

## Law in Romans: A survey

Words normally have a range of meanings. Run may be a verb meaning to move with speed so that one never has two feet on the ground at the same time. It may indicate the flow of a liquid, or describe an individual running a business or a meeting, or it may mean to operate machinery, it refer to the potential cost. My dictionary gives twelve different verb meanings. Run may also be used as noun with even more uses. If we are familiar with a language, we recognize which of these various usages is appropriate to a context. If some is dressed in exercise shorts, tennis shoes and a t-shirt and tells us that he or she is going to run, we would assume, they are running for exercise. However, if someone is talking to us about an elected position and then tells us he or she plans to run for that office, we don't envision a foot race, but a contest for votes. Furthermore, if we are told that a fence runs around the perimeter of a property, we know the speaker is indicate the location of the fence, not that the fence is physically moving. Each of these involves range of meaning for the same three letters.

In the New Testament the word law also has a range of meaning. When most readers encounter the word law in the New Testament, they assume that it refers to the Mosaic Law, and to be sure, it often does. The Greek *nomos* [νομος] can refer to a set of rules intended to dictate the conduct of a group of people. The Mosaic Law falls within this usage. Other times, it refers to a principle, similar to our law of gravity, or even "Murphy's Law: if anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."

This brief study will survey the uses of νομος in the book of Romans. Romans presents us the greatest diversity of uses in the New Testament, within a single book, and sometimes within a shorter context. Below are the full text verses with the occurrences. The passages have been categorized according to the contextual meaning of the word "law." Notes follow the passages if clarification is necessary. The text is the NASB (1995). I've underlined the definite article, when it occurs in the English translation though it is absent in the Greek text.

Classifications: **G**-law in general, **M**-Mosaic Law, **O**- Old Testament: Gen-Judges, **P**-a principle in general

**Rom. 2:12** For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

**G**- None of the occurrences of law in the verse have the definite article, therefore none of them refer specifically to the Mosaic Law. Paul is simply distinguishing between those people who sin lawlessly, that is they are not operating under a set of rules, and those who sin in law-they have some set of rules. This last group may be operating under the Mosaic Law as their set of rules, but it may be broader.

**Rom. 2:13** for *it is* not the hearers of the Law *who* are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

**G**- Likewise, these refer to people who have some set of rules.

**Rom. 2:14** For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a **law** to themselves,

**G and M**- The second occurrence refers to the Mosaic Law.

**Rom. 2:15** in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

**G**- Though Law has the definite article, Paul id not mean the Mosaic Law. The article refers back to the "they are a law for themselves" in verse 14. Paul is not stating that the essence of the Mosaic Law is intrinsically written in the hearts of men. This contradicts Paul's later claim in 8:7 that the frame of mind [*phroneō*] which pertains to the flesh is not and cannot be subject to the law of God. Fallen man is contrary to God and does not have the Mosaic Law thinly or otherwise written in their hearts. Rather, people wish to be treated fairly and this often becomes the basis of a set of rules, which are passed on and taught to children, and in this way, they become written in the individuals' hearts.

**Rom. 2:17** But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,

**G**-

**Rom. 2:18** and know *His* will and approve the things differing, being instructed out of the Law,

**M**-

**Rom. 2:20** a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the **Law** the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,

**M-**

**Rom. 2:23** You who boast in the **Law**, through your breaking the **Law**, do you dishonor God?

**G-**The first refers to rules in general, while the second **M-** is the Mosaic Law.

**Rom. 2:25** For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the **Law**; but if you are a transgressor of the **Law**, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

**G-**

**Rom. 2:26** So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the **Law**, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

**M-**

**Rom. 2:27** And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the **Law**, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the **Law** and circumcision are a transgressor of the **Law**?

**M-** this is an uncircumcised Gentile, while the second is **G-** though they have the law, they transgress law in general, their life is that bad.

**Rom. 3:19** Now we know that whatever the **Law** says, it speaks to those who are under the **Law**, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

**M-**

**Rom. 3:20** because by the works of the **Law** no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the **Law** comes the knowledge of sin.

**G-** By leaving it a general reference, Paul indicates that no one is justified by any kind of law.

**Rom. 3:21** But now apart from the **Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the **Law** and the Prophets,

**G-** God's kind of righteousness is made visible apart from any kind of law, **O-** in the second case referring not just to the Law of Moses but all of Moses' writing through Judges.

**Rom. 3:27** Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of **law**? Of works? No, but by a **law** of faith.

**P-** In the first case, Paul is asking what principle excludes boasting: not works, but **P-** a principle of faith in the second occurrences

**Rom. 3:28** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the **Law**.

**G-** Anything that could be considered a set rules, does result in justification, i.e. before God.

**Rom. 3:31** Do we then nullify the **Law** through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the **Law**.

**G-** in both cases this is general, because law as a set of rules was never intended to result in justification before God, therefore, faith does not render it idle (NIV nullify). Law was intended to demonstrate need, to prove to mankind his lost state, his utter failure.

**Rom. 4:13** For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the **Law**, but through the righteousness of faith.

**G-** The Mosaic law was not yet given at the time God promised Abraham. Further, Abraham did nothing of merit (law in general) which precipitated God's making a covenant with him.

**Rom. 4:14** For if those who are of the **Law** are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

**G-** Paul pressed his argument that the promise is not based upon a merit system (LAW) which is also true of being an heir. To be an heir based on merit renders faith idle, for faith is directed at promises alone.

**Rom. 4:15** for the **Law** brings about wrath, but where there is no **law**, there also is no violation.

**M-** This first reference is likely to the Mosaic Law, and it produces wrath or anger. It does this because law in general **G-** (second reference) involves transgression, or crossing a line. Such actions proves the offender guilty and under condemnation, and so deserving of death (2 Corinthians 3:7, 9).

**Rom. 4:16** For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the **Law**, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

**M-** The seed from Law are Jews born and raised under the Law contrasted to Gentiles who were not.

**Rom. 5:13** for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

G- Both statements consider a time when law was not present, and its relation to keeping a tally of sin.

**Rom. 5:20** The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

G- Law in general entered to increase transgression, so that God could demonstrate grace.

**Rom. 6:14** For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

G- The believer's present life involves freedom from any kind of law/merit system.

**Rom. 6:15** What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Let it not be!

G- see last verse.

**Rom. 7:1** Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

G- The first is any law/merit system, the second G- the definite article refers to the first phrase.

**Rom. 7:2** For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

G- This is a law or merit system tied to one's husband, second G- refers back to the last statement.

**Rom. 7:3** So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

G- The general law pertaining to her husband, the definite article refers to the previous statements.

**Rom. 7:4** Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

M- This is the Mosaic Law specifically to which we died.

**Rom. 7:5** For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

M- The Mosaic Law incited our sin natures to action, so that we could be proven sinful.

**Rom. 7:6** But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

M-

**Rom. 7:7** What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."

M- the first and last references, G- the second

**Rom. 7:8** But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

G-

**Rom. 7:9** I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

G- This refers to Paul's initial Christian experience

**Rom. 7:12** So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

M-

**Rom. 7:14** For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

M-

**Rom. 7:16** But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law (literally "it") is good.

M-

**Rom. 7:21** I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

P- Paul observed a principle, something like a law of gravity, evil was still present in him.

**Rom. 7:22** For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

P- (maybe M-) But specific, more likely God's plan of grace based upon 7:25; 8:7, if a principle, it is not a merit system, but the principle by which God works, not how we work.

**Rom. 7:23** but I see a different **law** in the members of my body, waging war against the **law** of my mind and making me a prisoner of the **law** of sin which is in my members.

**P-** The principle that not only did Paul do something he did not wish to do, but that he also had this conflict within himself, he wanted something else, **P-** The principle of his mind wanting to do a good thing, **P-** The principle he has observed of his sin nature wanting to do something contrary to his new nature

**Rom. 7:25** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the **law** of God, but on the other, with my flesh the **law** of sin.

**P-** how God works by grace (first part of the verse), **P-** the conflict with his sin nature.

**Rom. 8:2** For the **law** of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the **law** of sin and of death.

**P-** How the Spirit leads us to our life in Christ as a means of liberty from **P-** previous sin nature principle

**Rom. 8:3** For what the **Law** could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, **M-**

**Rom. 8:4** so that the requirement of the **Law** might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

**P-** principle of God's work by grace (7:23, 25; 8:7)

**Rom. 8:7** because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the **law** of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,

**M- or P-** the latter being the principle by how God's works in grace, not a system of merit for us.

**Rom. 9:4** who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the **Law** and the *temple* service and the promises,

**M-**

**Rom. 9:31** but Israel, pursuing a **law** of righteousness, did not arrive at *that law*.

**G-**

**Rom. 10:4** For Christ is the end of the **law** for righteousness to everyone who believes.

**G-** Christ ended any kind of law as a merit system for the believer's righteousness.

**Rom. 10:5** For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on **law** shall live by that righteousness.

**M-** though textual problem omits the definite article meaning this could be **G-**

**Rom. 13:8** Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the law*.

**G-** any kind of merit system is fulfilled by loving

**Rom. 13:10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the law*.

**G-** “ ”

Expanded translation of Romans 7:1-8:17. Expanded means interpretive: it reflects the translator's understanding of this text, containing added explanations. If "law" occurs without a footnote, the word has been added for clarification but is not part of the original Greek text.  
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1. Or, don't you know, brothers, for I am talking to the ones familiar with law,<sup>1</sup> that the law<sup>1</sup> system governs the man as long a time as he lives? 2. For the woman who is married, is bound to her husband by the law<sup>1</sup> while he lives. But, if the husband should die, she is released from the legal<sup>1</sup> system connected with her husband. 3. Therefore, while the husband lives, she will be living as a cheating wife if she joins herself to a different husband (man). But, if her husband should die, she is freed from the legal<sup>1</sup> system; she will not be a cheating wife if she joins herself to a different husband. 4. So, my brothers, you also were caused to die to the Law<sup>2</sup> of Moses through your being in the body of Christ, for the purpose that you might be joined to a different One, the One who was raised out from among dead people (i.e. Jesus Christ), so that you might bear fruit for God. 5. For when we were in the flesh (our sinful nature), the cravings for which we are pained, which come from our sinful nature, were are work within our human nature through the Mosaic Law,<sup>2</sup> for the purpose of bearing fruit in the realm of death-that part not yet saved. 6. But now we<sup>3</sup> have been released from the Law<sup>2</sup> of Moses by dying to the Law which held us, so that we can serve by that which the Spirit made new and not by means of the old letter. 7. So, what am I saying? Is the Mosaic Law<sup>2</sup> sinful? NO! But I would not have known the sinful nature, except through a legal<sup>1</sup> system. For I would not have known that the intense craving for other's things is wrong, except the Mosaic Law<sup>2</sup> said, 'Don't crave for other people's things.' 8. But the sinful nature took advantage through the rules of the Mosaic Law, and produced all kinds of cravings for other's things. Because, without a legal<sup>1</sup> system, sin (including my sinful nature) was effectively dead. 9. Now I was living separate from a legal<sup>1</sup> system at one time, but when the rule of the Mosaic Law came along (that is, I tried to live by it), the sinful nature came back to life. 10. Now I died and I found within myself the rule of the Mosaic Law which was intended to keep me alive (physically), it led to death (living like I'm cut off). 11. Because the sinful nature took advantage through the rule of the Mosaic Law, and it (the sinful nature) deceived me and and killed me. 12. So that, indeed the law<sup>2</sup> is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. 13. Therefore, the thing (i.e. the law) which is good for me, has it become death? Let it not be. But the sin *nature*, that it might plainly be seen to be sin, through the good thing for me, it worked out death, that the sin *nature* might become excessively sinful through the commandment. 14. For we know that the Law<sup>2</sup> is spiritual (speaks to my rationale), but I am fleshly, being sold under the sin *nature*. 15. For what I am producing, I am not familiar with it. For I don't do what I want, but what I hate, this is what I do. 16. Now if I do what I don't want to do, I agree with the law<sup>2</sup> that *it is* suitable. 17. But now I no longer am producing this, but the sin which dwells in me. 18. For I know that there does not dwell in me (this is in my flesh) anything good. For to want something, that's present with me, but how to produce the good, that isn't present. 19. For I do not do the good thing I want to do, but the bad thing I don't want to do, this is what do regularly. 20. But if the thing I don't want, I do, then no longer am I producing it but the sin which dwells in me. 21. For I find then a principle,<sup>4</sup> that while I am wanting to do something appropriate, that the bad thing is present with me. 22. For I agree with the principle<sup>5</sup> of how God operates according to the inner man, 23. But I see a different principle<sup>3</sup> within me, acting like a

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<sup>1</sup> Law in general, i.e. a set of rules (commands) governing activity, e.g. a law/rules governing marriage. In 7:1-3 the Greek definite article refers back to the law or legal system connected to her husband, not the Mosaic Law.

<sup>2</sup> The Mosaic Law, i.e. the set of rules (commands) given by God to Israel through Moses.

<sup>3</sup> By "we" Paul refers to the Jewish believers of the first century. Gentile believers were never under that law, but were under a law of their own devising (i.e. 2:14-15). It has implications for modern Christians of both Gentile and Jewish descent, by encouraging us not to put ourselves under law, because God freed the Jews from law.

<sup>4</sup> The principle that his sin nature is always present with him, opposed to what he wishes in his new nature.

<sup>5</sup> The principle of how God operates by grace, causing us to have a good desires for which see Philippians 2:13.

soldier against the principle<sup>6</sup> of how my mind works, and it take me captive by the principle<sup>3</sup> of the sin *nature*, that nature which is within me.

24. O, very sad and pitiable man that I am. Who will rescue me from this body dominated by this death, this sinful character. But grace is by God through Jesus Christ our Lord, Yet, therefore, one one hand I am serving with my mind the principle<sup>4</sup> of how God operates, but with my flesh, I am serving the principle<sup>3</sup> of the sinful nature.

8:1 Now then, there is no more judgment against those in Christ Jesus. 2. For the principle<sup>7</sup> of how the Spirit works with regard to the life in Christ Jesus, that principle has freed you from the principle<sup>3</sup> of the sin *nature* and the *spiritual* death (i.e. it is always present and I do what it wants rather than what I want). 3. For the inability of the Mosaic Law<sup>2</sup> -it was weak because of the flesh- concerning sin, God has condemned the sin *nature* in the flesh by sending His own Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh (He wasn't sinful). 4. So that the righteous results of the principle<sup>4,6</sup> of how God works, might be accomplished in us, those who are not walking by the standard of the flesh but by the standard of the Spirit (i.e. how He operates with regard to the life in Christ Jesus). 5. For, those people who are operating by the standard of the flesh, they set their attitude by the things about the flesh, but those who are operating by the standard of the Spirit, set their attitude by the things from the Spirit (i.e. our life in Christ Jesus). 6. For the attitude from the flesh *is* death (it reflects nothing about God's life and work), but the attitude from the Spirit *is* life (it reflects God's work) and it is peace. 7. Because the attitude from the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not submit to the principle<sup>4</sup> of how God operates, and it can't do so. 8. Now those operating by the flesh are not able to please God. 9. But we are not in flesh but in Spirit, since it is true that God's Spirit dwells in us. But if anyone doesn't have the Spirit sent from Christ, that one is not His (i.e. Christ's). 10. But assuming it is true that Christ is in you, remember, on one hand the body is dead due to the sinful nature (it hasn't been regenerated), but the Spirit is life due to righteousness (not ours but Christ's). 11. But if the Spirit from the One Who raised Jesus from among dead people, if that Spirit dwells in you, then the One raising Christ from among dead people, He will make alive even your bodies which are subject to death, He will do so through the Spirit He sent the Spirit dwelling in you.

12. Yet therefore, brothers, we are not obligated to life for the flesh by the standard of the flesh. 13. For if you live by the standard of the flesh, you are about to die. But if by the Spirit (see verse 2 on the principle of the Spirit regarding the life in Christ Jesus) you put to death the practices of the body, you will live. 14. For as many as are being led by the Spirit sent from God (this is how you walk), these are sons of God. 15. For, you have not received the Spirit who produces slavery all over again by the use of fear (a key motivation in the Law), but you have received the Spirit who graduated us to the status of sons. By that Spirit, we cry out, Daddy, Father! 16. This same Spirit witnesses to our human spirit that we are God's children. 17. Now since we are God's children, we are heirs: God's heirs and joint-heirs with Christ, since it is true that we suffer jointly with Christ, so that we will also be jointly glorified.

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<sup>6</sup> The principle of his renewed mind which is able to appreciate new desires from God.

<sup>7</sup> The principle of how the Spirit frees the believer by directing the believer to his life in Christ Jesus. The Spirit leads us to frame our minds with our position Christ, as opposed to the things from the flesh/sin nature. Walking by the Spirit involves following the Spirit's lead to this set of realities in Christ. It results in the experience of freedom.