

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### Comments on Romans 7

Paul again discusses that freedom from law releases one from the dominion of sin. 6:14. He has established that if, under law, one offers less than perfection he is the servant of sin. Paul rejects the proposition that one possible solution is that one can remain under law and still seek the benefits of Christ. The solution is to die to law through the death of Christ. Freed from the law, one is at liberty to marry another.

vv. 1-6 – The only way to be acceptable to God is to get out from under law and its demand for perfection.

Romans 7:1 Or are ye ignorant, brethren (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law hath dominion over a man for so long time as he liveth?

2 For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband.

3 So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if the husband die, she is free from the law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man.

4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be

v. 1 – All understand (they know law) the principle that a dead person is no longer bound by law and a living person is no longer bound by a dead (repealed) law.

vv. 2-3 – The principle is illustrated by the marriage vow – the death of the husband releases the wife from the marriage vow so that she may marry another without becoming an adulteress.

vv. 4-6 – These verses apply the principle. By death the Roman Christians were made free from law so that they might be married to Christ. The

joined to another, *even* to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.

analogy should not be pressed too far, *i.e.*, Christ died so that they might be married to Christ. Paul is simply establishing that death frees one to marry another. To the extent that some commentators are critical of Paul on this basis, Paul's answer might be that while Christ did in fact die, he was also raised so that we might belong to him. We are to belong to him so that we might bring forth fruit unto God. Recall that Paul is discussing sanctification, not justification, in this context. He is discussing the life that a Christian should live in response to grace. Both justification and sanctification (holiness) were impossible under the standard of law (perfection).

In fact, when they (we) were in the flesh sinful passions by the law were bringing forth fruit for death. They were still in the dominion of death. "Flesh" cannot refer to physical flesh (bodies) since they were still in their physical bodies. Neither does it seem to refer to "carnal Christians" since it clearly refers to a condition outside of Christ. Since when they became Christians they came into a new state, one may safely conclude that living in the flesh was their life in the old state that demanded perfection.

"Sinful passions" arise and are followed when the members of the body are presented as servants of sin unto death, that is, they are under the dominion of sin. The law did not create our passions. Neither did it make our passions sinful. But when it made demands of us it only succeeded in generating curiosity that, when satisfied, led to sin.

This condition should no longer describe the Christian who has been discharged from law (as the wife from the law of the dead

husband). This abrogation of the Law of Moses was necessary for Christ to be prophet, priest, and king. (See, Zechariah 6:9-12 and Hebrews 1:3; 7:11ff; 8:1ff, among others.)

The purpose of the discharge was so that we might serve in newness of the spirit and not in oldness of the letter. Much has been made of “newness of the spirit” versus “oldness of the letter.” It is a favorite playground of those who seek to dispense with all law and all works of whatsoever nature. What we have already said concerning Paul’s use of “law” and “works of law” as not dispensing with the “obedience of faith” will suffice here. However, from the context it is clear that Paul is contrasting the old system that demanded flawlessness with the new system based upon Christ. The “letter” demanded perfection down to the jot and tittle; under Christ there can be righteousness without flawlessness.

Paul has said that law, given by God to direct and secure obedience, actually worked in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. That leads to the next subject – is not the law then evil?

vv. 7-25 –The law is not wicked; the person under it is.

To paraphrase the Ethiopian eunuch, “Of whom speaketh Paul this? Of himself, or of some other man? While many argue that Paul is speaking of a Christian (perhaps just of Christians who struggle with sin (assuming that there is any other kind)), the arguments seem to be overwhelming that Paul speaks of a person

still under law. Paul speaks of a person who has been slain by sin (v. 11), who is carnal (v. 14), who is sold under sin (v. 14), in whom sin dwells (v. 20), who is captive to the law of sin that dwells in his members (v. 23), and who is wretched (v. 24) because he lives in a body of death (v. 24). While never forgetting the sin that Paul considered most grievous – persecuting Christ (the church) – Paul would never have used such language of himself. If it is argued that Paul was not one who was beset by sin, recall that he had to buffet his body daily that, after having preached to others, he himself would not be a castaway. 1 Cor. 9:27.

If the man whom Paul describes is lost, why, then, is he wretched? First, note that this utterly destroys the doctrine of original sin that holds that the sinner can *do nothing good* and has *no desire to do anything good* prior to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner separate and apart from the word of God (also an anti-scriptural doctrine). Second, and more to the point here, Paul has shown that there is no justification under the law system. Now addressing sanctification, he establishes that there is no holiness under the law system no matter how badly one may desire to acquire it. The only way to reach the state of justification and holiness is through the deliverance of Christ.

#### 7:7-12 - The relation of law to sin.

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not

vv. 7-8 – Does Paul’s argument that sin took occasion by the law to kill (v.5), lead to the conclusion that the law is sinful? Absolutely not! The law made sin known and sin, in the law, found occasion to work disobedience

covet:

8 but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting: for apart from the law sin *is* dead.

9 And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;

10 and the commandment, which *was* unto life, this I found *to be* unto death:

11 for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me.

(specifically, covetousness). Paul is not arguing that sin is a condition exposed by the law; he is arguing that sin is a deviation from the law. If sin were a condition, the sinner would be dead even in the absence of law. Paul, however, says that without law, sin is dead. Sin (personified) can accomplish nothing without law. Apart from law, sin has no power. 1 Cor. 15:56.

vv. 9-11 – In fact, apart from law Paul was alive. Once again, Calvinism suffers a fatal blow. Calvinism teaches that no one is alive from conception on to conversion due to Adam’s sin. The Westminster Confession states:

By this sin they [Adam and Eve] fell from their original righteousness. . .and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

It is clear that Paul did not write the Westminster Confession. Paul said that he was alive apart from law once, but when law came and sin revived, he died. That doesn’t sound like Paul believed that he was sinful from conception. Paul says there was a time when he lived and sin was dead (v. 8). When the law came, that was reversed – sin lived and Paul was dead.

Most commentators agree that Paul was “apart from law” during his youth. He does not

state at what point sin came. He just says that it did. Some place the “age of accountability” at 13, the age of the Jewish bar mitzvah. Others place it at twelve, the age that Jesus went up to the temple with Mary and Joseph. The scripture does not place a chronological age upon it. It is clearly an age of understanding that may be reached earlier by some than by others. It is also clear that all persons reach that age at some point (except those who stay children mentally and cannot ever acquire the requisite understanding).

Put another way, the commandment that came to regulate and bring life was in fact the occasion of his death. Is this not our own experience as well? Isn't Satan still deceiving people into believing that true happiness is to be found in sin and not in the restrictions and prohibitions of Christ?

12 So that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good.

13 Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by working death to me through that which is good; -- that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful.

vv. 12-13 – Paul states once more that any shortcoming is not on the part of the Law; it is holy and just and good. He then asks whether that which was good became death unto him. This demonstrates, once again, that Paul did not believe that his “death” was the result of inherited total depravity. Total depravity could hardly be considered “good.” Paul died as a result of disobeying the law.

The law doesn't kill people; sin kills people. The law has played a role, but its function has been to demonstrate the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

7:14-25 - To be under grace and not under law is essential to sanctification.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15 For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do.

16 But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17 So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.

18 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good *is* not.

v. 14 – Paul says, “I am carnal.” What does he mean by “carnal”? We have discussed this above. The most reasonable conclusion is that it is a person under law seeking to be holy as a result of perfect obedience. Calling such a person “carnal” does not mean that he is totally depraved. Such not only goes against our experience, it contradicts scripture, *e.g.*, Cornelius. Acts 10. It certainly confesses human inadequacy to fulfill the laws demands.

vv. 15-16 – These verses as well as several following verses express the utter frustration from failure to resist *all* temptation and thus fulfill the laws demand for flawlessness. He is not saying that it is impossible for the unredeemed to do one good thing. The “good” for which he seeks is “holiness” under law – an impossibility. The fact that his shortcoming grieves him is an admission that the law is in fact good.

v. 17 – In these verses Paul does not deny personal responsibility for his conduct. We have seen that he acknowledges his personal responsibility throughout this section. Paul establishes that he is in servitude to Sin (personified) because he cannot accomplish what the holy and good law demands. He is not “do[ing] it” in the sense that he desires to do better but is not able.

v. 18 – Paul identifies “flesh” with “me.” They are not two separate things. Paul, like others, is of Adam. Like Adam, he has sinned. His mind and his will seek one thing, but his flesh fails him. Thus, he cannot serve God acceptably

19 For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise.

20 But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.

21 I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present.

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then I of myself with the mind, indeed, serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

under law. Since acceptable service is the “good” for which he seeks, no “good” dwells in his flesh.

vv. 19-20 – Again, Paul is not saying that he is either incapable of doing an single act of good (he is not looking at isolated acts of good or evil) or that he is totally depraved. What he does say disproves both, since to will something good, even if not accomplished, is good in and of itself. He again acknowledges that Sin (personified) is his master and is imposing its will on Paul.

v. 21-23 – Of what “law” does Paul speak? It can be either the law of his experience or the law of sin. The latter appears to be more consistent with the context. See v. 23. He seeks (desires, wills) to establish the law of God, but the ever present law of sin defeats his desire and brings him into captivity.

v. 24 – The Greek for “wretched” has to do with toil, hard work, or burdensome labor. Moses Lard translates v. 24, “Toil worn man am I.” He is weary of toil that always results in failure. He longs for a deliverer from the body of death. The body is the contact with the world; its members have been presented as servants of sin unto death (6:16). He is in the truest sense of the term a “walking dead man.”

v. 25 – Thank God there is a Deliverer – Jesus Christ our Lord. The anguished cry is followed by an outbreak of triumph!

Paul follows the outbreak of triumph with a summary of the struggle from which Christ delivers. His desires for the good are



unavailing; he serves the law of sin that brings death.

Barclay makes three useful observations on these verses:

1. The inadequacy of human knowledge.
2. The inadequacy of human resolution.
3. The inadequacy of diagnosis.