



A GUIDE TO GODLINESS

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1,2).

Our opening text provides us with all the motivation we need to “live soberly, righteously, and *godly*, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). If the Lord Jesus Christ died for us, it is only “*reasonable*” that we should live for Him! But how are we to do this? In the present series of articles, we hope to provide the reader with God’s own instructions as to how to live a godly life.

Bible students know that Romans 9-11 are parenthetical, and so our opening text in Romans 12:1,2 actually comes on the heels of the doctrine taught in Romans 6-8. And so while the *motivation* of a godly walk is found in Romans 12:1,2, we believe the *mechanics* of how to live a godly life are found in these previous chapters. And so we plan to examine this passage in detail, for we believe an understanding of Romans 6-8 provides a believer with God’s own guide to godliness.

After declaring man’s sinfulness and need of a Savior in Romans 1-3, the Apostle Paul clearly establishes how the Lord Jesus Christ paid for all of our sins on Calvary’s cross in Romans 3-5, and affirms that we can be saved from our sins by simple “*faith in His blood*” (Rom. 3:25). After concluding this discussion in Romans 5, Paul then asks,

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1).

“What shall we say then” to *what*? Why, to being saved from all our sins, past, present and future! Paul knew that the natural reaction to such grace is to think that we can now sin with impunity, and so anticipates this faulty reasoning and deals with it here. But before going into a detailed refutation of such a thought, Paul’s initial response is to burst out an exclamation:

“God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2).

After Paul’s outburst fully expresses his revulsion at such a thought, he immediately settles in to responding to this question in a definitive manner. His words *“How shall we”* seem to argue, “After all God has done for us, in freeing us from sin, how can we even *think* of grieving Him by continuing in sin?”

This is called Grace motivation. God does not tell us, as He told Israel, “If you are good I will bless you.” That’s Law motivation, the “carrot and stick” approach, and it does not work in the present dispensation of grace! God rather tells us, “I have *already* blessed you (Eph. 1:3), now won’t you *walk worthy* of My blessing? (Eph. 4:1).”

We see an illustration of this kind of motivation in Genesis 39. When Joseph was tempted to sin with his master’s wife, he spoke of all that his master had done for him and then asked, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (v. 9). Joseph could have rationalized, “I’m far from home. Who’s going to know?” Or, “God seems to have forsaken me anyway, in allowing me to be enslaved. I don’t owe Him anything!” Despite his difficult life, he instead remained loyal to the master who had so blessed him, and we should do the same!

If we were to hear of a drunkard who continued to drink after receiving a new liver, we would be outraged. We should be similarly outraged at the thought of continuing in sin after God has given us a new *heart*.

We might compare our situation to the foreign diplomats in Washington D.C., who have what is called “diplomatic immunity,” and cannot be prosecuted for breaking our laws. Because of this, we are outraged when occasionally we hear of one who has flagrantly broken our laws, simply because he is immune from prosecution. Believers saved by grace have similar immunity to the eternal condemning power of the Law of Moses, and it is outrageous for us to consider committing the sins for which God will punish unbelievers in Hell for all eternity. Speaking of the sins that he enumerates in Ephesians 5:3-5, Paul goes on to say,

“...because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

“Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Eph. 5:6,7).

Grace is *not* a license to sin, although many Christians are deceived by “vain words” saying that it is (Eph. 5:6). This is similar to the “lying words” Jeremiah warned Israel about:

“Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.

“Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely...

“And come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations” (Jer. 7:8-10).

Liars were telling Israel that the sacrifices they brought to the house of God delivered them so they could continue in sin. God’s real purpose in giving Israel these things was to provide them with a safety net, in case they fell into sin. But in response to these lying words, they had begun to

use their safety net as a *hammock*, lounging comfortable in the sins for which innocent animals had died.

It reminds us of how our welfare system is similarly designed as a safety net for our people, in case they fall upon hard times. There are many words that people use to describe those who use this safety net as a hammock, and none of those words are very flattering. God forbid that *we* who are saved by the blood of *Christ* should ever consider using that precious blood as a hammock to lounge comfortably in iniquity.

May we rather be found as a people who fervently serve the Lord even though we know we are eternally secure. Men also have words for the boss's son who works fervidly even though he knows he cannot be fired, and all of these words are very becoming. May these be the words used to describe each of us as eternally-secure believers!

It is human nature to want to sin, for even beside our natural bent to transgress God's laws, sin is the one thing we cannot have as believers, and men always seem to want most what they cannot have! Adam was king of the world, but wanted the fruit of the one tree he could not have. Ahab owned many lands as king of Israel, but wanted the *one* land that the Law wouldn't allow him to have (I Kings 21:1-16). And as the king's son, Amnon was Israel's most eligible bachelor and could have had any woman in the kingdom, but wanted the *one* woman he couldn't have (II Sam. 13:1-4). Well do these examples of human nature illustrate how as the King's sons, *God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy"* (I Tim. 6:17), and yet we long for the *one* thing we cannot have, *sin!*

This is *natural*, but "the natural man" is not a good thing in Scripture (I Cor. 2:14)! When they were hungry, it was natural for Israel to remember the good things they had to eat in Egypt, and to forget how miserable their lives were as slaves to Pharaoh. Likewise it is natural for us to remember "the pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25), and to forget that we were slaves or "*servants of sin*" (Rom. 6:17), and how miserable our lives were in those days!

Next, the Apostle goes on to explain exactly what he means when he says here in Verse 2 that we are "dead to sin":

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3).

We are "dead to sin" because we have been baptized into Christ's death. Here the apostle speaks not of *water* baptism, for water baptism does not place us "into Jesus Christ." The core meaning of baptism is *identification*.

In the Bible's very first baptism (I Cor. 10:1,2), Israel wasn't sure if the Red Sea waters might close as mysteriously as they had opened, but they knew for sure what would happen if they tarried for the armies of Pharaoh! In entering the Red Sea they loudly proclaimed, "*We're with Moses!*" and thus *identified themselves* with him. Likewise the Lord's baptism with water *identified* Him as Israel's Messiah (John 1:31). His death was also called a baptism (Luke 12:50) for He was "*numbered with*" or *identified* with "*the transgressors*" (Isa. 53:12; Mark 15:27,28). And when James and John wanted to be identified with the Lord in the glory of His kingdom (Mark 10:35-37), He asked if they were willing to identify themselves with Him first in the suffering of death (v. 38).

And so the baptism of Romans 6:3 is the baptism by which we are identified with Christ the moment we believe the gospel. It is at that moment that we are "*baptized into Jesus Christ*" (cf. I Cor. 12:13). Paul says that as many as have experienced this baptism were also baptized into

His death. And while *water* baptism gives us no power over sin (the subject of this passage) *this* baptism gives us *plenty* of power over sin! Allow us to explain:

Before you were saved you *had* to sin, because *everything you did was sin* in the eyes of God. Even an amoral thing like plowing a field is sin if done by an unbeliever (Prov. 21:4). Even *righteous* works done by unbelievers are considered *self-righteous* “*iniquity*” (Isa. 64:6; Matt. 7:22,23). No wonder Paul says of the unsaved, “there is *none* that doeth good, *no not one*” (Rom. 3:12)!

But while you had to sin before you were saved (because everything you did was sin) *you don't have to sin any more!* Now when you do good works, God sees them as good works! Your baptism into Christ has broken sin's tyrannical power over you, and given *you* power over *it!* What a shame when we fail to *use* our new-found power!

It reminds us of how there was a time in this country when women and African-Americans could not vote. Now that they *can*, it is sad when they *don't*. Similarly, now that we *can* say no to sin, what a shame if we *don't!* Years ago, the National Library Service ran an effective reading campaign that said, “If you *do not* read, you are no better off than one who *cannot* read.” Similarly, if we *do not* avoid sin, we are no better off than the unsaved who *cannot* avoid sin.

The most important thing to remember about our baptism into Christ's death is that *death ends all relationships!* The marriage relationship, the master/slave relationship that was still present in Paul's day, all ended at death. And our baptism into Christ also effectively ends the master-slave relationship we had with sin. Here's how it works.

When the Lord was made sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), sin became His master, as it was once ours, demanding His death, as it once demanded ours. But when He died, He died to sin, and sin no longer has any claim on Him (Rom. 6:4,5). And when we trust Christ, we are baptized into His death, ending *our* master/slave relationship to sin.

“Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

The word “*that*” here indicates that God had a *purpose* in identifying us with Christ in His death and burial. It was so that He might also identify us with Christ in His resurrection! After His resurrection, the Lord began a new life, free from sin, *and so should we!*

The Lord rose from the dead on the eighth day and was given *a new beginning*, and the number “eight” in Scripture is frequently associated with *new beginnings*. God made six days, a day of rest, then determined that on the eighth day we would begin a new week. “Eight souls” (I Pet. 3:20) stepped off the ark after the flood to a new beginning. Eight individuals in the Bible were raised from the dead and given a new beginning. And just as our Lord's resurrection on the eighth day gave *Him* a new beginning, we who are identified with Him in this resurrection are similarly given a new beginning, and encouraged to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4). Oh that the many unbelievers who long to “start all over” in life could know that such an aspiration is not just a fantasy, but can be a reality *in Christ!*

“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

Our burial with Christ was actually a *planting*. Even a suburban-grown boy like this writer knows the difference between *planting* and *burying*. Bad guys *bury* the murder weapon, hoping it will never be found, and the person we used to be was “*buried with Him*” (v. 4), never to rise again.

But farmers *plant* seed, hoping it will *rise again* and bring forth fruit. And so we read here that our burial with Christ was actually a *planting*, for God hopes we will rise again and bring forth fruit unto Him.

We see an illustration of this when God *planted* Israel in Canaan (Isa. 5:1-7), and expelled the “stones” of the Canaanite nations, expecting spiritual fruit from all His efforts in Israel’s behalf (v. 2). When they brought forth only the wild fruit of sin, God was confounded, for He could not have done any more for them than what He did (v. 4). In the same way, God could not have done any more for *us* than what He has done. God forbid that we should bring forth the wild fruit of sin in response to all His efforts on our behalf.

Because we died and were buried with Christ, “we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,” and will rise from the dead physically with Him if the Lord tarries. But why does Paul bring *that* up *here*? Surely because God wants us to live the resurrection life *now*, in *this* life (Phil. 3:11). When we rise from physical death, we won’t sin any more, and God wants us to live that kind of life *now*!

In Acts 1:3 we learn how the Lord spent His earthly resurrection life when we read that He “*shewed Himself alive by many infallible proofs.*” Well, if we are to walk “in the likeness of His resurrection,” we should show ourselves to be *spiritually* alive by many infallible proofs of godliness in our lives, and follow Him in “*speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*” Of course we mean the kingdom proclaimed by Paul, not the kingdom of heaven on earth!

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6).

Many Christians wonder why they still have trouble with their “old man” if Paul says he is crucified. But while Paul says we ourselves “were” baptized into Christ’s death (v. 3,4), past tense, he says our old man “*is*” crucified with Him, *present tense*. Roman crucifixion meant *certain* death, but it never meant *immediate* death. Since anyone freeing a crucified man risked execution himself, death was sure to follow crucifixion. But crucified men often lingered for hours and even days. And so it is with our “old man.” His demise is certain, for death or Rapture will rid us of him forever, but in the meantime he lingers.

But it should encourage the reader to remember that with his hands and feet nailed to a cross, a crucified man was powerless to make anyone do anything. Similarly, our old man has no *power* in our lives to *make* us sin. Crucified men *can*, however, *speak*, and this explains why we still have trouble with our old man. He is not shy about *suggesting* evil at every opportunity, but may God help us to treat him like the impotent influence that he is in our lives.

While the Lord taught that offending eyes should be plucked out and offending hands cut off, this would allow an eye and a hand to remain to continue in sin! What the Lord offers us here through Paul is far better, for our old man is crucified with Christ “that the *body* of sin might be destroyed.”

“For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7).

Death ends all earthly relationships. Because of this, it was the only hope of freedom for slaves in the early days of our country. Imagine Abraham Lincoln’s frustration, however, when after he freed the slaves many of them chose to remain with their masters! Then imagine *God’s* frustration when after Cyrus freed Israel from bondage, only about fifty thousand returned to Israel! (Ezra 2:64,65). Now imagine God’s frustration when “*he that is dead is freed from sin,*” but *continues* in sin!

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:8).

Here Paul speaks of his assurance of our future life of living and reigning with Christ in heaven. Why bring that up? Well, if we *really* believe we will live and reign with Christ, we will live better *now*.

A president who is elected in November doesn't say to himself, "I have two months until I take office, I'd better live it up now, for after that I'll have to behave myself!" If he did, the press would be all over him! In the same way, we who are destined to replace the fallen principalities and powers and rule with Christ in the heavens are "principality-elects." And while we have not yet taken office, we have been elected and should already be reflecting the dignity of our future office *now*, in *this* life.

“Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him.

“For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God.

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:9-11).

The Lord Jesus Christ has not yet taken office, as Satan is still "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). And yet He has already reckoned Himself alive unto God, and is already reflecting the dignity of His future office. Paul here encourages us to reckon the same to be true of ourselves, who died to sin with Him. May we too live unto God!

Notice that God doesn't ask us to die to sin, He simply asks us to reckon we are already dead, which is much easier! Just as it is much easier for contemporary Americans to reckon ourselves dead to England than it was for 1776 Americans who had to actually fight the battle. God does not want us to be like the Japanese soldiers who didn't hear of the end of World War II, and who were frequently found years later hiding in the islands of the Pacific, still fighting a war that was over long ago. He rather wants us simply resting in the victory that He won over sin at Calvary!

But can reckoning the battle to be over, and ourselves dead to sin, really help us? God here says it can, and we see a parallel in instances when we hear someone say, "All I needed to succeed was to find someone who believed in me!" Well, *God Himself* believes we are dead to sin, and it should give similar strength to us to reckon it to be so.

When this writer was a teen, we attended a Christian youth meeting where this truth was vividly brought to life. A wooden plank was stretched across two inverted metal buckets, and a teen girl was blindfolded and asked to stand on the plank in the middle. Two strong young men were then instructed by a narrator to carefully lift the ends of the plank off the buckets an inch or two. The narrator then proceeded to "describe" how the girl was being lifted so close to the ceiling that she had better duck, even though the boys (who had previously received instructions of what to do) were still holding her mere inches from the ground. As the girl ducked to avoid the ceiling, she lost her balance and fell off the plank. All because she reckoned something to be true of her position in life that simply wasn't so.

Similarly, if we reckon ourselves alive to sin and prone to fall, it is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. But if we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God, this too is likely to come a self-fulfilling prophecy!

And so just as the president-elect immediately begins to reflect the position given him by the voters, we should likewise reflect the position God has already given us in Christ. What a slap in the face of the voters it would be for a man to live disgracefully once elected to high office! May we as believers never choose to disgrace the grace that saves us!

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12).

Before you were saved, sin *reigned* in your life, and not in the token manner in which modern figurehead kings reign. Kings in Bible days were *absolute despots*, and it is in this sense that sin reigned in your life as an unbeliever. Sin held o’er your being *absolute sway!* At that time, you had no choice in the matter, since everything you did was sin.¹ But now, while even the best believer can fall into sin, *you don’t have to let sin reign in your life!*

We believe Paul mentions our “mortal” body here to remind us that while our spirit is saved from eternal death, our physical body is still subject to physical death, and *sin hastens death!* Constant drunkenness will destroy your health, for example. When sin advances to the criminal level, such felonious activity increases your chances of being shot by the law or executed by the court. And even if you are never caught and brought to justice, the constant fear of being apprehended causes stress, a well-known contributor to high blood pressure and heart disease. And this fear of getting caught is something that affects even liars and other lesser offenders. No wonder Paul elsewhere affirms that obeying the parents who warned us about sin will promote longevity (Eph. 6:1-3), and no wonder he mentions our mortality here, to give us extra encouragement to avoid these life-threatening assassins commonly known as *sins*.

“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom. 6:13).

When you were unsaved, and *had* to sin because everything you did was sin, you were not *yielding* to sin, for yielding suggests you have a choice. You were rather *obeying* a supreme despot who held absolute sway o’er your being. But now you can do what you could not do back when you were one of the “*none that doeth good*” that Paul talks about in Romans 3:12. Now you can yield yourself to God.

In the old days when prisoners were forced to break rocks all day, a prisoner who did so was not *yielding* to the warden, he was *obeying*. But if after paying his debt to society an ex-con decided to drop in for a visit, and the warden requested he break some rocks to help him meet his quota, he would be *yielding* to such a request. Of course, such a man would have to have rocks in his head, so to speak! And the same is true of believers who yield to sin after Christ paid our debt, though sadly we usually remember it only after the fact.

We should rather yield ourselves unto God, “*as those that are alive from the dead.*” But where can we find a role model for this? There were eight individuals in Scripture who were raised from the dead, but the Bible tells us next to nothing of their lives after they were raised. Perhaps this was a purposeful omission on God’s part, leaving us only the example of *our Lord’s* post-resurrection life as our pattern. May each of us determine to fare better than Hezekiah, who was not raised from the dead, but who was given a new lease on life after a life-threatening illness (II Kings 20:1-6). How sad to read that he “*rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him*” (II Chron. 32:24,25). May these words not be spoken of us at the Judgment Seat of Christ,

where it will be determined how well we served the Lord with the new life given to us in the light of all He did for us.

We do know this about life after death: according to folklore only a *ghost* hangs around his old “haunts,” trying to relive the old life he enjoyed before he died. A *resurrected* man heeds Paul’s admonitions to “*seek those things which are above*” and “*set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col. 3:1,2). God help us to likewise be “*forgetting those things which are behind*” (Phil. 3:13).

“For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

Paul here explains *the reason* sin no longer enjoys the absolute dominion it held over us when we were unsaved: “*for ye are not under the Law, but under grace.*” In the dispensation of grace, the only people under the law are unbelievers (Rom. 3:19; I Tim. 1:9,10). “The strength of sin is the law” (I Cor. 15:56), and without it sin has no capacity to dominate us, as we shall see when we get to Romans 7.

“What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Rom. 6:15).

How many times have you heard, “You can’t tell someone they are under grace, they’ll live however they want to.” However, as has well been said, grace changes our “*want-to!*” That is, grace changes how we want to live. The Lord told Bartimaeus, “*Go thy way,*” but as we read on we see that “*immediately he followed Jesus in the way*” (Mark 10:52). Was he being disobedient? *No!* His way was now the Lord’s way! And so it should be the desire of every blood-bought child of God to follow the Lord Jesus in the way.

How can we even think of continuing in sin after Christ *died* for our sins? A Mafia hit man knows there is no way out of the syndicate other than dying. But what if such a man’s twin brother volunteered to die in order to fool the mob into thinking that the hit man was dead? Such a noble sacrifice would be greatly dishonored if the brother then continued to serve organized crime. Similarly, the noblest Sacrifice in history is equally dishonored when we continue in sin after the Lord died to save us from our sins.

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16).

In the early ‘60s there was a TV show called *Queen for a Day*, in which the woman with the most deserving story was crowned, draped in red velvet, and treated to a fully paid night on the town with her husband. She was actually queen of nothing and no one, but for one night was treated as though she were. Similarly, sin is no longer our master, but when we yield ourselves to it, we make it our king and we are its servants for that moment of our lives.

It is critical that we say something about the “*death*” mentioned here. Like many Bible words, the word “death” has many meanings. There is *physical* death, of course, *spiritual* death (Eph. 2:1), and “*the second death*” (Rev. 20:14). In each of these cases the word has the idea of *separation*, for in physical death the soul and spirit are separated from the body (Gen. 35:18), in spiritual death the soul and spirit are separated from God (Eph. 2:1; 4:18), and in eternal death the soul and spirit are separated from God for eternity (Rev. 20:15).

But here in Romans, there is something we like to call *Christian* death, a condition wherein all a believer’s spiritual vital signs are “flat-lined,” and there is no evidence of spiritual life whatsoever.

It is *sin* that has this deadening effect on our spiritual lives. But when it occurs, we don't need to be *saved* again, we only need to *wake up*. It is *to believers* that Paul says, "...Awake thou that *sleepest* and arise from *the dead*..." (Eph. 5:14). Believers who have died in sin must "*awake to righteousness, and sin not*" (I Cor. 15:34).

Something should also be said about the "*righteousness*" that is said to be the reward of "*obedience*" here. Every true believer knows that "with the heart man *believeth* unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10), and this righteousness cannot be obtained by our works (Rom. 4:5). But this speaks of our *positional* righteousness before God, "the *gift* of righteousness" that we receive when we trust Christ (Rom. 5:17). When Paul speaks here of "*obedience unto righteousness*" he refers to the *practical* righteousness that comes from obeying God (I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:22; 3:16).

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

"Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17,18).

When you were unsaved, you were "*the servants of sin*," incapable of "*obedience unto righteousness*." But when you got saved you "*became*" the servant of righteousness. While you can now choose to serve sin or righteousness, you *are* a servant of righteousness, forever free from the tyranny of sin.

"I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19).

To speak "*after the manner of men*" means to give an illustration from the world of men (Gal. 4:15), and the infirmity of our flesh that Paul mentions here is that we often need such illustrations to understand divine truth. Here Paul hesitates to compare the way we live for the Lord with the way we used to live for sin, and so qualifies the comparison with this disclaimer. However, the comparison is such a good one he dare not pass on it. The words "*as*" and "*so*" here indicate that we should now serve the Lord as we used to serve sin, i.e., *with all our might!* We should serve the Lord as enthusiastically as we used to serve ourselves and our own interests and desires.

"For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness" (Rom. 6:20).

If we are to live for the Lord "*as*" we used to live for ourselves, Paul is setting before us a mighty challenge, for when we served sin we served it *exclusively*, being absolutely "*free from righteousness*." To serve the Lord in such a manner now would mean likewise serving Him *exclusively*, totally free from sin. Nothing less than this lofty goal should be the express desire of our hearts.

"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21).

By the ordination of God, a fruit tree bears fruit "*after his kind*" (Gen. 1:11). "A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:17), and the end of this kind of fruit in the unsaved is sin and death.

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Rom. 6:22).

Now that you no longer belong to sin, but rather belong to God, “*the fruits of righteousness*” (Phil. 1:11) that you produce are no longer considered sinful self-righteousness, they are now considered “*holiness*” which ends in “*everlasting life.*”

But how can everlasting life be the “end” of the fruit of holiness when Paul clearly teaches that it is “*by His grace*” that we receive “*eternal life*” (Titus 3:7)? Ah, here the Apostle speaks of the everlasting life that we can enjoy in *this* life. This is similar to how Paul says that we who already *possess* eternal life can “*lay hold on eternal life*” by fighting the good fight of faith and by investing our finances in the Lord’s work and people (I Tim. 6:11,12,17-19). Believers who live only for themselves and spend their money selfishly are laying hold on *this* life.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

This is a verse that we often use when sharing the gospel with unbelievers, but Paul is not actually addressing the unsaved in this chapter, but is rather speaking to believers. This does not mean, however, that we should not use this verse when sharing Christ with others, for the principle that Paul is citing is true. The wages the unbeliever earns for his sin *is* physical, spiritual, and eternal death, and accepting eternal life as the gift of God is his only hope. Paul’s point, however, is to teach us that sin will continue to have a deadening effect in our lives even after we are saved. But thank God, His gift to us as believers is that we can now lay hold on the eternal life that is our only hope of enjoying the rich, fulfilling spiritual life that God longs for us to have as His children. May this be the longing of our hearts as well!

“Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?” (Rom. 7:1).

Bible commentaries love to debate whether Paul refers here to *Roman* law or *the Law of Moses*, but the apostle’s point is the same in either case. Death ends all earthly relationships, including the relationship between a man and the law! To illustrate this point, Paul cites this example:

“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Rom. 7:2).

Death ends all relationships, including the relationship between husband and wife. Paul is going to illustrate our relationship to the Law of Moses by comparing it to the relationship between a man and his wife.

“So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:3,4).

Here we see the point of Paul’s illustration. When we were unbelievers, we were married to the Law, and we couldn’t be married to Christ as long as we were bound to the Law. But just as death ends the relationship between a wife and her husband, so death ended the relationship between believers and the Law of Moses! As we learned in Romans 6, when Christ died, He died to the Law, and *we died with Him!*

If it be wondered why we would *want* our relationship to God's Law to end, let's expand upon Paul's illustration. Imagine a woman married to a man who is constantly pointing out her shortcomings. Nothing she does is good enough. She doesn't keep house perfectly. She doesn't discipline the children sufficiently. She's a terrible cook! Under the law, she had no choice. Under this constant barrage of criticism, she just had to sit there and *take it!*

This is a perfect description of the Law! The Law is constantly pointing out our shortcomings. You're too covetous! You don't honor your parents! You are fudging the truth when you put it that way! As unbelievers under the Law, we had no choice. Under this constant barrage of criticism, we just had to sit there and *take it!* This demand for perfection (Jas. 2:10,11) is what finally drove us to trust in Christ.

But once we are saved, the Law does not let up. It *continues* to point out our shortcomings. But praise God, we no longer have to sit and take it! We have become "*dead to the law by the body of Christ,*" and death ends all relationships! As believers under grace, we are set free from the Law that continues to demand perfection of still imperfect beings, a tyranny that leads to a feeling of defeat and despair.

But how did we *become* dead to the Law? Paul says it was "*by the body of Christ,*" i.e., by His *physical* body. But here we must be careful. We did not become dead to the Law by the *birth* of our Lord's physical body, for He was born under the Law (Gal. 4:4 cf. Luke 2:21-24). Nor did we become dead to the Law by the *adult life* of our Lord's body, for as a man He obeyed the Law, and taught others to obey it as well (Matt. 8:4; 23:1-3). No, it is by the *death* of our Lord's physical body that we are made free from the Law. When He died, He died to the Law, and *we died with Him!*

And the Law died to us, for Colossians 2:14 says that when Christ died He nailed the Law to His cross. We were then free to be married to another, "*even to Him who is raised from the dead,*" the Lord Jesus Christ! If it be wondered why we would want to be married to the Lord, it is "*that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*"

One of the purposes of marriage is to be "*fruitful*" (Gen. 1:22). When we were married to the Law as unbelievers, we could not bring forth the fruit of good works unto God (Rom. 6:21). Our works of righteousness were considered works of *self* righteousness (Isa. 64:6), and God rejects the works of self-righteousness.

Under the Law, if a man died childless, his brother could marry his wife and father the children that his barren brother could not (Deut. 25:5,6). In the same way, now that we are married to Christ we can bring forth the "*fruit unto holiness*" that our marriage to the Law could not produce in us (Rom. 6:22). Now when we do good works, they are considered good works by God, and we can be "*fruitful in every good work*" (Col. 1:10 cf. Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14).

Of course, under the Law, if a man refused to marry his dead brother's wife, she loosed his shoe and spat in his face (Deut. 25:7-10). When the Lord refused to allow Israel to make Him king before His death (John 6:15), it looked like He was refusing to marry her to raise up seed where the Law had failed. But how precious to know that when they stripped Him and spat in His face at Calvary, God was able to use this to raise up spiritual fruit in Israel, and in us.

"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5).

When we were unsaved, we were constantly in motion, but as we learned in Romans 6, every move we made was sin in the eyes of God! And Paul says that it was *“the law”* that gave this motion to sin! Because of the fallen nature we inherited from Adam, when we are forbidden to do something by law, it just motivates us to want to do it all the more! Under Prohibition, drinking actually *increased*, because the law goaded the fallen nature of men to want to break the law.

And the Law of Moses works the same way. Most people think the Law *weakens* sin, but Paul says *“the strength of sin is the law”* (I Cor. 15:56). Most people think the Law causes sin to decrease, but Romans 5:20 says that *“the law entered, that the offence might abound.”*

Why would God give a law that strengthens sin and makes it abound? To make men see their need of a Savior! This was the purpose of the Law.

It’s natural to connect motion with *life*, but just as men who are “dead in trespasses” can *walk* in carnality (Eph. 2:1-3), so spiritually dead unbelievers can also produce the motion of self-righteous good works. But when they do, they are “just going through the motions” of righteousness. They produce no real *fruit* that God can accept. A tree can only bring forth fruit *“after his kind”* (Gen. 1:12), so fruit brought forth by a spiritually dead unbeliever can only be *“fruit unto death.”*

“But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:6).

When we see the word *“delivered,”* we think of how salvation delivered us from things like *“the power of darkness”* (Col. 1:13). But we also needed to be delivered from the condemnation of the Law! The Greek word for *“delivered”* here is most often translated *“destroyed,”* and so Paul is saying we were delivered from the Law by the destruction of the Law and our relationship to it. *“That being dead wherein we were held,”* we were then free to be married to Christ and serve God *“in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”*

What’s the difference? When the Nazis rolled into Paris, her citizens were told to stand in the streets and cheer, an order they obeyed out of fear of what would be done to them if they didn’t. But when the Allies liberated Paris, the same cheering was motivated by a genuine love for the power that was redeeming them from their enemies. In the same way, the unbeliever under Law does good deeds out of fear of what God will do to him if he doesn’t. But once we are saved by grace, the same good deeds are motivated by a genuine love for our Redeemer.

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7).

Paul knows that his readers will be troubled by his assertion that the Law gives motion to sin, and so he hastens to add that the Law itself is not sin. He wouldn’t have known what sin was without the law, *“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom. 3:20). And if he had never known sin, he could never have come to know Christ, for *“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Gal. 3:24).

The Law is like an X-ray or MRI machine, both of which can reveal what’s wrong with you, but neither of which can do anything about it. Just so, the Law can show a sinner his sin, but is powerless to save him from it. In the life of the believer, the Law can be an excellent *thermometer*, revealing how hot sin is running in his life. But it has no power to act as a *thermostat*, i.e., it is powerless to *regulate* sin.

“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:8,9).

Up to this point, Paul has been talking about the Law and its effect on us when “we” (v. 4,5,6) were unsaved. Paul’s shift here to the pronoun “me” indicates he is about to get to the point and give a personal testimony concerning his relationship to the Law *after* he got saved.

Paul was “alive without the law,” i.e., he got saved and became spiritually *alive* as all of us did, by grace through faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:20,28). Grace taught him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to “*live soberly, righteously and godly*” in gratitude to God for saving him (Titus 2:11,12), and he eschewed evil with all the vigor and enthusiasm of a newly saved child of God.

Then, like all of us, he thought the Law would help him deal with sin *better*. But “*when the commandment came,*” i.e., when he introduced the Law into his life to try to help him with sin, it had the very opposite effect. As he puts it, “*when the commandment came, sin revived.*”

We have seen that the Law goads unbelievers to sin and makes them see their need of a Savior. But the Law has the same effect in believers! When we get saved, we receive a new nature from the Lord, but we do not lose the old sin nature that longs to sin all the more when it is told not to.

So when Paul placed himself under the Law, the Law continued to do what it did before we were saved, give motion to sin, and “*sin revived.*” Sin fell asleep when Paul was saved by grace, but he inadvertently revived it with the application of the Law.

As Paul puts it, sin *took occasion* by the Law. When a public speaker says, “I’d like to take this occasion to...”, he means he is about to use the occasion of his address to an audience for some purpose other than that for which they have gathered. This is sometimes done by actors receiving an “Oscar” at the Academy Awards, who take advantage of the tremendous viewership of the ceremony to make a political statement. In our text, Paul did not introduce the Law into his spiritual life to work “*all manner of concupiscence*” in him, but the Law took the occasion to do just that!

When Paul got saved without the law, “*sin was dead.*” But when he invited the Law into his life, sin revived and then the tables were turned. *He* “died,” i.e., he died the *spiritual* death that we spoke of earlier, wherein a believer’s *Christian experience* shrivels up and dies.²

“And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death” (Rom. 7:10).

Paul knows his readers will be further troubled by his further affirmation that the Law gives occasion to sin, and so he hastens to affirm that the Law was “*ordained to life.*” Over and over the Bible declares that if a man could keep the Law *perfectly*, God would gladly reward such a man with eternal life (Lev. 18:5 cf. Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 2:6,7; 10:5). But the words “*continueth*” and “*all*” in Galatians 3:10 indicate that God demands *100% obedience* to the Law, *100% of the time!* Since this is something no unbeliever can attain, the Law became known as “*the ministration of death*” (II Cor. 3:7).

But when Paul applied the Law to his life after he was saved, he learned what we all learn when we follow his example, and that is that we are no more able to keep the Law perfectly now that we are saved than when we were lost! He soon found that all his spiritual vital signs had flat-lined, and he needed to awake out of the sleep of this “*death*” (cf. Eph. 5:14).

“For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom. 7:11).

Imagine taking a drug that you *thought* was saving your life, only to learn that it was *killing* you instead! Such is the case with the believer and the Law. He *thinks* it is helping him, when in truth it is *killing* him! This is how sin “*deceived*” Paul, and how it deceives us all!

“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12).

Paul says the Law is “*good*” in I Timothy 1:8 also, but there he explains that it is only good “*if a man use it lawfully.*” Paul then goes on to explain that “*the law is not made for a righteous man,*” i.e., for *believers*. The only lawful use of the Law is to bring conviction of sin on those who are “*lawless and disobedient,*” to drive them to the Savior.

“Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13).

Here Paul hastens to add that it was not *the Law* that slew him, it was *sin* working by the Law. Paul knows that men like to find fault with laws that condemn them. When we are issued a speeding ticket, it is not because we were going too fast, of course, it is because the speed limit is set too low! There is nothing wrong with *us*, it is *the law* that is wrong! Here, Paul rushes to explain that he was not saying there was anything wrong with the Law of Moses.

Just as the law made sin worse in unbelievers, so the Law makes sin “*exceeding sinful*” in *the believer*. Of course, in the unbeliever, God is able to capitalize on the Law’s power to make sin worse by using it to drive him to Christ. But can God capitalize on it when the Law makes sin worse in the believer? We believe God can profit from the Law’s effect in a believer’s life in two ways.

First, we are told that when some parents catch a child smoking, they sit him down and make him smoke one cigarette after another—until he pukes his guts out, and never wants to smoke again! This is a technique God used often with Israel. “*Come to Bethel, and transgress*” sounds like a strange thing for God to say to Israel (Amos 4:4), but He said this only after constantly calling on them *not* to sin (cf. Psa. 81:11-13; Eccl. 11:9; Ezek. 20:39; Matt. 23:29-32). It is only when men turn a deaf ear to God’s call to repent that we read things like “*God gave them up to uncleanness*” (Rom. 1:24,26,28). God saves this severe tactic for last, but finally employs it in the hope that men will be sickened by their own sinfulness.

This then is the first way in which God can benefit from the Law’s power to make sin worse in the believer. As the Law drives a believer to sin, eventually he sickens himself with the depravity of his ways. And the second way in which God can profit from the Law’s effect in a believer’s life is that it makes him realize that the Law is not the answer to suppressing sin in his life.

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14).

Paul’s admission here that he was “*sold under sin*” has prompted some to believe that he speaks in this passage of his past life as an unbeliever. However, anyone who *commits sin sells himself to sin* (I Kings 21:20,25; II Kings 17:17; Isa. 50:1; 52:3). Thank God, we who are saved have been *redeemed* or *bought back* from sin by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). However, there awaits a coming “*day of redemption*” (Eph. 4:30) that will take place at the Rapture, a day in which our *bodies* will be redeemed (Rom. 8:23). Until that day, our souls are redeemed, but our bodies remain “*sold under sin,*” as Paul says here. Under the microscopic scrutiny of the Law, even *saved* flesh is not able to pass the muster of James 2:10,11, and it must be remembered that here in Romans 7 Paul is describing what he experiences when he places himself under the Law of Moses.

“For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:15).

Here we must be careful not to read the most common use of the word “allow” into this verse. Commonly when we *allow* something, it means we *permit* it, but this cannot be the meaning here, for if Paul didn’t *permit* himself to sin, *he wouldn’t sin!* No, one of the secondary definitions for the word “allow” is “*approve*.” The Lord told the wicked lawyers of His day, “ye *allow* the deeds of your fathers,” i.e., their forefathers who had killed the prophets (Luke 11:45-48). Here the word “allow” cannot mean to *permit*, for the lawyers being not yet born were in no position to permit or refuse to permit the murderous deeds of their ancestors. The word “allow” here obviously means *to approve of*, and this is also the meaning in our text.

And so Paul is saying that when he places himself under the Law, he commits sins of which he does not approve. He would rather do good things, but ends up committing the sins that he hates. While some see in this further evidence that Paul is speaking of his days as an unsaved man, we would suggest that like most unbelievers, Saul of Tarsus did not hate his sins. Although his sins were more along the lines of pride and self-righteousness, he loved them as dearly as carnal sinners love the sins of their flesh. It is *the believer* who hates the sin that he ends up committing, and longs to do the good things that he finds it so hard to accomplish under the Law.

“If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good” (Rom. 7:16).

Our English word “consent” means “*to be of one mind with*.” The Greek word means *to say the same thing*. Hence Paul is simply saying here that if when he sins he is doing what he doesn’t want to do, the very fact that he doesn’t want to do it is proof that he agrees with the goodness or holiness of the Law.

“Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:17).

Don’t you hate it when a criminal gets away with a crime by claiming he has a “split personality,” and so shouldn’t be held responsible for his actions? While we feel sure that such a legitimate mental health issue exists, we are reminded of the story of one such criminal who told the judge that *he* hadn’t stolen the merchandise, *his hands* were guilty of the crime. The judge wisely responded, “Then I sentence your hands to a year in prison. The rest of you is free to go along with them—or not!”

But here Paul is not engaging in the same kind of blame-shifting that went on in Eden, when Adam blamed Eve—and even *God Himself*—for his sin, and Eve blamed the serpent. Paul is not trying to shirk the *blame*, but rather to *explain* why it is a believer still sins. Until the Rapture, sin will continue to dwell in believers, and will continue to cause them to stumble, especially when stirred and strengthened by the Law. But sins in the believer are “the works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19), *not the works of the believer himself*.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. 7:18).

We know that no good thing dwells in *unsaved* flesh, but it is important to remember that when we get saved, God does not remove our flesh, and will not until the Rapture. But “*to will*” to do good is present with us for Paul says of believers that “it is God which worketh in you both *to will* and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

When Paul says that he could not find how to perform that which is good, this does not square with what we read of his life in general in the Book of Acts, or in his epistles, which speak to us of

a very dedicated and consecrated man of God. And so we know he must be speaking here of his experience *under the Law*. This is why in the Bible that bears his name, Dr. Scofield has entitled this passage: *“The strife of the two natures under the law.”*

“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19).

Again, this can only be Paul’s experience as a believer under the Law. We have already shown that the Law is a completely ineffectual weapon in the believer’s struggle with sin.

The Law certainly *looks* like something that would help with sin. But then gasoline is a liquid and *looks* like something that would be good to use to douse a fire. In reality, we know that gasoline is an accelerant, and only makes a fire *worse*. Similarly, a Law that condemns sin *looks* like something that would be good to use on sin in the life of a believer. But in reality, due to our fallen nature, it only makes sin *worse*, as we discussed earlier.

“Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:20).

The careful reader of Scripture will surely notice that in this verse Paul repeats the truth he has just shared with us in Verse 17. This is because this oft-overlooked verse is of *cardinal* importance. Paul is anxious that you as a believer understand that when you sin, it is not *you* that sins!

After Paul talked to the Corinthians about fornicators, drunkards and covetous people, he added, “and such *were* some of you” (I Cor. 6:9-11). But how could Paul use the past tense here when some of the Corinthians were *still* living in fornication (I Cor. 5:1), drunkenness (11:21), and were coveting one another’s spiritual gifts (12:15-31)? The answer is that *it was no more the Corinthians* who were doing these things, *but sin that dwelt in them*. And like the Corinthians, the new person that God has made you in Christ is incapable of sinning. And God does not want you as a believer feeling guilty for the sins committed by the sin that dwelleth in you.

The feeling of guilt is a powerful emotion. We are told that a great deal of even the most severe mental illness can be traced to overwhelming feelings of guilt. How we wish we could whisper the comforting words of the gospel into the ears of any and all such unbelievers who have been driven to mental illness by feelings of guilt. How we long to be able to tell them that *“Christ died for our sins...was buried, and...rose again”* (I Cor. 15:1-4), and that if they will just trust Christ as their Savior, God will *take away* their guilt, leaving them with nothing to feel guilty about!

But how many *believers* need to be reminded of our guiltless standing before God as well! How sad that the inexpressible feeling of relief and freedom from guilt that we experience when we first trust Christ disappears when we place ourselves under the Law, and find that even as believers we are incapable of living up to the absolute holiness the Law demands. Feelings of guilt set in, and soon we find ourselves living in abject defeat and despair, the kind of wretchedness Paul describes in this very passage (v. 24).

It is imperative to the spiritual health of the reader that you understand the word “guilt” by definition is not a feeling, it is a judicial standing. And the judicial standing of the believer is that he has been pardoned, forgiven, justified and even *“made the righteousness of God in Him”* (II Cor. 5:21). And so when we allow our *hearts* to feel the guilt that our *heads* know from Scripture has no place in our lives, we are inviting the kind of misery that Paul describes in this passage, a crushing load that God never intended for us to bear.

Dear reader, God Himself is fully satisfied with the payment that Christ made for *all* of your sins, past, present and future. When you as a believer feel guilty for your sins, you are saying in effect that you are *not* satisfied with His payment, making your standards higher than those of the

Almighty. You *should* feel *sorry* when you sin, sorry that you have grieved the One who paid your debt (Eph. 4:30). But God no more wants you to bear the *emotional* consequence of your sin (guilt) than He wants you to bear the *judicial* consequence of your sin in the lake of fire. Thank God, He has saved us from both, and we need only convince our hearts of what our heads know to be true about this to enjoy the indescribable “*blessedness*” that God longs for us to experience as His forgiven children (Rom. 4:6-8).

“I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21).

When Paul placed himself under the Law of Moses, he found another law, a fixed principle as sure as the law of gravity, that when he wanted to do good he found evil present with him. Due to the fallen nature we inherited from Adam, and made our own when we committed our first sin, we will always want to do evil when told not to. “The law worketh wrath” (Rom. 4:15), as our flesh angrily declares, “No one is going to tell *me* what to do!”

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22).

The “inward man” is the man that God has made you in Christ, the “*inner man*” who can be “*renewed day by day*” if he is “*strengthened with might by His Spirit*” with God’s Word rightly divided (II Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16). This strength can only come from a realization of the Pauline truth that “we are not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14,15). Only the inner man who knows he is not *condemned* by the Law can *delight* in the Law. But when we lose sight of this, and place ourselves under the Law, we experience the problem Paul describes next.

“But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23).

What is this *other* law Paul saw in his members? It is the same law that “did work in *our* members to bring forth fruit unto death” when we were unsaved (Rom. 7:5b). It is the law, or fixed principle, that says that when our fallen flesh is told not to do something, it only gives *motion* to sin (Rom. 7:5a). Paul says that when he placed himself under the Law of Moses, this other law warred against the law of his mind.

The law of the believer’s mind is the law in the inner man that knows it is not condemned by the Law of Moses, and so delights in it (v. 22). It is “the law of the Spirit” Paul mentions later (8:2). The Spirit and this law both dwell in the inner man, which we believe can be found in the believer’s mind. When Paul says that “your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost” (I Cor. 6:19), we believe that the actual physical area of your body in which the Spirit resides is in your brain. Isn’t it interesting that the lateral region of your head, between your forehead and your ears, is referred to as your *temple*?

And so when we forget our uncondemned position in Christ, and place ourselves under the condemnation of the Law, we allow this conflict to take place between the law of our mind and the law of the flesh that is still in our members, giving motion to the sin that our mind longs to avoid. When this happens, Paul says that we are brought “into captivity to the law of sin” which is *still* in our members, even now that we are saved, and we find ourselves giving in to iniquity.

The word “captivity” is a very specific Bible word that is used frequently in the Word of God, especially in the Old Testament. There the word frequently refers to the seventy-year period the people of Israel were held captive by the Chaldeans in Babylon. We believe Paul purposely selected this word, and that there is an important comparison with our text that he would like us to draw.

When the people of Israel were in captivity, they did not cease to be the people of God! That is, they did not lose their identity as the children of God, they simply could no longer function as God's children. They could not bring their sacrifices to the temple in Jerusalem, they could not attend the thrice-yearly feasts that were mandatory for every adult male Hebrew (Ex. 34:23,24), etc.

In the same way, when the believer is taken captive by the law of sin, he does not lose his identity in Christ. He is simply rendered unable to function as "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21). He needs to be recovered "out of the snare of the devil," because he has been "taken *captive* by him at his will" (v. 26), and so finds himself in the kind of *captivity* of which Paul speaks in our text. Believers who then place themselves under the Law may think that they are helping themselves, but they actually "oppose themselves" (v. 25) in so doing.

It is true that believers who fall into this condition can "recover themselves" (v. 26), but sometimes they need a little help. Spiritual believers who long to help them "must not strive; but be gentle...in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (v. 24,25). And beloved, there is nothing *meek* or *gentle* about *the Law*! And so we know the Law is *not* the solution to the problem of sin in our lives!

Those who would be of help to brethren who have fallen into sin must be "patient" and "apt to teach" them about the *grace* of God, not about His Law. Too often when brethren fall into sin, well-meaning believers try to minister to these fallen ones with the sternness and severity of the Law, coming down on them like a ton of bricks, forgetting that in many cases it is the Law that sin has used to strengthen them in sin in the first place.

When this writer was a boy, we recall seeing a 1957 movie entitled *The Amazing Colossal Man* on TV. Exposed to atomic radiation, a man grows to sixty feet in size and goes insane. When conventional weaponry failed to stop this menace to society, one scientist proposed they resort to nuclear firepower. Fortunately, another pointed out that if nuclear radiation had caused the problem, a nuclear explosion would only exacerbate the predicament!

In the same way, if sin is a problem in a believer's life, the Law of Moses that God says strengthens sin in the first place is no solution! It is the *grace* of God that teaches us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11,12). We'll speak more about this when we consider Romans 8.

"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

The word "wretched" means "*very miserable, deeply afflicted.*" We refuse to believe that this condition was the norm in the life of the great apostle, but only his experience when he failed to remember he was not under the Law that condemned him, but under grace.

The presence of the pronoun "I" here prompts us to point out that the words "I" and "me" and "my" appear *fifty times* in Romans 7. What a reminder that when we take our focus off of Christ, and who we are in Him, and center our attention on ourselves, we are sure to experience every bit of the frustration and hopelessness Paul describes in this chapter.

It is important to point out that when Paul speaks about "*this death*," he is speaking about the "Christian death" we mentioned earlier in our comments on Romans 6:16. Sin has a deadening effect in the life of the believer, an effect from which we should all long with Paul to be delivered.

Who shall deliver us from the body of this death? Thank God, there *is* an answer to this question:

“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

This beloved verse has long been used as a proof text for the doctrine of eternal security. But while the eternal security of the believer is taught in many Scriptures, we would invite the reader to consider that security is *not* the subject of *this* verse. It *would* be a proof text for eternal security if the verse ended with the words “*in Christ Jesus.*” But since the verse rather ends with, “*who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,*” if this verse *is* about security, it is teaching *conditional* security, for it is then saying there is only “no condemnation” for those in Christ who walk after the Spirit.

We are aware that new Bible versions omit the last ten words of the verse, citing their absence in what they call the better Greek texts. However, we do not believe these texts to be better, and we believe these last ten words *should* be included in our Bibles, if we are to understand the meaning of this verse in its context.

It is often overlooked that Romans 8:1 begins with a “*therefore,*” and good Bible students know that when you see a “*therefore,*” you should always look to see what it’s *there for*. Romans 8 follows Romans 7, where Paul has just finished describing the *self-condemnation* he experienced when he tried to use the Law of Moses to help him with sin (7:24).

Here it should be remembered that just as there is more than one kind of *salvation* in the Bible (Eph. 1:13; Rom. 13:11; Phil. 1:19, etc.), there is also more than one kind of *condemnation*. While the Bible does speak of *eternal* condemnation (John 5:24), it also refers to other varieties (Luke 23:40). And we would suggest that our text is saying that walking after the Spirit will eliminate the self-condemnation that is the subject of the context.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

“*The law of sin and death*” is the law that says, “You sin, you die.” It is the Law of Moses, for since all have sinned, we read of the Law that “*the letter killeth*” (II Cor. 3:6), and so it was well-named “*the ministration of death*” (II Cor. 3:7). We know that the Law of Moses is the subject here since the next verse goes on to say that the Law could not save us (Rom. 8:3), and who would think that any law but the Law of Moses could save us?

Now if the law of sin and death says, “You sin, you die,” then whatever “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ*” is, it must be something that sets us free from the Law of Moses. This can only be the “*law*” that says there is “*life in Christ,*” i.e., the law that says if you believe on Christ, you can be saved from the condemnation of the Law (Gal. 3:13). This is certainly good news for the unbeliever, but in the context, Paul is talking about his experience as a believer.

It is true that the unbeliever who sins will die. But it is also true that *the believer* who sins will die. He won’t die the *eternal* death that awaits those who die without Christ (Rev. 20:14,15), but he will die the “Christian death” which is the subject of Romans 6-8, the death wherein all of a believer’s spiritual vital signs are flat-lined and he enters a comatose spiritual state.

What’s the solution to this problem? Well, the solution for the unbeliever who is condemned by the law of sin and death is to believe on Christ and receive eternal life. And we would submit that the solution is the same for the believer whose sin is causing his Christian experience to shrivel up

and die. Not that he needs to get saved again. He needs only to realize that while there is death in sin, there is *"life in Christ."* Paul explains what he means by this in the next verse:

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

The Law of Moses was strong enough to save us *if we could keep it* (Lev. 18:5; Luke 10:28; Rom. 2:7; 10:5; Gal. 3:12). The weakness of the Law was found in that we could *not* keep it. It was weak *through the flesh*. This is similar to how a metal serving fork is strong enough to lift a ten pound turkey, but if you insert the fork into the bird and try to lift it, the bird's flesh will tear away, and you will not be able to lift it in this fashion. The fork is strong, but it is *weak through the flesh*.

When it was found that men could not keep the Law well enough to be saved, God sent His own Son *"in the likeness of sinful flesh."* When our Lord was born, He was *"made in the likeness of men"* (Phil. 2:7), but when God sent Him to Calvary, it was *there* that He was made *"in the likeness of sinful flesh,"* as He was *"numbered with the transgressors"* (Isa. 53:12).

And every believer knows *why* God sent His Son to die on Calvary's cross. It was, as our text says, *"for sin."* This phrase is used to describe Levitical offerings that were made *"for sin"* (Lev. 6:26; 9:15, etc.). And so Isaiah predicted that when God sent His Son to Calvary, He would *"make His soul an offering for sin"* (Isa. 53:10).

It was also at Calvary that God *"condemned sin in the flesh."* This is key to our understanding of this passage. Every believer needs something to condemn the sin that resides in his flesh (Rom. 7:17-20). The Law of Moses certainly *looks* like it would fill the bill, so to speak, for it certainly condemns sin! But while the Law looks like just the ticket to deal with sin, Paul has just finished teaching us in Romans 7 that when we use the Law to condemn sin in our lives, it leads to feelings of self-condemnation and despair.

It is here in Romans 8 that Paul tells us what to rather use to condemn sin in our flesh, i.e., *the cross of Christ*. It was *at the cross* that God tells us *exactly* what He thinks of sin, for it was at the cross that He showed His willingness to pour out His wrath on His own Son when He was made sin for us. If God was willing to punish even His own beloved Son for sin, sin must indeed be a heinous thing in His sight.

And this is all we need to keep in mind to condemn sin in our lives. This is why after Paul rebuked the Galatians earlier in his epistle to them for trying to use the Law to deal with sin, He reminded them that before their eyes *"Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you"* (Gal. 3:1). This is also why we observe the Lord's Supper, *"for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come"* (I Cor. 11:26). For it was *the Cross* that paid for our sins and condemns the sin in our flesh,

"That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

The word *"that"* refers to the *purpose* or *object* of something. Here, the purpose of Christ's death for our sins was not to enable us to continue in sin, but rather to fulfill the righteousness of the Law. And the object of condemning sin at Calvary was to tell us what God thinks of sin, and provide us with all the motivation we need to *"walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Notice though that Paul does *not* say that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled *"by"* us, but rather *"in"* us. Just as there is a difference between surgery done *by* a doctor and *in* a doctor, the perfect righteousness of the law cannot be fulfilled *by* us even after we are saved. But it can be

fulfilled *in* us, for just as “*he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law*” (Rom. 13:8), so when we walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh, we also fulfill the righteousness of the Law.

This is why after reminding the Galatians that love fulfills the law, Paul likewise told them, “*Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh*” (5:14-16). After telling them earlier in Galatians that the Law won’t help them deal with sin, here he tells them what will! Just as in the military, the best defense is often a good offense, so the best way to not walk after the flesh is to walk after the Spirit.

Walking after the Spirit has nothing to do with the claims of Pentecostalism. About the only other way the Greek word for “*walk*” is translated in our King James Version is *to be occupied with* (Heb. 13:9). Hence to *walk* in the Spirit is *to be occupied with the things of the Spirit*. In other words, the way to say no to the sins of the flesh is to say yes to the things of the Spirit. The way to get the things of the world out of your life is by *crowding them out* with the things of the Spirit.

This is what Paul meant when he said, “*neither give place to the devil*” (Eph. 4:27). Don’t give the devil any room in your life! If your life is *filled* with the things of the Lord, there will be no room in your life for sin, for not even the devil himself can add a single thing to a life that is already *filled*. You can completely submerge an inverted glass in water, and the water will not enter the glass, for the glass is *filled* with air. And so if we would only “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18), there will be no room in our lives for the lusts of the flesh.

Of course, the believer’s *walk* begins with his *thoughts*, and so Paul goes on to say:

“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5).

When a child is told, “mind your manners,” he is being told to keep his manners in mind, and allow them to influence his behavior. Thus people who walk after the flesh do so because they “*mind the things of the flesh*,” i.e., they keep the things of the flesh in mind and allow them to influence their behavior, whether they be saved or unsaved. But believers who succeed in walking after the Spirit have learned the secret of minding the things of the Spirit instead.

It may sound strange, but the Law of Moses causes a believer to mind the things of the flesh, i.e., to keep them in mind, and unwittingly allow them to influence his behavior. Due to our fallen nature, if we are told, “Don’t think about pink elephants,” this commandment has suddenly introduced the thought of pink elephants to the forefront of our mind, whereas before that time they were perhaps the furthest thing from our thoughts. If we then go through the day thinking, “*I’m not going to think about pink elephants!*”, focusing on this prohibition actually keeps the forbidden colorful hulks on the center stage of our mind. If we rather simply turn our attention to other things, all thoughts of pink pachyderms soon escape our thoughts.

In the same way, going through the day thinking “*I’m not going to steal*” just keeps thievery uppermost in our thoughts, whereas turning our focus to spiritual things soon eclipses these thoughts from our attention. This is part of what is called grace motivation, and it is the reason it succeeds where the Law fails, when it comes to helping the believer deal with sin. The Law says “*thou shalt not steal*,” without telling you how to keep from stealing. Grace supplies the victory *with* the commandment when it says, “let him that stole steal no more: *but rather let him labor*” (Eph. 4:28). If you go through the day thinking about how to *earn* money, you won’t be thinking about how to *steal* it, and so the thoughts of your mind will not influence your behavior and cause you to engage in this illegal and sinful activity.

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6).

An unbeliever with a carnal mind is spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), but to be “carnally *minded*” is death for the believer as well. Minding the things of the flesh will lead to sin and the death of your Christian experience, i.e., your spiritual health and vitality. But “to be spiritually minded *is life*,” i.e., *spiritual* life, health and vitality. Being spiritually minded allows the Spirit to influence your behavior, and so “*to be spiritually minded is life*.” As Paul put it elsewhere, “*he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*” (Gal. 6:8). Here Paul speaks of reaping the benefits of everlasting life *now*, in *this* life, by godly thinking which leads to a godly life.

Another blessing of being spiritually minded is “*peace*,” which in the context here in Romans 8 must refer to an absence of the struggle under the Law that Paul described in the previous chapter. As a believer under grace, you don’t have to live on the losing end of the Romans 7 conflict, as Paul did when he was using the Law to help him with sin.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

The word “*enmity*” means to be *an enemy of*, and most unbelievers would be surprised to learn that they are God’s enemies (Rom. 5:10), right down to their “*carnal mind*” (v. 7 cf. Col. 1:21). The unbeliever’s carnal mind cannot be subject to the law of God, for it is the servant of sin (Rom. 6:17,20), and “*no man can serve two masters*” (Matt. 6:24).

“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).

Here again Paul is talking about unbelievers. While it is possible for believers to *walk* “after the flesh” (Rom. 8:1,4) and “*live after the flesh*” (Rom. 8:12,13), only unbelievers are actually “*in the flesh*” (cf. Rom. 7:5), and having no faith “*cannot please God*” (v. 8 cf. Heb. 11:6).

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9).

It is a precious truth that the humblest believer in Christ is “in the Spirit,” and the Spirit is in him. This writer’s father was a tool and die maker who taught us how to heat treat steel to make it harder and more durable. First the industrial furnace is heated to temperatures up to and even exceeding two thousand degrees, and then the steel is placed in the fiery furnace. A couple of hours later, the steel is still in the fire, but now *the fire is also in the steel*, for it glows a bright red even after it is removed from the furnace. In the same way, every blood-bought child of God is in the Spirit, and the Spirit of Christ dwells in him.

“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10).

While the believer’s soul is saved and redeemed, his body is “*dead*,” and in need of the life-giving salvation and redemption that the Rapture will bring it (Rom. 8:23; 13:11; Eph. 1:14; 4:30). But there is a Spirit within the believer that has already given life to our soul “*because of righteousness*.” It is still true that “*in the way of righteousness is life*” (Prov. 12:28), and in Christ we are “*made the righteousness of God in Him*” (II Cor. 5:21 cf. Rom. 3:22), and so possess His *eternal* life.

But while this is our *position* in Christ, what has this got to do with our *walk*? Let’s listen as Paul explains:

“But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11).

We know that the resurrection of our *dead* bodies at the Rapture is not the subject here, for Paul speaks of the quickening of our “*mortal bodies.*” Mortal bodies are by definition *susceptible* to death, but are very much alive. Likewise believers are very much *spiritually* alive, but are susceptible to the death of their Christian experience if they live after the flesh. And believers who have lived in sin for great lengths of time are often tempted to give up hope of ever being raised from the depths into which they have fallen.

It is to these dear, precious saints that Paul addresses these words. He argues that if the Spirit that was able to raise up even *Christ* from the dead dwells within each believer, then there is *no* believer who is so far gone in sin that he too cannot be raised up out of its awful grip. Here it must be remembered that as our Lord hung on Calvary’s cross, His Father laid on Him *the sins of all mankind of all time*, judged Him guilty of these sins, and condemned Him to death. But the Spirit was able to raise Him up and give Him life because of His righteousness, and *the same Spirit dwells in the humblest believer.*

When we share Christ with unbelievers, especially those who bear a heavy load of sin, we are eager to convince them from God’s Word that “*His blood can make the foulest clean.*”⁸ Yet how many *believers* who have fallen deep into the abyss of sin have wondered if they can be raised from the mire into which they have sunk. It is to these dear ones that Paul’s words here are directed, so that they never give up hope.

Think for a moment of the power of even *one* sin. Adam’s sin was not a very big one in the eyes of men; he ate a piece of fruit. But that one sin condemned him to die physically and eternally, doomed all of his progeny to the same awful fate, contaminated all plant and animal life, and even the earth itself! Now consider that the Spirit was able to raise Christ up from under the weight of *every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed*, and that this Spirit dwells within *you*. Abundant proof that no matter who you are, no matter what you have done or ever will do *as a believer*, God can quicken your mortal body by His Spirit that dwelleth in you, raising you up to spiritual health.

But it must be pointed out here that the *instrument* of the Spirit’s quickening power is *the Word of God* (Psa. 119:25,107,154). If the Christian reader of this page feels lost in sin and degradation, the path back to the life and peace spoken of in this passage is through the intake of Bible doctrine, and the application of its principles to your soul.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom. 8:12).

A *debtor* is someone who owes a debt to a *creditor*, and the believer’s flesh has given him nothing that puts the believer in his debt. Although Paul leaves the words unspoken, his implication is that we rather owe the Spirit a debt we cannot pay for all that He has done for us. And if the way to discharge a debt to the flesh is to live after the flesh, then conversely the way to discharge our debt to the Spirit is to live after the Spirit. As Paul puts it, if we receive eternal life and live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

This writer grew up near Chicago, where all the people who *worked* for the city were required to *live* in the city. The city felt that if her employees drew their livelihood from Chicago, they in turn should live, walk and spend their livelihood in the city’s stores and pay the city’s taxes. In this way the city would receive a benefit in return for the livelihood bestowed on her employees. In the

same way, “*if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:25). If we draw our life from the Spirit, it is only right that we live in such a way that He draws great benefit in return for that which He has bestowed upon us.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13).

Here we see the importance of recognizing that “death” in this passage is the “Christian death” of the believer’s Christian experience, and not the eternal death of his soul. If the latter were the case, Paul here would be saying that living a sinful life will cause a believer to lose his salvation. But since the former is the case, we understand that it is the believer’s spiritual health and vitality that is vulnerable to death.

When Paul says to “*mortify the deeds of the body,*” one definition of the word “*mortify*” is “*to kill,*” and another is “*to bring into subjection by abstinence.*” And so we would suggest that the way to execute the sinful deeds of the body is to *starve them to death*, not allowing our mind to feed on the sinful influences of the world about us. This is part of what Paul had in mind when he counsels us to “*make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*” (Rom. 13:14). Of course, this must be done “*through the Spirit*” and not through the Law, as Paul has been saying in this passage, and hastens to repeat here in Verse 13.

Interestingly, the word *mortification* is defined as “*the death of one part of an animal body while the rest is alive.*” Hence if we mortify the sinful deeds of the body, this will leave only the good deeds of the Spirit to live on, allowing us to “live,” really *live* the Christian life. While many Christians struggle to barely eke out a Christian existence, God is eager that we *thrive*, not just *survive*, as His children.

And so it is the closing prayer of this writer that these thoughts on Romans 6-8, the Apostle Paul’s own guide to godliness, will enable the sincere believer in Christ to not only live victorious over sin, but to *live it up in the Lord* as never before, in the triumphant and jubilant manner in which God longs for us to live. *Amen!*

Endnotes

1. See our comments on Romans 6:3.
2. See our comments on Romans 6:16.
3. Charles Wesley’s words in the hymn *O for a Thousand Tongues*.