



# GRACE MESSENGER

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## **THE CURSE OF RELIGION: DYING WITHOUT GRACE (Part 2)**

Part 1 is in the October 2010 Issue.

In the process of building his case for being “married to Christ” and its consequential life of newness of spirit in verses one through six of Romans chapter seven, Paul makes three rather derogatory statements concerning the law. He states that the Christian who is now one with Christ had “become dead to the law. . .” (7:4) and “. . . are delivered from the law. . .” (7:6). Also, he states that when believers”... were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in [their] members to bring forth fruit unto death” (7:5).

With such derogatory statements as “dead to the law” (7:4), “delivered from the law” (7:6) and “the motions of sins, which were by the law” (7:5), another legitimate question can be raised: “What shall we say then? is the law sin?” (7:7). Again, Paul gives a definite “God forbid” (7:7) with an additional six verses explaining why the law is not wicked. In fact, “. . . the law is good, if a man use it lawfully”

(1 Tim. 1:8-11). The legitimate use of the law exposes sin: “. . . nay, I had not known sin, but by the law . . .” (Rom. 7:7). Not only does the law expose sin by the simple statement that this act or that act is sin, but it reveals sin in a much more fundamental and a much more detrimental way: “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (7:11). The legitimate use of the law does, indeed, expose sin. It is the illegitimate use of the law that brings death. The understanding of this truth is vital to the reality of what it means to be Christian in the purest sense of Christianity. The reality of this truth is also fundamental to understanding the remaining verses of chapter seven. In essence, the confusion that this seventh chapter of Romans has generated in so much of Christianity originates simply because the issue of the law is completely ignored in most attempts to understand it. It is the issue of the law, in fact, that is the fundamental theme of this chapter. Out of the twenty-five verses of this chapter, the law is mentioned no less than twenty-eight times.

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## **A Personal Note from James**



*The Colossians letter is one of the most provocative letters written by Paul. By bringing the focus back to Jesus the gospel in this letter can save you from needless failures and heartaches.*

*Hearing Jesus in this Bible study can bring you into the real essence of what it means to experience the life of God, what it means to live in the simplicity of his message.*

*Paul's entire letter to the Colossians was written to proclaim Jesus Christ is the essence of all things. He wanted his first readers to not be moved from this hope of the gospel. His prayer for them was "that [they] might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . ." (Col. 1:9). As the entire letter indicates, the knowledge of the Father's will is to understand that Jesus Christ is the way of **entrance** and of **continuance** in experiencing the kingdom of God.*

*For example, Paul proclaimed to the Colossians "Even the mystery . . . is made manifest to his saints; To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26,27). Christ dwells within the believer and God is confident that glory will be experienced in the believer because it depends not upon man but upon Christ. Sadly, however, after man enters into the kingdom he keeps turning to something other than Christ for his hope.*

*If this is your experience consider joining me on the webinar to hear more. Here is part of a webinar teaching that was shared recently in a home fellowship. The webinar format is different because it is through the Internet, but this will give you an idea of what is shared.*

### **Listen to part 1 of 2**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qv7eGYuDEQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qv7eGYuDEQ)

*In Christ,  
James*

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The illegitimate use of the law can be illustrated in verses nine and ten. Paul says, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death" (7:9, 10). Notice again the contrast of life and death in these verses.

Paul was alive. The life to which Paul is referring is the life that originated out of the knowledge and the reality of being one with Christ. It is the abundant life of the statement of

**It is not only life, but abundant life; not only life, but crown of life living; not only life, but the all things of life; not only life, but reigning in life. It is living in its ultimate reality.**

Jesus in ". . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). It is the "crown of life" of the statement of James in, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). It is the **all things** of the statement of Peter in, "According as his divine power hath given unto us **all things** that pertain unto life. . ." (2 Pet. 1:3). It is the reign of the statement of Paul in, "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by

one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). The "I was alive" (7:9) of Paul is a reference to the quality of life he is experiencing in being one with Christ. It is not only life, but abundant life; not only life, but crown of life living; not only life, but the all things of life; not only life, but reigning in life. It is living in its ultimate reality.

It is this quality of life that is killed by the law. The commandment, more accurately the attempt to live by the commandment, brings death to the abundance (5:17) of the abundant life that

is possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The abundance of grace which produces this phenomenal quality of life is frustrated by the attempt to live rightly by keeping the law. It is not the law, per se, that kills abundant life, but rather the attempt of man to live the law in his own ability.

Since ". . . the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12) and yet ". . . sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived [Paul], and by it slew [him]" (7:11), a logical question could be raised. Paul asks that question, "Was then that which is good made death unto me? . . ." (7:13). Again, the response is

God forbid (7:13). Paul emphatically states that the problem is not the law. Accordingly, he takes the next thirteen verses to explain the real culprit of the problem.

Every Christian, at one time or another, can identify readily with Paul's statement: ". . . *for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*" (Rom. 7:18, 19). Likewise, the Christian who has come to terms with his struggle will also join with Paul and cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (7:24). The struggle that is set forth in these statements is the issue of every dying believer or church. For they are, in fact, the issue of what it means to be Christian, what it means to be human. The problem of man is obviously found in the statement of Paul ". . . I am carnal, sold under sin" (7:14). This statement and the concluding statements of this chapter relate to the struggle of attempting to do right in the context of the law. Verses fifteen through twenty-five are simply commentary on verse fourteen. The struggle that is set forth in those verses occurs in man because he is born into this world a physical creature that soon turns to his own intellect for guidance. Without the quickening Spirit of God to be the essence of life, Paul, as with all men, is "carnal, sold under sin."

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The essence of this struggle is not the struggle of a Christian who has Christ living in him, the grace of God flowing through him, and the Holy Spirit controlling him. The struggle of verses fifteen through twenty-five is a struggle of frustrated grace. It is the struggle of a believer who is fighting the warfare on the wrong front. He is attempting to do the good that he would in his own work-righteousness (Rom. 7:19). But, because there can be no good thing come of his own efforts, he finds himself doing wickedness that he does not want to do. Religion kills because it always quenches the grace of God.

The cry is always, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). The answer is always, 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. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 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: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom. 7:24-8:4)

Because man attempts to keep the law in his own ability walking after his flesh, he experiences the curse of religion, dying without grace.

## BIBLE STUDY AIDS:

As you may know, The Way of Christ Web page provides many Bible study aids such as MP3's, CD's, DVD's, as well as books and articles by Dr. Stone. In spite of this he says that there is a unique understanding in seeking and studying the scripture and most of our studying actually hinders our process! Why then do we provide Bible study aids? Read more on what Dr. Stone has to say on this:

***Bible study aids are numerous. There is one, however, that is above all the rest. It stands alone as the foundation for all understanding of the Scripture. All Bible study aids must be grounded in the knowing of Jesus.***

***Successful Bible study aids must answer the question of how do you seek God. For the Bible says, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou***

***find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). With the question to that answer being no, Bible study aids that fail to address the unique Christian approach to learning are ineffective. Bible study aids must also deal with the core issue of the process of study itself. To come to a clear understanding of the unique approach to Christian learning, you must accurately ascertain one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Most Bible study aids fail because of a misunderstanding of this verse.***

***Since most Christians understand this verse as a command or an admonition by Paul to Timothy to study the Word of God, they think the act of study itself is the core of all Bible study aids. What Paul is saying, however, is not putting the emphasis on study as is commonly understood. He is telling Timothy the rightly handling of the word of truth will produce a workman who is approved by God. He will not be ashamed of himself or of his work for he will have rightly handled the Word of God. The success or failure of all Bible study aids rest in how the seeker handles Jesus, the living Word.***

***Paul also seems to indicate that Bible study aids that are centered in man's effort to seek God by his own study, his own skills, or his own acts of wisdom may actually hinder the process of finding God. He wrote, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect (1 Corinthians 1:17). His own preaching was ". . . not with enticing words of man's wisdom . . . that . . . faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). Failing to know which of the Bible study aids are legitimate or not is essential to understanding the secrets of the Word of God.***

***[www.wayofchrist.org/bible-studies.asp](http://www.wayofchrist.org/bible-studies.asp)***

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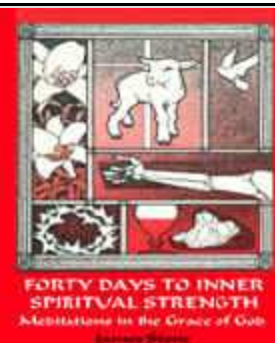
Barry and Jennifer with their children, Kaitlyn Grace & Gabriel James



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[barrysheperd@wayofchrist.org](mailto:barrysheperd@wayofchrist.org)

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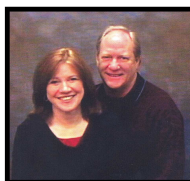


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