SOME PRELIMINARY WORK

Romans 7 is one of the densest, most challenging chapters in Scripture. It begins with an illustration: A woman is bound by law to her husband till “death do us part.” If she lives with another man while she is married, she is an adulterous. But if her husband dies, she is legally free to remarry (7:1–3). Paul’s point is that Christians died to “the law of sin” (we will come back to this in inTerpret) so they could marry Christ. Being wedded to sin was an extremely enslaving, negative experience; being wedded to Christ is liberating and positive in every way (7:4–6).

There are some who misunderstand Paul’s illustration as follows: The law of God was an abusive husband, enslaving believers during the Sinai/old covenant era. When Christ came in history, that law died, setting believers free from the law to be married to Christ. Believers in the new-covenant era who keep the Sabbath, an old-covenant institution, just because the Ten Commandments say so, are committing spiritual adultery! They cannot be married to Christ and the law.

This week will have us taking a closer look at Romans 7. Read it several times, noting and charting the contrasts in their proper context. Reach a conclusion that provides the greatest “explanatory power” with the “least academic burden.” Buckle up for an intense, hopefully insightful and rewarding study of this week’s lesson!
Write out Romans 7:1–8:4 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Romans 7:1–7; 8:1–4. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or “chart” out the chapter.
THE CHARTS TELL A STORY

The two charts (scan the QR code) help us visualize what is going on in Romans 7. The second chart merely converts the same data into contrasting characterizations of the covenants. Most commentators consider these contrasts to be describing the historical old and new covenants—the left column characterizing the Sinai covenant and members of that covenant; the right, the historical new covenant and new-covenant Christians. InGest will evaluate the lower four characterizations (a through d), while inTerpret will consider the law that new-covenant Christians are required to die to.

The historical model of the two covenants represented in Romans 7:1–6 bristles with problems. Note the following considerations:

a. The Sinai covenant, “the law,” was itself a marriage covenant: in the Old Testament preface (Jer. 31:31, 32) to the new-covenant definition (Jer. 31:33, 34), Yahweh said of the people of Israel, “I was a husband to them” (NKJV). Yahweh was the preincarnate Jesus (Heb. 11:24–26) and was often referred to as Israel’s husband (Isa. 54:5; 50:1; Hos. 1:2–3:5). So, believers did not have to wait until the New Testament era to be “married” to Jesus.

b. Romans 7:5, 6 characterize the old covenant as “the flesh” and the new covenant as “the Spirit.” As we discussed in lessons 5 and 6, when “flesh” and “Spirit” are contrasted in the New Testament, they never describe contrasting historical periods or historical covenants but characteristically describe contrasting ways people respond and relate to the gospel; “the flesh” represents an unconverted life, an old covenant experience, and the Spirit represents a converted life, a new covenant experience. Those who live “in the flesh” will not inherit the kingdom of God (Rom. 8:6, 13; Gal. 5:19–21)

c. “The letter” (NKJV) was a code word for legalism, referring to a purely outward (i.e., legalistic) response to the gospel, contrasted to a heart response of faith (Rom. 2:27–29).

d. Romans 6:20–22, which we studied last week, revealed that before conversion and baptism we bear “fruit” that results in “death”; after baptism, we bear “fruit to holiness [and] everlasting life.”

None of the contrasts in a through d above are historical characterizations; all are experiential!
DEAD TO WHAT LAW?

Romans 7:4 says the new covenant believer is “dead to the law [and] married to . . . [Christ].” Sounds like “the law” here is the Sinai covenant for sure, and not something experiential, right? What further light might Scripture shed on this?

In Romans 6–8, Paul evaluates God’s Sinai covenant law and reveals explicitly what we are to die to. Note that Romans 7:7 says he “would not have known sin except through the law” (NKJV) and then quotes the tenth commandment; 7:12–14 says “the law is holy . . . just . . . good . . . spiritual”; in 7:22, 25 he affirms that as a Christian apostle, “I delight in the law of God” and “I myself serve the law of God” (NKJV), something he could not do if he was still living “in the flesh” (8:8).

There is not a negative impulse here toward God’s law, which included the Ten Commandments. Did Paul really teach that Christians should die to this holy, spiritual law?

In Romans 6 he identifies explicitly what the Christian is called to die to: in 6:2 he counts himself among those who “died to sin” (NKJV); in 6:6, 8, 10 he says the baptized believer has been “crucified with” Christ, has “died with Christ . . . to sin” (NKJV); in 6:11 he appeals, “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin” (NKJV). He continues to make those appeals in other letters (compare Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:5, 8–10).

Before Paul spoke of dying to “the law,” he first established that the death the Christian is to experience is death “to sin.” To assure no one would accuse him of equating the law with sin, he clarified, “Is the law sin? Certainly not!” (Rom. 7:7, NKJV), and then proceeded to extol the law in the very next verses, as we cited above. Then might there possibly be such a thing as a “law of sin” that the Christian must die to? Indeed there is!

In this very context Paul speaks of a sinister power that seeks to bring one “into captivity to the law of sin which is in [one’s] members” (7:23, NKJV, emphasis supplied here and in passages below). Even as an apostle who inwardly “serve[s] the law of God,” he still feels in “the flesh” a pull to serve “the law of sin” (7:25, NKJV). In the next two verses, he praises God that even though the inner spiritual warfare still persists, “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (8:1, 2, NKJV).

Now it begins to make sense. In Romans 7:1–6, Paul is not pitting the historical new covenant against the Sinai covenant. He is pitting a converted and saved life (a new covenant experience) against an unconverted and lost life (an old covenant experience). In Romans 7:1–6 (NKJV) Paul is saying, Before you were converted you were not married to Christ; you were held captive, not by the law God gave His people on Sinai, but by the law of sin and the flesh which “aroused sinful passions” in you and the fruit you bore was “fruit to death.” Even your religion was outward and external, of “the letter” only, cloaking a host of evil passions lurking within. The “law of sin” was in control (Rom 7:14–25), rather than the law of the Spirit written in the heart (Rom 8:1–4). But the Spirit of God convicted you through the gospel, and through the process of conversion and trusting the righteousness of Jesus you died to the law of sin; your old self (the first husband in Romans 7:1–3) was “crucified with Christ,” so you could be “married to Christ,” bear “fruit to God” and “serve in the newness of the Spirit.” Thanks be to God, if you will abide in Jesus (7:25) and seek a fresh baptism of His Spirit daily (Rom. 8:5–17), you will have continual victory over struggles, overcome trials in your Christian life, and bear much “fruit to God.”

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Considering Romans 7:1–6 in the context of Romans 6–8, are you seeing the contrast of two experiences? Which experience describes yours?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/cov09-4
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Romans 8:5–11
Romans 6:2, 6, 7, 11
Ephesians 4:22
Colossians 3:3–10
1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24
1 Peter 1:4, 5

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Romans 7:1–8:4?

Review your memorized verse from Romans 7:1–8:2.
STRUGGLING BUT SECURE

Paul does not sugarcoat the process of dying to sin. In Romans 7:14–25, he appears to acknowledge that victory over sin is not a one-and-done event that occurs at conversion and baptism. The war between “the flesh” and “the Spirit” remained alive in his own heart. “Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:11, NKJV) seems to be an ongoing process.

Many of us who were baptized early in life and have been walking with Jesus for many years have experienced an ongoing struggle with sin, this war of the Spirit against the flesh (as we saw in Lesson 5). It validates the need we continue to feel for ongoing repentance and for watchful vigilance in coming to Jesus daily and not giving up.

Ellen G. White writes:
“No deep-seated love for Jesus can dwell in the heart that does not realize its own sinfulness. The soul that is transformed by the grace of Christ will admire His divine character; but if we do not see our own moral deformity, it is unmistakable evidence that we have not had a view of the beauty and excellence of Christ. “The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we shall see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Saviour. A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.” (Steps to Christ, 64, 65).

Paul did not elaborate on the exact nature of his own struggles with “the flesh” and “the law of sin”; perhaps it included intense discouragement and severe trial. But when he felt the conflict most severely he cried out, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” and, by faith, gloriously and confidently affirmed, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25, NKJV).

We have been assured that no matter how severe the struggle, “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (8:1, 2, NKJV). Not free from the conflict, but free from doubt that we are on the right side and the final victory is certain!

Jesus will never give up on you. Don't give up on Him, or ignore Him!
OF A LIFETIME

“Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict, that we shall overcome. We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience.” (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 560–561.)

“The Christian life is a battle and a march. In this warfare there is no release; the effort must be continuous and persevering. It is by unceasing endeavor that we maintain the victory over the temptations of Satan. Christian integrity must be sought with resistless energy and maintained with a resolute fixedness of purpose.” (White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 453.)

“Said Paul: ‘I die daily.’ He had a new conversion every day, took an advance step toward heaven. To gain daily victories in the divine life is the only course that God approves. The Lord is gracious, of tender pity, and plenteous in mercy. He knows our needs and weaknesses, and He will help our infirmities if we only trust in Him and believe that He will bless us and do great things for us.” (White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:66–67.)

“The claims of Christ upon our service are new every day. However complete may have been our consecration at conversion, it will avail us nothing unless it be renewed daily, but a consecration that embraces the actual present is fresh, genuine, and acceptable to God. We have not weeks and months to lay at His feet; tomorrow is not ours, for we have not yet received it, but today we may work for Jesus. Today we may lay our plans and purposes before Him for His inspection and approval. . . . This is God’s day, and you are His hired servant.” (Whites, *That I May Know Him*, 155.)

“Today you are to give yourselves to God, that He may make you vessels unto honor, and meet for His service. Today you are to give yourself to God, that you may be emptied of self, emptied of envy, jealousy, evil surmising, strife, everything that shall be dishonoring to God. Today you are to have your vessel purified that it may be ready for the heavenly dew, ready for the showers of the latter rain; for the latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement. It is our work today to yield our souls to Christ, that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord—fitted for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” (White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, 205.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How has this quarter’s lesson helped your understanding of the covenants so far?

What law are we to die to?

How is struggling a sign of spiritual life?

When does the struggle end?

Where is the rest experienced in the struggle?

How have you experienced rest in the midst of spiritual struggle?

What is the role of Sabbath rest in the sanctification process?

Despite the difficult passages, what is the theme that has been repeated from Lesson 6 to now?