YOU NEED A NEW HUSBAND

Paul teaches that through baptism, we die to sin (Romans 6:2, 10). Paul also shows that believers have died to and have been delivered from the law (Romans 7:5, 6). What could Paul possibly mean by this shocking statement? Before we explore what he means, it is helpful to notice what he does not mean. Paul is clear: the law does not die; we die to the law. When we believe in Jesus, we die to the law—our relationship with the law undergoes a dramatic change.

To prove his point, Paul uses an illustration about the law that governs marriage (Romans 7:1–3). A married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. When he dies, she is free to marry another man. If she marries someone before the death of her husband, she is committing adultery. Paul’s illustration isn’t an allegory in which every nuance of the story corresponds to some other detail of real life. This approach has led to many forced interpretations. Paul’s point is a simple, straightforward point. Death changes our relationship with the law. Just as death releases a wife from the law of marriage, so we die to the law through the body of Christ.

Dying to the law and being released from the law are essential because of our fallen condition. In our fallen flesh, the law, rather than helping regulate bad behavior, actually aroused our sinful passions (Romans 7:5)! By dying to the law, we are enabled to enter a new marriage with Jesus legitimately, which results in bearing fruit to God (Romans 7:4).
Write out Romans 7 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you are pressed for time, write out Romans 7:21–25. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
**IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THE LAW?**

If we have to die to and be delivered from the law, does that imply there is a problem with the law? Certainly not (Romans 7:7)! There isn't a problem with the law. The law is holy, just, and good (Romans 7:12).

It is human nature to minimize our shortcomings and mistakes. God's law overcomes this natural tendency by showing sin to be just what it is, exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13). If we fail to understand God's law, we become blind to our sins. There was a time in Paul's life when he was in just such a state. His way of saying this was, "I was alive without the law" (Romans 7:9). By this, Paul means there was a time when he didn't understand the moral depth of the law. When the commandment came, and he understood the moral depth of the law, he died—that is, he realized he was condemned to death by the law (Romans 7:9, 10).

For Paul, the commandment against coveting reveals the moral depth of the law. This commandment is the only commandment that primarily governs the activities of the mind. When the full weight of this commandment came forcefully to Paul's attention, sin revived, and he realized his sin and saw himself as a dead man, condemned by the law (Romans 7:9, 10).

As a Pharisee, Paul had always conformed perfectly to the outward requirements of the law (Philippians 3:5, 6). Perfect obedience was essential to Pharisees, because the law promised that those who do the law would live (Leviticus 18:5; Romans 7:10a). Paul knew that the law was a double-edged sword. If it promised life to those who obey, it also promised death to those who disobey (Leviticus 26:3–46). Through the commandment that prohibited coveting, Paul came to understand that despite his outward conformity to the law, he had violated the law inwardly through coveting. The law that had long promised life, he found to bring death (Romans 7:10).

According to Paul, we must die to and be delivered from the law. What does he mean by this? He means that we must die to and be delivered from the law as the way of salvation. If we, like the Pharisee Paul, expect to be saved because of our obedience, we don't know the first thing about the depth of the moral requirements of the law. When we begin to understand the law, we will die to it as the way of salvation. Even though we must die to the law as the way of salvation, the law never dies. God's law will never cease to serve the good and useful function of identifying sin (Romans 7:13–16).
AN ONGOING ASYMMETRY

Before his conversion, the apostle Paul was a Pharisee. He was supremely confident in his faithfulness to God (Philippians 3:4–6). From his childhood, his life was characterized by obedience to the law. He was circumcised on the eighth day and born into the line of Benjamin, a tribe that was particularly loved by God (Romans 7:5; Deuteronomy 33:12). According to Paul’s testimony, as far as the righteousness of the law was concerned, he was blameless (Philippians 3:6). There is no evidence in Paul’s testimony that before his confrontation by Christ that he had any real sense of moral weakness or failure. After his conversion, Paul came to regard himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Notably, Paul didn’t refer to himself as the former chief of sinners. He speaks of himself as the chief of sinners in the present tense. A humble self-perception is a hallmark of genuine conversion.

Through his conversion, Paul began to grasp something of the spirituality of God’s law (Romans 7:14). Through conversion, the mind experiences a radical change of orientation. Rather than being centered on the things of the flesh, the mind now focuses on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5). The actual requirements of the law begin to be fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4). In contrast, the unconverted mind does not submit to God’s law (Romans 8:7).

Through conversion, we enjoy the beginnings of a renewed mind as the Spirit writes God’s law on our minds (Hebrews 10:16; Romans 8:4). Even though God has renewed our mind, we are stuck with a human body that continues to be carnal or “of the flesh” (Romans 7:14, ESV). It is not until Jesus returns and redeems our bodies (Romans 8:23) that there is a total symmetry between the bodily cravings and the mind. Because of the asymmetry that currently exists between the renewed mind and our fallen condition, until the coming of Jesus, we will always face bodily cravings that are inconsistent with what we know to be the will of God (Romans 7:14–24). Between the initial renewal of our minds by the Spirit and the redemption of our bodies, Paul calls on us to put to death the deeds of the body with the help of the Spirit (Romans 8:13). We call this sanctification. Sanctification is the process of bringing these deeds of the body into harmony with our renewing minds.

We will face the ongoing cravings of our fallen flesh. Sometimes we will be victorious and put the cravings of the body to death. When we fail, we should agree with the law that it is good in the useful way of pointing out sin (Romans 7:15, 16). We should rejoice that we stand in grace (Romans 5:2) and renew our commitment to putting to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13).
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Leviticus 26:3–46
1 Corinthians 9:27
Galatians 2:15–21
Philippians 3:1–16

What other verses come to mind about sanctification?

Review your memorized verse from Romans 7.
HOW TO KNOW YOURSELF

Romans 7 begins with the importance of dying to the law. Believers must die to the law as the way of salvation. Dying to the law is necessary because our sinfulness makes it impossible for the law to save. Dying to the law is not the same as the law dying. The law continues to serve the necessary function of pointing out sin and showing sin to be just what it is, exceedingly sinful.

As we grow in Jesus, we come to understand better the spirituality of the law and the reality of sin in our lives. Ellen White said it best when she said, “The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you” (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, 64, 65).

Actual Christian growth leads to a greater and greater acknowledgment of the reality of sin in our lives. Closeness to Jesus will lead to more recognition of sin in our lives, not less. Through the process of sanctification, we progressively come to understand better the plague of sin in our lives and our desperate ongoing need for Jesus.

If we are coming closer to Jesus, we will better understand the holiness and beauty of His character and will better see our deficiencies. Like Paul, we will sometimes be confused by our own bad behavior (Romans 7:14). We will be frustrated by our inability to fully practice what we will to do (Romans 7:15). We will be bewildered by our failure to perform the good we want to do (Romans 7:18). We continually acknowledge that nothing good dwells in our flesh (Romans 7:18). We will see that even when we will to do good, evil is present with us (Romans 7:21) and that even when we delight in the law of God in our inner being, the power of sin is still at work in our bodies (Romans 7:23). We will also recognize that these weaknesses don’t represent who we are in Jesus (Romans 7:17, 20).

When we are confronted with our failures, we will freely acknowledge our wretchedness and seek deliverance (Romans 7:24). For the kinds of inwrought sin we all battle, there is only one solution: “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25).
“The apostle Paul declares, ‘I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.’ [Romans 7:18.] To those who have tried so hard to obtain by faith so-called holy flesh, I would say, You cannot obtain it. Not a soul of you has holy flesh now. (No human being on the earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility.)

“If those who speak so freely of perfection in the flesh, could see things in the true light, they would recoil with horror from their presumptuous ideas. In showing the fallacy of their assumptions in regard to holy flesh, the Lord is seeking to prevent men and women from putting on His words a construction which leads to pollution of body, soul, and spirit. Let this phase of doctrine be carried a little further, and it will lead to the claim that its advocates cannot sin; that since they have holy flesh, their actions are all holy. What a door of temptation would thus be opened!

“The Scriptures teach us to seek for the sanctification to God of body, soul, and spirit. In this work we are to be laborers together with God. Much may be done to restore the moral image of God in man, to improve the physical, mental, and moral capabilities. Great changes can be made in the physical system by obeying the laws of God and bringing into the body nothing that defiles. And while we cannot claim perfection of the flesh, we may have Christian perfection of the soul. Through the sacrifice made in our behalf, sins may be perfectly forgiven. Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. When we surrender ourselves wholly to God, and fully believe, the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. The conscience can be freed from condemnation. Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus. Thank God that we are not dealing with impossibilities. We may claim sanctification. We may enjoy the favor of God. We are not to be anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. Ye are accepted in the Beloved. The Lord shows, to the repenting, believing one, that Christ accepts the surrender of the soul, to be molded and fashioned after His own likeness.”

Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk. 2, pp. 32, 33.
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 do you think the law arouses sinful passions?

Have you ever felt the law arouse sinful passions in your life?

In what ways can you identify with Paul’s failure to do the things he wants to do and his failure to avoid the things he doesn’t want to do?

Have you ever felt wretched because of your sin? How did you resolve this feeling?

As we come closer to Jesus, why do we perceive ourselves as more sinful? Or less sinful?

Why doesn’t this perception change happen to some people? How can we help?

How does developing an accurate perception of our sinfulness lead to discouragement?

Is there someone you can encourage this week? Who is it, and how?