

A Study in the Book of Romans

15

Romans 7:1-25

Key Verse

“ So my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that you might bear fruit to God. ”

Having examined in great detail the Gospel’s answer to two specific problems – “sins” (the acts we commit) and “sin” (the very nature of sin within us) – Paul now introduces the third answer that the Gospel brings – the answer to the Law.

The Gospel’s Answer to the Law

Read Romans 7:1-4)

Up to this point in his letter, Paul has made continual reference to the Law and man’s inability to meet its standard, even though the Law of the Sinai Covenant is actually the *lowest* expression of God’s righteousness.* Why does Paul spend so much time on this subject of our freedom from the Law? In fact, it seems his letter to the church at Rome is especially directed to those who were strong on the teaching of the Law. This was because the greatest threat to the liberty of the early Church were the “Judaizers” – men who were infiltrating

Introduction

The Gospel’s Three Revelations

The Gospel’s Three Answers

The Gospel’s Answer to Israel

The Gospel in Action

Conclusion

* The Law of Moses dealt with external behavior only. When Jesus came on the scene, he didn’t lower the conditions of God’s Law. He actually raised them! (note [Matthew 5:20-22,27-28](#)). Contrary to what most people believe, the righteousness expressed in the Law of Moses was the *lowest* that God could bring himself without compromising his holiness. The holiness expected in the New Covenant is actually far higher than that expected in the Old Covenant!

the Church with the teaching that having received Christ by faith, the Christian must now obey the Law of Moses.

Paul has already shown that God brought the only possible answer to the sin-contaminated human condition – he put mankind to death in Christ. In **6:6-7** he has made his grand declaration:

“For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

And, Paul declares, this same death is God’s answer to man’s bondage to the Law.

The Picture of Marriage

Paul uses the picture of marriage. The law of marriage, he explains, is binding until the death of one of the parties, no matter which one it is. In other words, when a man and woman get married they are “under” the law of marriage. Only if one partner dies is the binding of that law over the other partner broken. But if, for example, the husband dies, the wife too becomes “dead” to that marriage law – it no longer has any control over her. She is free to marry again.

Paul has previously painted a vivid picture of us being slaves to our master, sin. Now, in this new analogy, Paul has us “married” to sin, and because sin is our husband we find ourselves in bondage to the Law that controls sin. As long as we remain married to this husband (sin) we are under the bondage of the Law of Sinai. Its demands are unattainable and its judgments are against us. There is only one escape, says Paul. Death!

Following this analogy, Paul explains that two deaths took place through the “body of Christ” – through Christ’s death (**7:4**):

The husband (sin) died

On the Cross, Christ became sin. Paul states this clearly in **2 Corinthians 5:21**:

“God made him who had no sin *to be sin for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In Christ, sin itself was put to death. The Law that once bound us because we were “married” to sin no longer has any jurisdiction over us.

The wife (you) died

In God’s eyes, Christ’s death was your death. Because of your death in Christ, the written code of the Law, which had been hanging over you like a death sentence under appeal, has been cancelled. Paul states in **Colossians 2:13-14**:

“...He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

Dead to the Law

“The law,” says Paul, “only has authority over a man as long as he is alive” (7:1). In Christ, our death to sin also means our death to the Law. Remember the picture we used of Jack, the alcoholic, who had died? He could not be tempted by alcohol because he was dead. In the same way, neither can a policeman come up to his gravesite and issue him with a summons for drunken driving. Jack is not just dead to alcohol; he also dead to the law! In the same way, through our death in Christ, we are crossed off the “census records” of the Law, and our relationship to the Law is severed for good.

A New Marriage

Read Romans 7:4-6

Again, following this analogy of marriage, we find that two resurrections occurred when Christ became alive again, enabling a new “marriage” to take place.

Christ is raised to be our husband

In 7:4, Paul states God’s specific goal at the Cross:

“So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, *that you might belong to another...*”

In all his dealings with man, God’s ultimate purpose was to form a Bride for his Son – a company of people in a love-relationship with him. This is clear in **Ephesians 5:25-27**:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Read Hosea 2:19-20

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2

Read Revelation 21:2, 9-10; 22:17

Jesus often referred to himself as the Bridegroom (**Matthew 9:14-15; 25:1-13**). This bride-bridegroom relationship is without question the highest and most profound description of Christ’s relationship with his Church. In fact, the very nature of the New Covenant could be said to be a marriage covenant.

We are raised to be married to Christ

In Christ, we too are raised to a new life (**Ephesians 2:6**) to be joined to a new “husband.” Unlike our previous marriage to sin, this is now a true “love-match”! With Christ as our husband, we are joined in union to his righteousness, his purity, his truth, his love and his glory.

The Message brings out the core of Paul’s meaning in **7:1-6** beautifully:

“You shouldn’t have any trouble understanding this, friends, for you know all the ins and outs of the law – how it works and how its power touches only the living. For instance, a wife is legally tied to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she’s free. If she lives with another man while her husband is living, she’s obviously an adulteress. But if he dies, she is quite free to marry another man in good conscience, with no one’s disapproval. So, my friends, this is something like what has taken place with you. When Christ died he took that entire rule-dominated way of life down with him and left it in the tomb, leaving you free to ‘marry’ a resurrection life and bear ‘offspring’ of faith for God. For as long as we lived that old way of life, doing whatever we felt we could get away with, sin was calling most of the shots as the old law code hemmed us in. And this made us all the more rebellious. In the end, all we had to show for it was miscarriages and stillbirths. But now that we’re no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin, and out from under all those oppressive regulations and fine print, we’re free to live a new life in the freedom of God.”

There is now a new “marriage law” that binds us together with our new husband, Christ. In **7:6**, Paul calls it “the new way of the Spirit.” In **Romans 8** (as we shall soon see) he will call this new way of the Spirit “the law of the Spirit of life” (**8:2**). This new marriage law is no longer an externally imposed code of rules and regulations. Now it is a law of love (see **Galatians 6:2; Romans 13:10**). It is the fusion of our spirit with the Spirit of Christ. His love fills us and our love for him motivates us. It is our spirit surrendering to him and his Spirit empowering us to live the way that pleases him. As *The Living Bible* expresses **2 Corinthians 5:15**:

“He died for all so that all who live – having received eternal life from Him – might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.”

Fruit of the Marriage

The product of our marriage with sin was spiritual death (**Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 6:23**). Married to our new husband, Christ, we now bear fruit for God (**Galatians 5:22-23**). This is expressed so clearly by Paul in **Romans 7:4-5**:

- **Verse 5 – The Fruit of the Old Marriage** – “For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore *fruit for death*.”
- **Verse 4 – The Fruit of the New Marriage** – “So...you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear *fruit to God*.”

Whereas your marriage to sin produced “fruit for death” (a fact already declared by Paul in **6:23**), your marriage to Christ now produces “fruit to God.” What a contrast! No wonder God had to deal not only with the problem of sin itself, but also with the “marriage law” which bound us to sin and judgment.

In the rest of **Romans 7**, Paul is going to amplify on **verse 5**. He is going to show

exactly what it meant to be bearing fruit for death. But before he does, he summarizes his entire message to date. He writes:

“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

This single verse is the key to understanding not only the rest of Paul’s letter to the Romans, but also the rest of [chapter 7](#).

A Summary of Chapters 7 and 8

Having just laid the foundation in [7:1-4](#) – the fact of our deliverance from the bondage of the Law through Christ – Paul is preparing to enlarge upon this in [chapters 7-8](#). He pauses, however, to summarize the case he is going to make. In [7:5](#) he states the *problem*, which he will then enlarge upon in the rest of [chapter 7](#). And in [7:6](#) he gives the *answer*, which he will enlarge upon in [chapter 8](#).

Verse 5

In just a few words, Paul summarizes our condition before we came to Christ. Notice it is in the *past* tense:

“When we *were* controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law *were* at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death”.

As we shall soon see, in [verses 7-25](#) Paul goes on to describe this condition we were in considerable detail.

Verse 6

Notice Paul’s change in tense. He is now speaking of our present condition in Christ:

“But *now*, by dying to what once bound us...”

(This is the death he has just described in [6:6-7](#) and [7:1-4](#) – our death in Christ to sin and, therefore, to the Law.)

“...we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code”.

Paul will later go on to detail the nature of this “new way of the Spirit” in [8:1-11](#).

The Problem Highlighted

Read Romans 7:7-14

Paul has been addressing those “who know the law” ([7:1](#)). Following the statements he has just made concerning our death to the Law, he is immediately aware of the argumentative response some would bring and sets about to answer it.

Some would jump to the conclusion that Paul was saying that the Law itself was sin – an evil thing ([7:7](#)). Paul gives a definite answer to this: “Certainly not!” In

fact, he says, it is because the Law is so good, so holy and so righteous that it shows sin up for what it is (**7:7-12**). Even without the Law, sin is already present (**5:13**). The Law simply reveals it, in the same way that light reveals dirt. This, if you recall, was the only reason the Law was given. If man had not been marred by sin, God would never have given the Law! (note **1 Timothy 1:8-10**).

Remember **Galatians 3:19**? Why, says Paul, was the Law “added”? Because of man’s sin. We see this principle at work in everyday life. For example, a sign may be posted over a plot of land stating: “No tipping of rubbish allowed – by order of the council.” Why is the sign put there? Because if the sign wasn’t there, people will tip their rubbish in that place. If no one wanted to tip rubbish there, there would be no need for the sign. In the same way, the Law was given to reveal and control sin, but it had no power to change the sinner! It was only added “until the Seed” (Christ) had come. For when Christ came, he dealt with the very sin itself, changing the sinner, and therefore doing away with the need for the Law. In other words, by its very definition, the Law belongs to the old creation not the new!

The Effect of the Law

In **Romans 7:7-11**, Paul describes the three principal effects of the Law.

It aroused the desire to sin

Read Romans 7:7-8

The Law uncovered the core of sin’s nature – rebellion. Tell someone he can’t have something, and from then on it is the very thing he wants more than anything else!

It made sin “alive”

Read Romans 7:8-9

Paul says that “apart from the Law, sin is dead.” Is he saying that the Law produced the sin? No, it is the other way around – sin produced the need for the Law. But the moment the Law came, sin became recognizable as sin. This is why Paul says:

“...when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.”

Suppose a man has cancer but is not aware of it. We could say it is not “alive” to him simply because of his ignorance of it – but this ignorance would not take away the fact of its existence or its devastating result if left unattended. Suppose, one day, the man decides to go to a doctor for a check-up and as a result of the tests he is made aware of the cancer. The cancer has become “alive” to him – but it is only this knowledge that will cause him to search for a cure.

This is a good analogy for the purpose of the Law. God designed the Law as a diagnosis, not a remedy. It brings sin into stark relief so that we may seek out God for the cure.

It resulted in death

Read Romans 7:9-11

Though giving us awareness of sin, the Law offers no forgiveness – no remedy – for the sinner and thus resulted in our judgment. As Paul says:

“For sin...*through the commandment* put me to death.”

Once again, *The Message* casts a clear, strong light on the meaning of Paul’s words in **7:7-11**:

“...The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behavior would be mostly guesswork. Apart from the succinct, surgical command, ‘You shall not covet,’ I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it. Don’t you remember how it was? I do, perfectly well. The law code started out as an excellent piece of work. What happened, though, was that sin found a way to pervert the command into a temptation, making a piece of ‘forbidden fruit’ out of it. The law code, instead of being used to guide me, was used to seduce me. Without all the paraphernalia of the law code, sin looked pretty dull and lifeless, and I went along without paying much attention to it. But once sin got its hands on the law code and decked itself out in all that finery, I was fooled, and fell for it. The very command that was supposed to guide me into life was cleverly used to trip me up, throwing me headlong. So sin was plenty alive, and I was stone dead.”

Paul has answered clearly the first argumentative response in **7:7-11** and shown that that the fault lay not with the Law, but with man himself. He is now ready with an answer for the second argument that would arise:

“Are you saying, Paul, that God’s good Law produced death?”

Read Romans 7:12-13

Again, his strong answer is: “By no means!” It was sin that produced the death, not the Law, just as it was the cancer in that man that produced death, not the X-rays tests that revealed it. As Paul states so clearly in **7:11**:

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”

As we have seen, the problem was never with the Law itself. The problem was with the incompatibility between the Law of God and the sinful inclinations of the fallen human nature. It is this incompatibility that Paul will soon go to great lengths to describe in the rest of **Romans 7**.

Paul’s purpose in **7:7-13** has been to prove the absolute incompatibility between man and the Law. He now summarizes this incompatibility in **verse 14**:

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

The very holiness of the Law, which should have been a means of life, has proved

to be the instrument of death, because man is a “slave to sin.” That which is spiritual is incompatible with that which is unspiritual. And, as Paul explains, when a person is sold as a slave to sin, how can he then serve as a slave to another master?

The Grand Dilemma

Read Romans 7:15-25

This passage is easily one of the most misunderstood parts of Scripture. Lifted out of context, it has been used to explain not only why the Christian is constantly struggling with sin, but also to provide the reason why this condition is normal for the Christian.

But the moment we read **Romans 7** in the context of **Romans 6** and **Romans 8**, we discover this is *not* what Paul is talking about! In **7:15-25**, Paul is identifying the heart of the problem that the Cross of Christ targets.

The critical problem, Paul explains, is that there are *two* laws that have man in bondage:

- ☞ **The outward law** – Law of Moses – “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law...” (**verse 22**).
- ☞ **The inward law** – the law of sin and death – “...but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (**verse 23**).

In **Romans 7**, Paul is graphically describing what life is like trying to live with these two diametrically opposed laws operating. We can picture it like trying to reach the moon before the space age. No matter how high a man may have tried to jump up to reach the moon, he was pulled down again. He could not attain to the moon because there was another law at work besides the law of his mind (that which he desired to do). The sinful nature of man, which Paul calls the “law of sin and death,” is like the law of gravity. No matter how much man desires with his mind to attain to the outward Law of God’s holiness, he is continually pulled back down again by the inward law. It is as though there is a continual civil war going on inside him – as though two men are within, pulling in two different directions.*

Paul summarizes this condition in **7:25**:

“...So then, I myself in my mind am *a slave to God’s law*, but in the sinful nature *a slave to the law of sin*.”

A slave to two incompatible masters – the Law of God and the law of sin! This is the miserable description of frustration and defeat found in **Romans 7**, at the

* The Bible does *not* teach, as some believe, that the Christian has two natures – an old sinful nature and a new Christ-like nature – struggling inside, like a great tug of war. You do *not* have two natures. You either have the old nature or the new nature (note **2 Corinthians 5:17**). The tug of war described in **Romans 7:15-23** is *not* between *two natures* but between *two laws* – the outward law of God’s holy standard and the inward law of sin. Which is the one that wins? Obviously the inner law. This is why God set about to change the very nature of that inner law – which is the subject of **Romans 8**.

end of which Paul climaxes with a cry of desperation in **7:24** (KJV):

“Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

The answer, however, is immediate in **7:25**:

“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

In the next chapter, Paul will expound on the exact nature of this glorious answer, but before we look at **Romans 8**, let’s take a closer look at what Paul has to say in **Romans 7:15-23**.

Life Under the Law

One of the big questions concerning **7:15-23** has been: “To whom is Paul referring?” Is he describing the normal experience of the Christian or the experience of those outside of Christ? Because he uses the personal pronoun “I,” many believe he is speaking of himself. Taking the passage out of the context of all that Paul is writing about, many Christians have read it as an independent autobiographic sketch of Paul’s own miserable life and draw the conclusion that Paul is describing his own present-tense experience and, therefore, the normal Christian life.

Nothing could be further from the truth! It is one of the greatest tragedies in the Church that this has been so widely believed. It must certainly cause great rejoicing in the heart of Satan, for believing this error robs the Cross of much of its power, leaving the Christian in a bitter, never-ending struggle with sin.

No, to understand this passage we must look at its context. Firstly, we must understand that Paul is referring to those who are living under the Law (note his audience in **7:1** – “...I am speaking to men who know the law”). Secondly, we need to understand that Paul uses the hypothetical “I” throughout these verses so as to be all-inclusive in his description of this experience. This constant struggle with sin was indeed his experience before he knew the wonderful good news of his liberation from the two laws through Christ’s death and resurrection. But primarily, Paul’s use of the pronoun “I” is not so much autobiographical as it is a description of the great “I” – every individual human being in his or her utter need of salvation.

Having already highlighted the great problem of the incompatibility of man and the Law in **verses 7-13**, Paul gives the reason why in **verses 12 and 14**: The Law is spiritual, holy, righteous and good; but man is unspiritual, a slave of sin. The term he uses – “a slave of sin” – is the same terminology he used just previously in **6:20-22**, where he emphasized the truth of the Christian’s liberation from the slavery of sin through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Take a look again at what Paul has already stated in **Romans 6**:

- ☞ **6:6** – “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, *that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*”

- **6:16** – “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, *you are slaves to the one whom you obey* – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”
- **6:17** – “But thanks be to God that, though you *used to be* slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.”
- **6:18** – “*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*”
- **6:20** – “When you *were* slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.”
- **6:22** – “*But now* that you have been *set free from sin and have become slaves to God...the result is eternal life.*”

Could anything be clearer? Paul in no way taught that slavery to sin is the normal Christian experience. This means that Paul’s words in **7:14** – “...but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” – should themselves be a clear signal that Paul is not talking about the Christian life. In Paul’s mind, to be a “slave of sin” is our *pre-Christ* experience.

Thus we find that Paul’s thinking is clear-cut:

- **Romans 7** is the experience of those under the Law (outside of Christ).
- **Romans 8** is the experience of those in Christ (set free from the two incompatible laws).

The Sub-Normal Christian Life

However, Paul was also very much aware of the teaching that was infiltrating the early Church. His whole letter to the Galatians was written because Christians had been “bewitched” by teachers of the Sinai Law into believing that, having received Christ by faith, they must now “be made perfect” through self-effort.

“You foolish Galatians!” he wrote in **Galatians 3:1-3**. “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

The greatest threat to the early Church was not the great persecution they were suffering. It was the subtle teaching that added the works of the Law to the work of Christ – a teaching that Paul called “a different gospel...which is really no gospel at all” (**Galatians 1:6-7**) – for it was this that threatened to rob the Gospel of its purity and liberty. Paul exhorted those early Christians in **Galatians 5:1** (KJV):

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

The yoke of bondage to which he was referring was nothing less than the “old way of the written code.” And this is still the greatest threat to the Church today!

Many modern Christians have fallen into its subtle trap. Sadly, **Romans 7:15-25** *does* describe the normal experience of many Christians, for it is the experience of anyone who, by his own effort, is struggling to attain to a standard of right-living by trying to obey an outward law (note that Paul's repetitive use of the pronoun "I" in **verses 15 to 25** – 26 times in all! – is deliberate, for it emphasizes this kind of self-focused struggle).

Romans 7 can indeed describe the Christian who, though he has received forgiveness for the sins he has committed and has been born of the Spirit into the family of God, has not realized Christ's complete work in dealing with the very nature of sin within and is thus struggling to deal with it himself. This Christian wants with all his heart to attain to God's righteous standard but finds himself continually failing miserably. **Hosea 4:6** describes a sad truth that applies as much under the New Covenant as it did under the Old Covenant:

“...my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge”.

Romans 7 is far from a description of the normal Christian experience as intended by the Lord. The Gospel is not: “I must *try* to crucify the flesh (my sinful nature).” No, the Gospel is: “The flesh (my sinful nature) *was* crucified with Christ” (**Romans 6:6**). It is not something I am working to attain; it is something that was attained for me by Christ! It happened 2000 years ago!

Now if this is true, how then can we account for the fact that **Romans 7** does appear to describe many Christians' experience? It is because, as with all truth in the Word of God, the good news of the Gospel only becomes real to each of us personally by our own individual faith. Faith takes what is a historical and eternal fact and makes it mine in reality now.

The Wretched Man!

In his cry in **7:24**, Paul is, in fact, using an event well known in those days to picture our condition outside of Christ.

Back in ancient times there were many different means of execution. One of them was especially gruesome and Paul uses this particular one to describe the “wretched man” of **Romans 7:14-23**. As we saw in **Module 102**, if someone was found guilty of murder one means of execution was to chain the dead body of the victim to the guilty man and leave him to wander the streets with the “body of death” on his back.

This horrific punishment would exert its influence on the murderer in three ways:

- **Effect One: Corruption** – The dead body would begin to decay. Flies would swarm around. Maggots would begin their work. The stench and decay would be horrific. Finally the corruption from the dead body would begin to work on his live body and he would die a slow and excruciating death.
- **Effect Two: Guilt** – With the victim of his crime chained to his back, the reality of his own guilt would be constantly with him.

- **Effect Three: Hate** – Chained to his back was the very person he had tried to rid himself of. Hate had caused his crime. Now imagine the hate, anger and resentment gnawing away at him on the inside towards this one on his back.

This is the picture Paul uses to describe what we were like outside of Christ. This is the picture of our old self (which Paul calls “the body of sin” in **Romans 6:6**). Paul’s whole point in this passage is to reveal that it is impossible for the outward Law to help us. Paul is depicting so hopeless a condition that – whether Jew or Gentile – it became immediately obvious that it would be foolish to even think of having any hope of fulfilling God’s righteous standard in our own strength.

Summarizing what we have already seen in **Module 102**, we see from this illustration of the “body of death” three things that make up our old self:

All I have inherited from Adam’s sin and fallen nature

If you and I were able to see our generational line all the way back to Adam each one of us would find every sin imaginable. In other words, just as the corruption of that “body of death” worked through the body of the live man until it finally killed him, so the corruption of sin has worked from Adam down through my generational line until I was born into the world. Not only does it affect who I am – my human nature – but I am also born under the weight of God’s judgment for all this accumulated sin. We see this principal at work in **Exodus 34:7**:

“...He does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

This is my heritage! I am born into the world with all the accumulated sin, curses and personality defects inherited from past generations, all spiritually contaminating my personality and making me “unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

The effects of what I have done myself

As Christians, we recognize that our sins were a major problem that God had to deal with on the Cross. These sins pronounced me as guilty and deserving punishment. But what few realize is that those very acts of sin also affected the kind of person I became. My character was affected by what I did. My personality was shaped by my own sin. This too is an important aspect of the old self – the wretched condition that only the Cross could solve.

The effects of what other people have done to me

My “old self” was not only shaped by my own sins. The sins of others also played a major role. The abuse, hurts, rejections, wounds of every kind that have been committed against me by others have also shaped me as a person. Fear, bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, lack of trust, poor self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness are just a few examples of the effects of others’ sin against us.

These three things correspond to the three “effects” of the body of death:

- ☞ **Effect One: Corruption** – The generational effect of Adam’s sin.
- ☞ **Effect Two: Guilt** – The effect of the sins I myself have committed.
- ☞ **Effect Three: Hate** – The effect of the sins others have committed against me.

These three things make up who I am outside of Christ. This old self is like a body of death chained to me.

But the reality of this body of death is not only true for those outside of Christ but also, tragically, for many Christians. Many have believed in the wonderful truth that Jesus died for their sins and so have received forgiveness and eternal life, but because they have not realized the fullness of Christ’s work on the Cross, they have continued to carry that body of death over with them into the new life which they now have in Christ. This has resulted in ceaseless struggle for them as Christians and much time and focus has been spent on trying to fix up the problems they have within themselves.

In the light of these three things that make up who we outside of Christ, no wonder Paul cries out:

“What a wretched man I am!”

...and with it the desperate plea...

“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Paul has painted the picture clearly. There is no way that man can save himself. His condition is too deplorable – rotten to the core. He cannot unlock the chains that bind the body of death to him. He cannot stop the rotteness, decay and corruption of sin. He cannot heal its effects. Man has no wisdom, strength, or power to help himself. He needs a rescuer – someone outside himself to come and save him. So, with a sense of relief, wonder and praise in his words, Paul gives the answer – an answer that he will introduce in full depth in the next chapter:

“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”