

ROMANS 7

Paul continues to explain how the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ frees us from the dominion that sin has over us through the law.

I) Freed from the Law (7:1-6)

- A) Law has dominion [rule] over a man as long as he lives (v. 1)
- B) Illustration from the law of marriage (vv. 2-3)
 - 1) A woman who has a husband is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives
 - 2) If her husband dies, she is released [loosed] from the “law of her husband”
 - 3) If while her husband lives she marries another man, she is an adulteress
 - 4) If her husband dies, she is freed from that law – would not be an adulteress if she marries another man (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39)
- C) Those justified by faith have become dead to the law through the body of Christ (v. 4)
 - 1) This death takes place in the act of baptism where one is united with death and resurrection of Christ (cf. 6:2-3); died to sin and died to law justification (perfect works)
 - 2) Dead to the law in order to be married to the risen Christ and bear fruit to God (cf. 6:22)
 - 3) Jews dead to the Law of Moses, and all men dead to law code condemnation
- D) When in the flesh [seeking our own things], passions of sin through law [which identified and condemned sin] were at work in our members [body, 6:13, 19] to bear fruit to death (v. 5; cf. 6:21)
 - 1) Now been delivered (“released” – same word as in v. 2) from the law, having died to what we were held by [the law that demanded perfection], we now should serve in the newness of the spirit [renewed, cleansed, forgiven servants of righteousness] and not in oldness of the letter [law-condemned servants of sin] (v. 6)
 - a) Many connections to our death to sin in baptism and being raised to new life (6:2-13)

Paul uses the law of marriage to illustrate that since we have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, we are now lawfully married to Christ and justified by faith. The law (and its requirement of perfect law-keeping) has no more dominion over a man when he is in Christ.

The newness of the spirit is contrasted with the oldness of the letter (see 2 Cor. 3:2-6 for a similar argument contrasting the old and new covenants; see also Rom. 2:27, 29). Where once we were confined under the condemnation of sin, we now serve God justified and forgiven in the newness of spirit, being instructed by the revelation of the Spirit of God in the new covenant of Christ, and our faith in God being accounted to us for righteousness.

II) Sin’s Advantage in the Law (7:7-12)

- A) *Third question:* Is the law sin (is the law at fault)? Paul’s answer: “Certainly not!” (v. 7)
 - 1) Paul now uses his own experience with law and sin as an example
 - 2) Paul would not have known sin except through law (knowledge of sin, 3:19-20)
 - 3) For example, he learned about the sin of covetousness because the law said, “You shall not covet” (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21)
 - 4) Law not responsible for man’s conduct, but measures it by a divine standard (v. 8)
- B) It was sin that took opportunity by the commandment to produce evil desires; for apart from the law, sin is dead (cf. 5:13; 1 Cor. 15:56; example of Eve – Gen. 3)
- C) Paul was once alive [spiritually] without the law [child – before accountability], but when the commandment came, sin revived [became alive] and Paul died [helplessly doomed] (v. 9)

- 1) The commandment which was to bring life (cf. Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15-19) brought death instead (v. 10; Deut. 27:26; 2 Cor. 3:6-7; Gal. 3:10)
- 2) Sin, taking advantage by the law, deceived and killed; sin is responsible and all have entered into sin (v. 11)
- 3) The law itself remains holy, just, and good (v. 12; cf. Psa. 119:137-138); law is not sin!

Paul now answers the third anticipated question – the law is certainly not at fault for sin. He uses his own experience with law and sin as an example. The law gave him the knowledge of sin by teaching the divine standard. It did not cause him to sin. Sin took opportunity by the law to tempt and produce in him evil desires.

Paul was alive once without the law. This refers to his being a child before the age of accountability. Eventually, though, Paul sinned. The commandment informed Paul of his sin and his helpless state of spiritual death. Sin itself is responsible for deceiving and killing souls, while the law has the character of the Lawgiver who gave it – holy, just, and good.

III) Law Cannot Save from the Human Predicament of Sin (7:13-25)

- A) *Fourth question:* “Has then what is good [law] become death to me?” (vv. 13-14)
 - 1) Answer: “Certainly not!” Culprit was sin, not the law; sin produced death in Paul; sin became exceedingly sinful through being exposed by the law
 - 2) Contrast: Law is spiritual (divine in origin, 1 Cor. 2:13), but Paul is carnal, sold under sin
- B) His problem – a desire to be obedient under law, yet falling into sin (vv. 15-23; cf. 3:19-20)
 - 1) Paul uses himself as an example of desiring the law of God but being condemned in sin
 - 2) What he wants to do, he does not do, and what he hates, he does
 - 3) When he sins, he agrees with the law that it is good (in its condemnation of his sin)
 - 4) Struggles against flesh where nothing good dwells; strives to do good, but difficult
 - 5) Though he wills to do good, he sins, but still delights in the law of God in his spirit
 - 6) The law [condemnation] of sin wars against the law of God in his mind – there is no provision in the law itself to remedy the condemnation of sin
- C) Paul declares that in this struggle [conflict] he was a wretched man in a body of death (v. 24)
 - 1) He struggled in a body which was dead in sin under the law and which itself was subject to the curse of sin and death (“wretched” = distressed, miserable)
 - 2) But now thankful for God, through Jesus Christ our Lord – the remedy! (v. 25; explained more fully in chapter 8)

Paul answers the fourth and final anticipated question in this section. Has that which is good (law) become death to him? Again, no, for sin is the true culprit. The law remains holy, for God who gave it is holy. Paul, though, is under the condemnation of the law due to his sin.

It is debated whether Paul speaks of himself in this chapter. The present tense first person singular pronouns (“I”) would clearly suggest that he is using himself as an example of the struggle of one who desires to keep the law but falls into sin. What he knows to do he does not do, and what he knows he should not do, that he does. He thus agrees with the law that he is a sinner. While he delights in the law of God, the law of sin fights against the law of his mind. He cannot win this struggle alone. Thanks be to God who brought salvation in Christ!

There are different laws at work here. The law of God is holy and good. The law of sin is the condemnation of sin. The law of the mind is Paul’s desire to obey the will of God. In this struggle Paul’s desire is to live for God under the law, but he fails and is dead in sin. He spiritually delights in the law of God but is a wretched man in a body of death. But there is a remedy from God in Christ. The next chapter will reveal that remedy in there being no condemnation in Christ, living according to the Spirit, and eagerly awaiting the hope to come.