. Secondly, we will show how Paul's concept of sin was determined by his conversion experience. In the last stage of our discussion of sin, we will demonstrate the fact that the understanding of sin that was received by Paul in his conversion experience is the doctrine of sin present in the Epistle to the Romans, particularly in the seventh chapter.

In Paul's writings sin is a God-opposing rebellious power at work in man. Sin came into the world through the disobedience of Adam (Rom. 5:12,18) and reigned in the world (Rom. 5:21), taking men captive (Rom. 6:6). Subjecting all men (Rom. 3:9), sin rules them with its law (Rom. 7:23,25) and pays its subjects with death (Rom. 5:21; 6:23).<sup>1</sup> Man, subject to the power of ἁμαρτία,

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c.1957), pp. 42, 43. Gustav Stählin, "ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμαρτήμα, ἁμαρτία, D. The Linguistic Usage and History of ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμαρτήμα and ἁμαρτία before and in the N.T.," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel,



is called a ἄμαρτωλός. He is "the man who does not allow God supreme authority over his life, and who withholds from Him total dedication and obedience."<sup>2</sup>

When Paul speaks of sin, he does not, as a rule, refer to individual sinful acts. Ἄμάρτημα in Romans 3:15; 5:16, and ἁμαρτία in Romans 7:5; II Corinthians 11:7; Ephesians 2:1 are exceptions.<sup>3</sup> Quotations from other sources and the use of familiar formulae account for the unusual reference to individual acts as sin in Romans 4:7,8; I Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:14.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's concept of sin as rebellion against God is determined by his own confrontation with Christ. Paul's

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translated from the German and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964), I, 296. W. David Stacey, The Pauline View of Man (London: Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1956), p. 162. W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: SPCK, c.1948), p. 26. Norman Powell Williams, The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1929), p. 150. Davies says, "N. P. Williams is probably right in saying, at least generally, that 'sin,' 'the old man,' 'the sinful body,' 'the body of this death,' 'the sinful passions aroused by the Law,' 'the mind of the flesh' are all so many picturesque and paraphrastic names for the yêtzet hâ-râ'." We do not accept this position. The reasons for our disagreement will be found in chapter four of this paper where the possibility of understanding Romans 7, as a conflict between the yêtzet hâ-râ' and the yêtzet hâ-tôb will be discussed.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "ἄμαρτωλός, ἀναμάρτητος," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated from the German and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964), I, 333.

<sup>3</sup>Stählin, p. 294, 295.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 295.



evaluation of himself before and after that experience reflects a significant change in Paul's understanding of sin. As a Pharisee Paul had felt that he was blameless with respect to righteousness based on the law (Phil. 3:6). But speaking of himself as a Christian, Paul says, "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (I Cor. 15:9). Also, whenever Paul uses the term sinner he is referring to himself in some way (Rom. 3:7; 5:8,19; Gal. 2:15,17).<sup>5</sup> The change in Paul's evaluation of himself is not to be explained simply by saying that as a Christian he saw what the law really demanded, but that as a Pharisee he had been content with a superficial interpretation of the law.<sup>6</sup> Nor could it be said that his doctrine of justification by faith had led him to a libertinism, to which the term sinner would more appropriately apply (Rom. 6; Gal. 5:19). Paul presents a different evaluation of himself because his concept of sin had changed as a result of his conversion experience. As a Jew, before his conversion, Paul knew that transgression of the commands of the Torah constituted sin. Since the Torah had been given to Israel by God, disobedience to the Torah was

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<sup>5</sup>Rengstorf, p. 332. Paul does not use the term of himself exclusively, but whenever he used the term in a substantive sense he did so in relation to himself. In I Timothy *ἀμαρτωλός* also refers to Paul.

<sup>6</sup>Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity, translated from the Swedish by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1964), pp. 39-45.



an act of rebellion against God.<sup>7</sup> It was with this understanding of sin that Paul could call himself blameless with respect to the law (Phil. 3:6). The zeal with which he applied himself to the law, as he understood it while a Pharisee, is attested to by the fact that he persecuted the church (Phil. 3:6; cf. Gal. 1:23). It was, however, in this very act of persecuting the church that Paul was confronted with God's judgment. Walter Grundmann states very clearly how this judgment of God effected Paul's concept of sin.

But this persecution was simply the final result of his attempted self-justification through the works of the Law, of his zeal for it. This zeal was also judged in the judgment on the persecution of the community of God. With this judgment, he came to realise that his whole activity in Judaism was opposition to God's will and consequently active hostility to God. Both the persecution and the underlying zeal for the Law sprang from the tendency of man to assert himself against God and to try to will in independence of Him. This desire of man to dispose concerning himself is opposition to the will of God. Once this became clear, he was insistent that sin is not merely a violation of the divine majesty, as he had already learned as a Jew, but active hostility to God and resistance to His will on the part of the man who wills to be independent and to rule his own life. This thought of hostility is the constitutive element in Paul's doctrine of sin.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Walter Grundmann and Gustav Stählin. "ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα; ἁμαρτία", C. The Concept of Sin in Judaism," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated from the German and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964), I, 289.

<sup>8</sup>Walter Grundmann, "ἁμαρτάνω, ἁμάρτημα, ἁμαρτία F. Sin in the NT," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated from the German and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964), I, 309.



Paul's concept of sin as rebellion against God is the understanding of sin that is presented in the Epistle to the Romans.

In describing the effects of the righteousness of faith (Rom. 5:1-11) Paul states clearly what he understands the condition of the sinner to be. In the new relationship, men justified by faith have peace with God. Before God had effected men's reconciliation through Christ, the same men who now have peace with God were weak and ungodly (verse 6), sinners (verse 8), enemies (verse 10). Here the terms sinners and enemies are both used to describe the same men before they were reconciled to God by the death of God's Son. Here, therefore, Paul says that sinners are enemies of God. A state of hostility exists between God and the men who are not reconciled to God through God's Son (verse 10). On the other hand, the men who are justified by faith have peace with God (verse 1). Here, therefore, Paul teaches the concept of sin as hostility toward God. This is the understanding of sin he had come to know in his own experience. The term sinner describes a man rebelliously asserting himself against God even, and especially, when he does this on the basis of God's law. It can never be otherwise, for the law reveals sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). The law does not work the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:20).

The rebellious nature of sin is also revealed in Paul's account of sin's entrance into the world. Paul says that sin came into the world through the disobedience of one man (Rom. 5:12,18,19). The fact that Paul can speak of the



transgression (Rom. 5:14; cf. 4:15) of Adam means that he understands Adam's sin as a disobedience to a law. It was a case of man asserting himself in opposition to God's expressed will. The law did not create righteousness; rather, it revealed sin. Paul says that the disobedience of one man led to condemnation (verse 18) for all men, and at the same time all men sinned (verse 12). Although some have seen here a reference to original sin, Paul does not develop the idea of original sin,<sup>9</sup> nor does he explain the origin of sin itself. But he does make it clear that sin came into the world through Adam and showed itself to be active opposition to God.

In Romans 5:12 Paul says that all men sinned, and in the first three chapters he shows that man's rebellion is an observable fact. Paul charges that all are under sin (Rom. 3:9). In Romans 1:18-3:9 he gives a vivid picture of man's haughty self-assertion. The charge against the Gentiles is that they refuse to acknowledge God as God even though they are confronted with God's eternal power and deity in the things that he has made (Rom. 1:19-21). They choose, rather, to continue in their own ways, which they know are condemned by God (Rom. 1:32), for to do otherwise would be to acknowledge God as God and subject themselves to him. Even though the Jews have the Torah, Paul charges that they, too, are under sin.

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<sup>9</sup>Grundmann, "Sin in the N.T.," p. 310. Grundmann says, "There is an indissoluble connection between the act of Adam, the fate of death and the general state of sin. This does



For although they have the law they show their disobedience by breaking the law and dishonoring God (Rom. 2:23).

In Romans 3:20 Paul says, "Through the law comes knowledge of sin." He repeats this idea in Romans 7:7. But here he makes clear exactly what he means by giving an example that shows how law makes sin known (Rom. 7:7-25). When Paul was confronted with the command, "You shall not covet,"<sup>10</sup> sin took advantage of the command and brought about all sorts of covetousness in him. Sin used the good command of God and in so doing revealed the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 7:13). Sin did not obey the commandment. It did just the opposite of what had been commanded. It used the commandment to bring about the very thing the commandment forbade. Confronted by law, sin is revealed as a rebellious force in man that will not be subject to the requirements of law. And to refuse to submit to God's law is to be hostile to God (Rom. 8:7). As a result of sin coming into contact with the requirement of the law, a man not only experiences sin by sinning, but he comes to know that sin is hostility toward God.<sup>11</sup> Confronted

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not mean that a doctrine of inherited sin is presented. It means that a judgment is pronounced on men in their being as such--a judgment which is certainly shaped by human reality but which is possible only in the light of Christ."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 310. "At this point ἐπιθυμία is not to be taken as merely a specifically carnal, i.e., sexual desire, but in a more comprehensive sense (πάσα ἐπιθυμία) as the yearning of man, kindled by the Law but opposed to it, for self-assertion against the claim of God."

<sup>11</sup> Herman Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, Law, in Bible Key Words, translated from the German by Dorothea M. Barton,



by the commandment, the nature of sin becomes manifest. It asserts itself and will not submit. The extent of its perversion is shown by the fact that it uses God's holy law to achieve its ends.

In Romans 7 sin can be defined as rebellion against God that is manifested by sin's refusal to submit to God's law. This definition seems to contradict the understanding of sin gained by Paul as the result of his conversion experience. For in that meeting with Christ, Paul had come to know sin as opposition against God that shows itself in zealous pursuit of righteousness under law. This contradiction is, however, more apparent than real. In both cases sin is rebellious opposition to God's will, and God's will is always found in the law. In his case against righteousness based on law, Paul does not condemn the law. Instead, he puts the law into its proper position (Rom. 3:31). He does this by insisting that the function of the law is not to produce righteousness but to reveal sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Paul, therefore, puts the law into the position of sin-revealer. It is this understanding of the law that Paul upholds, and he does so not only with his doctrines of law and sin but also with the good news of justification by grace through faith. Paul's view of the law teaches that law makes sin known as rebellious opposition to God. Because the wages of sin is death, death must be the reward of the man who is exposed as a sinner by the law. Paul's



gospel does not overthrow or disregard this understanding of the law. Instead, his gospel announces that the sinner, who must die, does die with Christ and is therefore freed from sin (Rom 6:6; 7:1-6). Those, however, who seek to gain God's favor with works of law do disregard the true function of the law. They do not submit to the law as it reveals sin. Therefore, in their misuse of the law they are in rebellion against God.



## CHAPTER IV

### MAN IN ROMANS 7

Having described the meaning of the terms law and sin as they are used by Paul in Romans 7, it is now necessary to examine Paul's concept of man as he is confronted by the requirements of law and is taken captive by sin. In this examination our concern is not with anthropology as such, but with the anthropological terminology used in Romans 7 in connection with law and sin. Since it has been suggested that the connection between law and sin and the anthropological terminology used in Romans 7 are based on either the rabbinic doctrine of the two impulses or Hellenistic dualism, these claims will be evaluated. Finally, this chapter will deal with the problem of identifying the "I" in Romans 7:7-25 and its significance for the proper understanding of Romans 7.

Paul was not interested in anthropology as such. Paul's special revelation from God dealt with God and his dealings with men. Therefore, when Paul talks about man, he presents a picture of man in relationship to God. In seeking to express the relationship between God and man as he had come to understand it as a Christian, Paul chose terminology from various sources. His concern was not with the background of the words he chose, but with the accuracy and clarity with



which they would convey the message he had to proclaim.<sup>1</sup>

For Paul, man, for one thing, is σάρξ. Paul uses this term with a variety of connotations. Flesh may refer to man in a physical sense. This physical sense is of primary importance in determining the exact meaning of flesh even in its derived and developed usage.<sup>2</sup> Starting with flesh as the equivalent of the Hebrew בָּשָׂר, Paul develops the term flesh and uses it to convey his theological message about the relationship between God and man.<sup>3</sup> Whether Paul uses flesh in a strictly physical sense or in its developed theological sense, he does so with reference to the whole man as he relates to the world in which we live (Rom. 7:18; II Cor. 4:11, 7:5; Eph. 5:29).<sup>4</sup>

The primary meaning of flesh is "the material that covers the bones of a human or an animal body."<sup>5</sup> Paul uses σάρξ both in this basic sense<sup>6</sup> and in a number of related

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<sup>1</sup>W. David Stacey, The Pauline View of Man (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd.), p. 238.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 154, 156.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 750.

<sup>6</sup>Stacey, p. 154: "Paul does not, however, use σάρξ, but κρέας and βρώμα when he is discussing the eating of meat in Rom. 14 and I Cor. 8, which suggests that σάρξ was not merely a substance but a substance animated and alive."



ways to refer to man in his corporeal and therefore limited existence.<sup>7</sup>

In the primary sense of flesh, the flesh of man can be distinguished from that of animals, birds, and fish (I Cor. 15:39). A man is circumcised in his flesh (Eph. 2:11; Col. 2:13; Gal. 6:13). A face-to-face meeting of two people is one that takes place in the flesh (Col. 2:1). Persons who join in sexual union become one flesh (I Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31). Flesh can be used in the sense of the body viewed as substance (II Cor. 7:1; Col. 2:5; I Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31).<sup>8</sup> "All flesh" means all men as human beings (Rom. 3:20; I Cor. 1:29; Gal. 2:16). Human beings, who are flesh and blood, are distinguished from God and other supernatural beings (Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12; I Cor. 15:50).

Flesh, secondly, is used to refer to man in his physical relationships. For example, Paul can refer to Abraham as his forefather and Israel as his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom. 4:1, 9:3, 11:14; cf. I Cor. 10:18). It is according to the flesh that Christ is a descendant of David and a member of the Jewish race (Rom. 1:3, 9:5). The phrase "according to the flesh" can also be used to refer to the temporal and external standards and circumstances of man which are determined

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<sup>7</sup>Werner Georg Klummel, Man in the New Testament, translated from the German by John J. Vincent (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1963), p. 41. Stacey, p. 157.

<sup>8</sup>Bauer, pp. 750, 751.



by his own nature or by the world in which he lives (I Cor. 1:26; II Cor. 5:16, 11:18; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; Rom. 2:28).<sup>9</sup> Man as flesh is subject to the physical weaknesses and limitations of his situation. He suffers tribulations and afflictions and is exposed to death in his flesh (I Cor. 7:28; Col. 1:24; II Cor. 4:11). The most important limitation of man as flesh is his inability to understand the things of the spirit (Rom. 6:19; I Cor. 3:3).<sup>10</sup>

After having begun with the physical meaning of flesh and having used it in its Old Testament sense to denote man in his weaknesses and limitations,<sup>11</sup> Paul uses flesh in a derived theological sense that is unique. In its theological sense, flesh is used of man in his rebellion against God (Rom. 8:6,7; Gal. 5:16). This use of the term is not the result of a metaphysical or anthropological dualism in Paul.<sup>12</sup> It is, rather, the consequence of the certain fact of justification by grace alone through faith in Christ

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 751.

<sup>10</sup> Stacey, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 161, 162: Note Stacey's footnotes for list of men who acknowledge the Hebrew basis of the Pauline development of the use of σάρξ. The recognition of the Hebrew origin of Pauline usage of the term prevents the dualistic interpretation which could easily be inferred if Galatians 5:16 or Romans 8:6 are considered the bases of the Pauline concept of σάρξ.

<sup>12</sup> D. E. H. Whiteley, The Theology of St. Paul (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c.1964), pp. 32, 40. Kummel, pp. 41, 42.



(Rom. 3:21ff., 8:7-10; Gal. 5:5,6).<sup>13</sup> To be at odds with God's gracious activity is to be in the flesh (Rom. 7:5, 8:9). Therefore, any attempt to achieve the righteousness of God by works of law is a work of the flesh (Phil. 3:3-9; Gal. 3:3).<sup>14</sup>

Although flesh, like sin, can be in rebellion against God, flesh is not to be equated with sin. Rather, it is in

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<sup>13</sup>Kümmel, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1951), I, 240: "To the category of conduct 'according to the flesh' belongs above all zealous fulfillment of the Torah; it does so because a man supposes he can thereby achieve righteousness before God by his own strength. The Galatian Christians who want to adopt the Torah and be circumcised are indignantly asked: 'Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?'--ending, that is, not in sensual passions but in observance of the Torah (Gal. 3:3). In fact, not only zeal for the Law but also pride in all the pious Israelite's merits and titles of honor belongs to the attitude of flesh--or, the Torah and the merits and dignities of Israel fall within the concept 'flesh' as belonging to the sphere of the visibly occurring and the historically demonstrable (Phil. 3:3-7). This passage makes it especially clear that the attitude which orients itself by 'flesh,' living out of 'flesh,' is the self-reliant attitude of the man who puts his trust in his own strength and in that which is controllable by him. For the renunciation of this attitude means, according to Phil. 3:9, renunciation of one's own righteousness; and according to Rom. 10:3, the basic sin of the Jews is that they want--even though motivated by 'zeal for God'--to establish 'their own righteousness.'" Eduard Schweizer and others, Spirit of God, in Bible Key Words, translated from the German by A. E. Harvey (London: Adam and Charles Black, c.1960), IX, 73: "Now iii. 3[Gal. 3:3] states that the Galatians, having begun 'in the Spirit' (πνεύματι) were wanting to end 'in the flesh' (σάρκι); this means, in the first place, that they wanted to continue with their own human strength. This is correct, but still inadequate; for 'flesh' corresponds to 'works of the law,' ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, Spirit to 'hearing of the faith,' ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, iii. 2, 5."



and through his flesh that sin attacks and dominates a man.<sup>15</sup> This can easily be misunderstood to mean that sin works simply in the realm of physical lusts, passions, and desires of a man. For Paul, however, the works of the flesh include such unphysical activities as idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, and party spirit (Gal. 5:20; cf. Rom. 1:29-31). It must be remembered that, for Paul, man's fleshly existence included his whole orientation to the world in which he lives. That means that when sin assaults man in his flesh it is attacking him through his orientation to the world in which he lives. And this world, set in order by God, is one of law and legal principles with which all men are familiar and to which they respond (Rom. 2:12-16). Because the world of the flesh is ordered by law, sin has, in the law, an instrument that is particularly well suited for its assault on the flesh. Once sin has enslaved a man, its domination is expressed in all the relationships of his fleshly existence. In other words, when a man is in a state of rebellion against God, his hostility will show itself in rebellious and sinful actions and attitudes. In Romans 1:29-31 and Galatians 5:19-21 Paul lists sins that result from the root sin of enmity toward God./

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<sup>15</sup> W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: SPCK, c.1948), p. 19.



Flesh is the antithesis of spirit, as far as Paul is concerned.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to examine Paul's use of the term spirit. Spirit is applied to God (Rom. 8:9, 13; II Cor. 3:3), to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5, 9:1, 14:17, 15:16), and to the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; II Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6). It is with reference to God that spirit is used in Romans 7:6. The term can also refer to the results of the work of the divine spirit. It is in this second sense that those who are led through the Spirit of God can be said to have received the spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:14,15; cf. Eph. 1:17; I Cor. 2:4, 4:21; II Cor. 4:13).<sup>17</sup> Because man is a living soul he has a spirit of his own. When the spirit of man is used with flesh, it refers to the immaterial<sup>18</sup> but morally neutral part of the human personality (II Cor. 7:1; Col. 2:5). Spirit can also refer to the spirit of a man who is animated by the spirit of God (Rom. 8:10,16; I Cor. 2:11).

The distinguishing characteristic of spirit in Paul is that spirit is used to describe God. All the other ways in which Paul uses the term are affected by this usage.<sup>19</sup> It is spirit "which differentiates God from everything that is not God."<sup>20</sup> The fact that spirit differentiates God from

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<sup>16</sup>Kümmel, p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>Stacey, p. 132. Stacey says that these first two uses are paralleled by the use of πνεῦμα to refer to evil spirits and the results of their work. In this connection he makes an allusion to Romans 8:15, but does not cite it, nor does he discuss either of these two uses with references to biblical texts elsewhere in the chapter. Ibid., pp. 128, 129.

<sup>18</sup>Bauer, p. 681.

<sup>19</sup>Stacey, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup>Bauer, p. 682.



everything that is not God explains the antithesis between spirit and flesh in Paul. This is true because as far as Paul is concerned flesh is not only different from God, it is in active rebellion against God (Rom. 8:4-13; Gal. 5:16,17).<sup>21</sup> The antithesis between flesh and spirit is evident even in Paul's anthropological use of the terms. For as sin assaults man through his flesh, so the spirit of God contacts a man in his spirit (Rom. 8:15, 16; I Cor. 2:11).<sup>22</sup> It is in the light of the antithesis between flesh and spirit that πνευματικός and σαρκινός in Romans 7:14 are to be understood. The law is πνευματικός because it is God's law. He has given it to his people and it expresses his will.<sup>23</sup> But the ἐγὼ is σαρκινός, "of the realm of the flesh,"<sup>24</sup> because it serves the law of sin (Rom. 7:25).

Having examined Paul's use of the terms flesh and spirit, we have considered the two most important anthropological terms used by Paul. There are, however, three other anthropological terms in Romans 7 that we must investigate: σῶμα, τοῦς and ὁ ἕσω ἄνθρωπος .

Paul uses the term σῶμα in a number of ways. It is not,

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<sup>21</sup>Stacey, pp. 157, 158.

<sup>22</sup>Schweizer, p. 86: "Where he does actually mention the idea of an 'organ' which receives the Spirit of God, he also calls it "spirit" and expressly describes it as something not belonging to man but given to him by God (Rom. viii. 15-16; I Cor. ii. 11)."

<sup>23</sup>Stacey, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup>Bauer, p. 750.



however, necessary to examine the entire concept of body in Paul to determine how the word is used in its two occurrences in Romans 7. For Paul, body can be synonymous with flesh (I Cor. 5:3; Col. 2:5). Both terms can refer to the whole human being and can be equivalent to the use of the personal pronoun (Rom. 6:13, 12:1).<sup>25</sup> The body, like flesh, is prone to sin (Rom. 8:13) and is described as mortal (Rom. 6:12, 8:11). The similarity between body and flesh is reflected in Romans 7:24 where "Paul can speak of a 'body of death' (Rom. 7:24), showing that  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha$ , meaning man as flesh, involves all the sin and corruption connected with  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\iota$ ."<sup>26</sup> In the other occurrence of body in Romans 7, the context makes it clear that the "body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4) is a reference to Christ's physical body and not the Church (cf. Rom. 6:1-11).<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that although the body is vulnerable to sin and subject to death, the body is not essentially evil. The fact that Paul conceives of Christ as having a body is a strong argument against any dualistic significance of Paul's use of body. The body is not to be despised as a corrupt element of man. Paul does not teach the Greek idea that the body is an evil shell or prison in which the soul of a man is held captive.<sup>28</sup> For Paul the body is, rather, the whole man

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<sup>25</sup> Stacey, p. 183.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> Bauer, p. 807.

<sup>28</sup> Bultmann, p. 201.



organized for action. It is in this sense that the body is to be presented to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 8:1-11, 12:1; I Cor. 6:13,20; Phil. 1:20).<sup>29</sup>

Paul uses the term  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  in Romans 7:23,25. This term is used of the rational and intellectual side of man.<sup>30</sup> Mind is a universal human possession. Although it is morally neutral, the mind may come under the power of sin (Rom. 1:28), or it may be renewed and brought into God's service (Rom. 12:2).<sup>31</sup> In I Corinthians 14:19 Paul indicates that a man's spirit and his mind are not to be equated.<sup>32</sup>

The only remaining anthropological term in Romans 7 is a reference to the inner man in Romans 7:22. Bauer in his discussion of  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  suggests that in Romans 7:22  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  equals  $\delta\ \epsilon\iota\omega\ \alpha\ \nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ .<sup>33</sup> Such an interpretation would agree with Kümmel's conclusion that "Paul knows no human inner life related to God but only the complete man, who is sarx, soma, psuche, etc., and wholly stands over

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<sup>29</sup>Stacey, p. 186.

<sup>30</sup>Bauer, p. 546. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, The Epistle to the Romans (Seventh Edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), p. 46: " $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  = the reasoning faculty, esp. as concerned with moral action, the intellectual part of conscience."

<sup>31</sup>Bauer, p. 546, suggests that this renewing of the mind takes place when the natural  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  of a man is penetrated and transformed by the spirit in baptism.

<sup>32</sup>Whiteley, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup>Bauer, p. 546.



against God."<sup>34</sup> However, under his discussion of *ἄνθρωπος* Bauer suggests that *ὁ ἕως ἄνθρωπος* means "man in his spiritual, immortal aspects, striving toward God" (Rom. 7:22).<sup>35</sup> Because the inner man's delight in the law can best be understood as the way in which the mind serves the law, we conclude that the terms mind and inner man in Romans 7:21-25 are to be considered synonymous.

Our investigation of the anthropological terms in Romans 7 has shown that the Pauline man is a man of flesh, spirit, body, mind, and inner man.<sup>36</sup> For Paul, these terms do not describe parts of man, but man as he functions in different relationships of life. Underlying all of man's life is the antithesis between flesh and spirit. It has been suggested that this antithesis between flesh and spirit is derived from either the Jewish doctrine of the two impulses or from Hellenistic dualism. Since this antithesis is involved in the relationship between law and sin presented in Romans 7, it is necessary to evaluate these suggestions.

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<sup>34</sup> Kummel, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Bauer, p. 68. J. Jeremias, "*ἄνθρωπος*, *ἄνθρώπινος*," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated from the German and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c.1964), I, 365: agrees that *ὁ ἕως ἄνθρωπος* means all men even non-Christians (Rom. 7:22) "according to their Godward, immortal side."

<sup>36</sup> These are not the only anthropological terms used by Paul, but they are the only anthropological terms he uses in connection with the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7.



W. D. Davies claims that there is a direct connection between the rabbinic doctrine of the two impulses and Romans 7.<sup>37</sup> According to the doctrine of the two impulses, a man has two opposing inclinations located somewhere in his body. One impulse is good, the other evil. The evil impulse urges man to commit all sorts of sins. It is the moral task of man to control and subdue his evil inclination. God gave the Torah to help man in his task. If man studies Torah and does what it commands, the evil impulse will have little power over him.<sup>38</sup> Davies feels that this juxtaposition of the evil impulse and the Torah as the divine remedy is reproduced in Paul's antithesis between flesh and spirit.<sup>39</sup> However, Porter concludes that "the parallelism between his [Paul's] contrast of spirit and flesh and the rabbinical contrast of the good and evil impulses is remote and insignificant."<sup>40</sup> This conclusion appears to be more consistent with the discussion of the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7 than is Davies' suggestion. First of all, there is no struggle between flesh and spirit in Romans 7.

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<sup>37</sup> Davies, p. 23. At the end of his discussion of the relationship between the Jewish doctrine of the two impulses and Romans 7 Davies says, "We may assume then that in Romans 7 Paul reflects and possibly actually has in mind the doctrine of the Two Impulses." Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> Davies, pp. 21, 22. Frank Chamberlin Porter, Biblical and Semitic Studies: Critical and Historical Essays by Members of the Semitic and Biblical Faculty of Yale University (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1901), pp. 132-134.

<sup>39</sup> Davies, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Porter, p. 134. Porter continues, "Of course Paul in



The conflict that is presented in verses 7-25 is not between flesh and spirit but between what a man knows with his mind to be the will of God and the evil he serves in his flesh. Secondly, Paul conceives of sin not only as breaking a command of the law, but as total rebellion against God. This rebellion is manifested particularly in man's attempts to do the works of the law. Paul's concept of sin, therefore, rules out any attempt to make amends for sinful acts by fulfilling the law.<sup>41</sup> Thirdly, Paul does not conceive of the law as the remedy for the problem of evil. Used by sin the law becomes an instrument that brings about man's death instead of protecting him.<sup>42</sup> For Paul the law does not deliver from sin; it reveals sin. It is, therefore, highly improbable that there is any significant connection between the rabbinic doctrine of the two impulses and the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7.

The assertions that the flesh-spirit antithesis in Paul is an expression of Hellenistic dualism is equally groundless.

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Romans 7 is describing the same experience of struggle between two opposing forces in man upon which the Jewish doctrine rests, but his way of expressing the struggle as a war between the law (of sin) in his members, and the law of his mind (*νοῦς*), or between that which he possesses and does in his flesh and in his mind, is widely different from the Jewish conception, and seems to rest on a different view of the world and of man."

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Herman Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, Law, in Bible Key Words, translated from the German by Dorothea M. Barton, edited by P. R. Ackroyd (London: Adam & Charles Black, c.1962), XI, 112.

<sup>42</sup>Franz J. Leenhardt, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1961), p. 187.



In Greek thought the body and the soul were the opposing elements in man. It is true that Paul uses these terms of Greek dualism, but he does not use them in a dualistic way. For Paul, body and soul are not two mutually exclusive and opposing elements of man. Instead he uses both terms to refer to the whole man (Rom. 12:1, 13:1).<sup>43</sup> Paul can also employ both terms in connection with doing evil (Rom. 2:9, 8:13). The fact that Paul did not despise the body as evil nor honor the soul as good is illustrated in Romans 12:1 and 13:1. One would expect a dualist to devote the soul to God, but in Romans 12:1 Paul says that his readers are to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God, while in Romans 13:1 he uses the term soul in exhorting his readers to be subject to temporal authorities.

Just as Paul does not teach dualism with his use of the terms body and soul, neither is this Greek philosophical idea reflected in his antithesis of flesh and spirit. Man's spirit is not free from defilement (II Cor. 7:1) because it is immaterial. Nor is flesh in rebellion against God because it is material. Rather, flesh is in rebellion because it is enslaved by sin. If one were to find a dualism in Paul, one would expect a contrast between spirit and sin, since these are really the forces engaged in conflict. Paul's failure to develop the antithesis between spirit and sin is difficult to explain if it is assumed that Paul proposes to present a

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<sup>43</sup>Whiteley, p. 37. Bultmann, p. 201.



dualistic position.<sup>44</sup>

Having investigated the anthropological terms in Romans 7 and having shown that Paul's antithesis of flesh and spirit reflects neither the rabbinic doctrine of the two impulses nor Hellenistic dualism, we are now confronted with one of the most perplexing problems in Romans 7. Who is the "I" referred to in Romans 7:7-25? The answer to this question has been disputed from the time of the fathers to the present day.<sup>45</sup> Today the answers that are given are: (1) that the "I" is a stylistic device used by Paul to speak of the non-Christians as they are viewed by a Christian; (2) that the "I" refers to Paul before his conversion in Romans 7:7-13 and to Paul the Christian in verses 14-25; (3) that the "I" refers to a man who is trying to live the good life but is doing so under his own strength.<sup>46</sup> We do not propose to choose among these three alternatives nor to propose our own answer to the question of who is the "I" in Romans 7. We suggest, rather, that to raise this question is not only extraneous to the interpretation of Romans 7 but is actually misleading. By honoring this question with an answer one implies that the situation described applies to

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<sup>44</sup>Stacey, p. 176.

<sup>45</sup>See Kümmel, pp. 51-53, for an extensive bibliography on this subject.

<sup>46</sup>C. L. Mitton, "Romans 7 Reconsidered," Expository Times, LXV (1953-54), p. 135.



some people and not to others, while in fact it applies to every man. In Romans 7 Paul is not discussing anthropology; he is presenting his view of law and its relationship to sin.<sup>47</sup> The relationship that Paul says exists between law and sin is dependent on Paul's concept of law as requirement and his concept of sin as rebellion. It is a relationship that exists independently of the personal history of a man that comes into contact with the law. The unchanging nature of this reaction of sin to the law stresses the fact that for Paul a man's righteousness before God is always apart from the works of the law. The concluding chapter of this paper will describe this relationship between law and sin in detail.

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<sup>47</sup>Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Harvard Theological Review, LVI (July 1963), p. 212.



## CHAPTER V

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW AND SIN IN ROMANS 7

We have suggested that the question of the identity of the "I" in Romans 7 is misleading. The basis for that suggestion is the fact that in Romans 7 the relationship between law and sin is dependent on Paul's concept of law and his understanding of the nature of sin. In chapter two of this thesis we found that the basic element in Paul's concept of law is his awareness that law establishes relationships in terms of requirements. Our investigation has shown that Paul understands sin as rebellion against God. Since the nature of both law and sin is most clearly seen when they relate to one another, the answer to the question, "What is the relationship between law and sin in Romans 7?" has been answered in part by chapters two, three, and four of this paper. It is now our purpose to bring all these parts together with a view to presenting a unified answer to the question we formulated at the outset.

In presenting the relationship between law and sin we must start with the question with which Paul begins. Are law and sin to be equated (Rom. 7:7)? Paul's answer is an emphatic, "No!" The law does not equal sin. Nor does the law have a sinful purpose. Law and sin, by definition, stand in opposition to each other. Law for Paul is the expression of God's will, while sin is rebellion against Him. It is,



however, in the opposition of law to sin that the first point of contact is established.

Law opposes sin. In its specific commands, law forbids action that is contrary to the will of God. The command, "You shall not covet," is a case in point (Rom. 7:7). If the law were successful in restraining sin with its prohibitions, our discussion of the relationship between sin and law could end right here. But Paul does not say that the law prevents sin. On the contrary, he says that the law makes known both the phenomenon and the power of sin.

The law reveals sin. Paul puts it this way in Romans 7:7: "Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin." These words by themselves could mean a number of things. They could suggest that it is possible with the statement of the will of God in the law to evaluate one's actions and to determine what is in opposition to God's will. This interpretation would serve as an explanation of Romans 4:15 and 5:13, but would not do justice to the context of Romans 7:7. In Romans 7:7-25 Paul uses a specific case to illustrate what is meant by the phrase, "the law makes sin known."

In the example he uses in Romans 7:7-25, Paul explains how sin makes covetousness known. Sin leads man into covetousness through the very command that forbids it. In the commandment, "You shall not covet," sin finds the opportunity required<sup>1</sup> with which to bring about all sorts of covetousness

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New



in man. With this example Paul makes it clear that, when he says that the law makes sin known, he does not mean simply that the law applies the name transgression to an already existent condition. Rather, Paul means that, when sin is confronted with the law, sin produces a situation in which man covets and therefore experiences sin as a reality.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, through the law man comes to know sin not as an observer, but as an active participant in rebellion against God; and that is sin.

When sin uses the law to lead a man into that very covetousness which is forbidden by the law, sin is made known for what it is. Sin is made known not only in the sense that man experiences it, but also in the sense that through sin's use of the law the nature of sin is exposed as rebellion against God. Sin is revealed as rebellion by its use, or rather its misuse, of the law. When sin perverts the uses of the law to accomplish in man the very covetousness the law forbids, sin cannot be defined merely in terms of "weakness," or "ignorance," or "failure," or "missing the mark." Sin is exposed as rebellion by the fact that it perverts God's law and bends it to its own insurgent purposes.

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Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1957), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>Herman Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, Law, in Bible Key Words, translated from the German by Dorothea M. Barton, edited by P. R. Ackroyd (London: Adam and Charles Black, c.1962), XI, 111.



Sin can use the law to lead man into rebellion in either or both of two ways, depending on man's response to the law. Both situations, however, lead to rebellion against God and are therefore deadly for man. In either case sin uses the law to incite to rebellion and in so doing uses the law to increase sin (cf. Rom. 5:20). By using the law to incite to rebellion, sin is increased in two ways: (1) The sinfulness of sin is increased, because in the presence of the law sin becomes open rebellion against the known will of God. (2) Sin uses the law to increase sin also in the sense that sin uses the law to make man sin more.

The first and most obvious way in which sin incites a man to rebellion against God is that it leads man to see the law as a threat to his autonomy. What such a man views as an imposition serves as a reminder to him of his creatureliness. Rather than submit to the law and admit to his own limitations as a human being, this man rebels. He refuses to acknowledge God as creator. Such a picture of rebellion is vividly depicted in Romans 1:18-32. Although the rebellious men in Romans 1 know the requirement of God, they refuse to obey God's demand (Rom. 1:32). To obey would be to acknowledge God's right to require. And such obedience would shatter man's intent to assume the role of God.

In this description of sin using the law to incite to rebellion there is little of the deception that Paul speaks of in Romans 7:11. There is no picture here of the law promising life but leading to death. The law promises only



death to the man who refuses to do what it commands. The deceptiveness of sin is more evident in the second way in which law incites to rebellion.

Sin uses God's law to incite to rebellion even the man who delights in the law. It is against such a law-loving man that sin uses the law's promise of life to deceive man and lead him to death. This is the approach that sin uses to attack a man who does not rebel immediately against the command of the law.

It is obvious that Paul felt there were such men who delighted in the law. The Jews in general and Paul, in particular, as a Pharisee, felt that the law was God's gracious remedy that man was to use to control his own evil impulses. The Jews considered the law a yoke, but a yoke with a life-giving purpose. Indeed, this must have been the response to the law that Paul expected of any man who would seek to achieve God's righteousness by works of the law. Such a man would not rebel against the law; he would delight in the fact that he knew with certainty exactly what God expected of him. This is also the reaction of the man in Romans 7:13-25. But even the man who delights in the law as a revelation of the will of God is trapped by sin's misuse of the law. Even though it takes a more devious route, sin uses the same law that forbids covetousness to create covetousness in the man who delights in the law.

The way in which sin deceives the man who delights in the law is effective and therefore deadly for man. The man



who delights in the law knows that the law is good, and he wants to do the good. But even though he wants to do what God's law requires, he finds himself unable to do it. He can acknowledge that the law is spiritual, he can delight in that law according to his inner man, he can serve it with his mind; but he cannot do what it requires. And the reason he cannot do what he wants to do is the fact that he serves the law of sin in his flesh (Rom. 7:25).

Man's response to the command that forbids covetousness will serve as a case in point. The man who acknowledges the law as the gift of God will see God's will in this particular command against self-assertion.<sup>3</sup> He can acknowledge it as God's will and he can want to do it, but in fact he ends up asserting himself. In other words, sin has used the law that forbids covetousness to produce covetousness in man.

The very desire for self-assertion is kindled by the same law that forbids it. This happens because man is flesh; and as flesh he is oriented to a world ruled by law, which not only requires and demands but also affords opportunity to obtain merit. The idea of merit or credit resulting from obedience to obligation is as natural a part of man as is the worldly order in which he lives as flesh.<sup>4</sup> Since the

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<sup>3</sup>Supra, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Franz J. Leenhardt, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, c.1961), p. 196: "Every man, whether he be faced by the law of Moses, or by the 'moral law' or by any other law whatever (ecclesiastical, sociological, etc.) finds in the implied idea of



demands of the law are God's requirements, it would follow that man has a claim upon God. Man shows his self-assertiveness in presenting his merit as a claim against God. In this way sin uses the commandment that forbids covetousness to create inordinate desire even in the man who delights in the law. In the process sin reveals once more its own nature as rebellion against God.

Because of the ways in which the law makes sin known as rebellion, the weakness of the law is also revealed. Since sin misuses the law, the law is not able to produce the obedience it expects. The fact that sin's perversion of the law exposes the weakness of the law does not negate the law or free a man from the obligation to do what the law commands. On the contrary, this fact only makes clear the hopelessness of man under the law. The fact that sin can use the law to subject man to sin's power rules out every attempt of man to obtain the righteousness of God by works of law. The effect of Paul's discussion of the relationship between law and sin, therefore, is to underscore the fact that a man needs to be justified by grace through faith if he is to be saved.

So far in our discussion of the relationship between law and sin we have seen that the law forbids sin, the law

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obligation the basis of a 'right' and the opportunity to attain 'merit,' i.e. a claim to divine favour. He justifies himself by what he does. His obedience is an entitlement to be shown to God. He cherishes the sentiment which lies at the root of all sin: pride."



reveals sin, the law increases sin, the law produces sin and that by sin's misuse of the law the weakness of the law is made known. In Romans 7:23,25 Paul calls this entire set of circumstances "the law of sin." That is to say, the relationship described in Romans 7:7-25 is a description of the way in which law and sin interact when they meet in a living human being. Because the interaction between sin and law is dependent upon the nature of sin as sin and law as law, the relationship between the two is not subject to change.

Having said that the reaction between law and sin as they meet in man is the law of sin which is not subject to change, we have stated only what might be called the negative aspect of this law. But the positive aspect of the law of sin is also presented in Romans 7, and it, too, deals with the relationship between law and sin. Therefore, we must consider the positive side of the law of sin before we can conclude our discussion.

The positive aspect of the law of sin is that "apart from the law, sin lies dead" (Rom. 7:8). In other words, where there is no law, sin cannot use the law to kill man. After Paul's indictment of all men in Romans 1:18-3:19 it is hard to conceive of there being any man who is not under law. A man who acts as if the demands of God did not apply to him is not apart from law (Rom. 1:32). In his case, sin is actually using law to lead man into rebellion. Nor could the Jew in any sense be considered apart from law (Rom. 2:17-25).



For Paul the only man over whom the law has no jurisdiction is a dead man (Rom. 7:1-6).

As we have said before,<sup>5</sup> to be apart from law is the equivalent of being in a state of grace. A Christian, therefore, is apart from law and, for that reason, sin cannot use the law to deceive and kill the Christian. But having made this bold assertion that a Christian is apart from law we must now qualify our statement by indicating in what sense it is that a Christian is apart from law. A Christian is not apart from the law in the sense that he can act as if the law did not exist. Nor can the Christian despise the law as if the coming of Christ made the law and its commands less holy, just, and good than they actually are. Such a response on the part of the Christian would be another way in which sin uses the law to create in man a state of rebellion against God. The Christian is apart from law in the sense that he is dead. The Christian has died with Christ and is therefore discharged from the law (Rom. 7:1-6; cf. 6:1-14). The man who is dead in Christ is truly alive because he is apart from the law (Rom. 7:10).

Our examination of the relationship between law and sin has led us to the conclusion that Paul's discussion of the law of sin in Romans 7 is an important step in Paul's presentation of the message of justification by grace through faith. The discussion of law in Romans 7 explains why it is that the law can never produce the righteousness that God expects. When Romans 7 is understood as a

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<sup>5</sup> Supra, p. 21.



theological description of the interaction between law and sin rather than a psychological or anthropological picture of man, the chapter is clearly an integral part of Paul's development of the theme of Romans--that man is justified by grace through faith.



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