

Romans: Chapter Seven

Romans 5.12-8.39: SANCTIFICATION (*Righteousness Realised*)

Romans 6 uses the metaphor of **slavery** to teach deliverance from **sin** as a *monarch* (6.1-14) and a *master* (6.15-23). Romans 7 uses another metaphor, **marriage**, and concerns deliverance from the Mosaic **law**. The chapter shows the law is hopeless in terms of producing salvation *or* sanctification, both of which are only enjoyed in the Lord Jesus (7.24-25).

Broadly speaking, the chapter divides into *three*. The first section (vv.1-6) clearly declares the believer's deliverance from the law (Paul writes particularly to his Jewish brethren) through the **death** of Christ. The remaining sections are largely *parenthetical* dealing with the true nature and work of the **law** (vv.7-13) and its antagonistic relationship to mankind in the flesh (his natural, fallen condition), vv.14-25. In summary, the law is intrinsically holy and good, the problem is that it operates on an inherently sinful and fallen people. Indwelling sin thus uses the law to its own advantage producing slavery and ultimately death.

From v.7 onwards, one cannot fail to notice the major emphasis on personal pronouns such as 'I' (x32), 'me' (x12) and 'my' (x4). The passage is not so much autobiographical, as Paul using himself as representative of a person (primarily a Jew) engaged in the hopeless struggle of trying to achieve salvation and sanctification through obedience to the law. He soon finds there is a conflict between what he *is* in the flesh (a slave to sin) and what he *desires* in his mind (to obey the law of God). What the law demands he finds he is powerless to do. What a wretched life (v.24)!

Whilst believers are clearly in view in vv.1-6, there is much disagreement over what follows. Many sound expositors see pre-conversion (vv.7-13) *and* post-conversion (vv.14-25) experiences, but the context suggests this is a plain description of the Jew's 'marriage-life with the old husband', the law. **David West**: *These verses (vv.7-25) describe the experience of a conscientious yet unconverted Jew, fully instructed in the law and seeking to accomplish a righteousness of his own 'by works of the law'.* They certainly do not chart the **normal** experience of a Christian. They *could*, however, be applied to a believer who is seeking to live according to the law as a principle of life and indeed it seems there were some to whom he was writing that were doing just that in their continued legal observance of foods and days (cf. 14.2, 5).

The Law and the Saint (7.1-6)

v.1: It is important to note that Paul is particularly (though not exclusively) directing this chapter to his Jewish brethren, those that 'experientially knew the (Mosaic) law'. Undoubtedly some may have felt they were being unfaithful to God in abandoning His law. The apostle begins with a well-known principle that the law only has 'dominion' or 'rule' over a person as long as they are alive. **vv.2-3**: Paul uses the contract of marriage to illustrate the same truth. A wife is bound to her husband by marriage as long as he is alive. To marry another man whilst he was still living was adultery. However, if her husband was to die, she would be released (discharged) from the marriage contract and free to marry another.

v.4: The application, though not perfect, is clear. It is not the husband that dies (the law) but the believer (the wife). Having been 'put to death' (*passive*, cf. 6.3, 7) by means of the 'body of Christ' (in which He kept the law and died as our representative) the law no longer has any claim upon the believer – the old marriage state is terminated; the relationship has ended. The believer is thus free to be united or 'married to another' (of a different kind) – the risen and glorified Christ. This relationship brings forth fruit unto God, rather than resulting in death (**v.5**). To put one who belongs to Christ under the yoke of the law is 'bringing about an adulterous condition. It is just the same as a woman having two husbands!' **Hamilton Smith**: *Instead of our lives being controlled by a written law that is against us, we have now come under the control of a living Person that loves us.*

v.5: These two verses make very important statements which summarise the life of the *unregenerate* under the **law** (v.5, expanded in vv.7-25) and the life of the *regenerate* in the **spirit** (v.6, expanded in 8.1-17). First, the unregenerate. 'In the flesh' is a way of describing unconverted days, human existence apart from God in dependence upon self. In this state, 'sinful passions' (motions) were stirred and incited by the law producing deeds that lead to death. **v.6**: *But*, the state of the regenerate is very different. Believers are 'delivered' or 'discharged' from the claims and slavery of the law in their lives 'having died' to it (cf. v.4). The purpose and obligation being that they 'should serve' God, not through blind, external obedience to the 'old' (worn out, obsolete) 'letter' (written document) of the law but in 'newness of spirit'. This is a new, fresh manner of service (cf. 6.4), wrought on the human spirit by the Holy Spirit. **Leckie**: *The law was blind, reluctant and unwilling obedience. Now, having been regenerated we serve in newness of spirit, in a joyful state of heart and mind.* It is the difference between the labour of a hired servant (**law**) and service of a son with a father (**grace**). We are no longer bound to a code, but united to a living Person that we delight to please.

The Law and Sin (7.7-13)

v.7: Paul has accused the law of inciting sin (v.5). Does this therefore mean that the law of God is sinful or evil? God forbid! In Paul's experience, unless the law had been given, he had not 'known sin' (not 'sins'). In other words, the commandments of the law helped Paul clearly understand the extent and seriousness of his inward state of sin. The commandment not to 'covet' (a lustful, powerful desire for something wrong or unlawful) particularly revealed the innermost desires of his heart and mind – clear evidence of *indwelling* sin in Paul's life. He was polluted through and through. In Jewish tradition, coveting is the sin which is the root of all others and therefore neatly summarises the law as a whole. **v.8:** This commandment provided sin with a 'base of operations' or 'springboard' (occasion) to incite further lust. When the human heart is faced with prohibition it stimulates rebellion and yet further sin (e.g. a 'no smoking' sign). Without the law, sin was present within him, but comparatively inactive or dormant ('dead') – the serious state of his sinful condition was not realised. **v.9:** Paul makes a possible reference to his bar-mitzvah when, at 12, he became a 'son of the commandment' and responsible to keep the law as a rule of life. Prior to this he was 'alive' in the sense of being unconscious of his sinful state and alienation from God, taking the ground of being able to live unto God. But, once the commandment was given, sin 'sprang to life' and he realised he was 'dead', separated from God. **v.10:** So, the commandment that promised life if obeyed (Leviticus 18.5) was found to lead to death when disobeyed. **v.11:** Sin had deceived him by using a holy and good commandment to incite him to evil, promising satisfaction and happiness in fulfilling his lust (cp. Genesis 3.4-5, 13; 1 Timothy 2.14). In obeying sin, he was 'put to death' (slain) being under the condemnation and curse of the law.

vv.12-13: In conclusion, it is not the law that is sinful or evil – I am! The problem is not the law, but sin that dwells within me. The law is 'holy', taking the same *character* as the God who gave it. It is 'just' in its *demands*, seeking to give to God and others what is their due (justice). It is 'good' or beneficial in its *purpose* and effect on others. **v.13:** Again, the law which is 'good' did not bring 'death', but **sin** is the real culprit, being exposed in its true character and nature by the law.

The Law and Slavery (7.14-25)

This second part of Paul's digression on the Mosaic law explains the inherent weakness of human beings as the reason for their inability to keep the law and so produce sanctification by self-effort (cf. 8.3). These verses describe what *regular* Jewish life under the law was like, and what is *always* true of the flesh under law – hence the switch to the *present* tense. Whilst delighting in their God-given law (2.17-20) and earnestly seeking to obey it, the Jew was unable to do so. Again, the 'holy' and 'good' law merely demonstrates the power of sin and evil within.

vv.14-17: The root of the problem is that the law is *spiritual* in character and the unregenerate Jew is a mere human being (carnal), under the slavery and bondage of sin (cf. 3.9). Therefore, such a person finds themselves doing of what they (and the law) disapprove. 'The very act of not wanting to do what the law forbids is itself an admission that the law is good.' Now, the explanation of all this is indwelling sin. The natural man is powerless before such a master. **vv.18-20:** Paul now considers the same struggle from another angle. Now, they cannot do of what they (and the law) approve and know is good (right). There is a will to do what is right, but in a fallen condition (the flesh) the *power* to do it is absent.

vv.21-23: So, the general principle (law) was that the conscientious Jew sought to do what was right according to their God-given law, even delighting in and approving of its moral standards (2.18) in their minds. Yet, the evil presence and controlling power of the sin principle was always present to oppose and overpower that desire making them prisoners of sin. The Jew could not therefore find *salvation* or *sanctification* through the law. **v.24:** No wonder there follows such a heartfelt cry for deliverance from such a sin-dominated body (cf. 6.6) characterised by death. 'O wretched man that I am!' Literally, 'miserable' or 'distressed man, I'. This is the cry of the pious Jew unable to fulfil the law's demands. Paul does not ask 'how' or 'what' might deliver him, but 'who'. His experience with the law and indwelling sin has shattered his self-confidence and driven him to look outside of himself for a deliverer. **v.25:** Paul, speaking now as a Christian, interjects to thank God that deliverance is available 'through Jesus Christ our Lord', which deliverance every Christian has experienced in measure now and will know in fullness in a future day (8.23). Deliverance from sin (6.7) and the law (7.6) cannot be found in self-effort, but only in the Deliverer Himself.

The application of such teaching is important. Sometimes as Christians we may feel empathy with these words. Who can deliver me from my struggle with indwelling sin? Thank God, Christ has delivered me! Such is the teaching of Romans 6 and 7. **Leckie:** *Practical sanctification does not come from looking in, or by self-effort but by looking to Christ. A Christian whose vision is filled with Christ will be a Christian who does not yield to sin very often.*