

“Paul Learns Liberty From His Bondage to the Flesh Through Its Dominion”
The Normal Christian Life – Paul’s Testimony, Part 2

Review: “Paul’s Testimony As A Law-Keeper Is Still An Example For Us All”

- ***An Analogy with the Mosaic Law Teaches Truth About the Law Today***
- ***Our Nature of Sin Is Encouraged by Law and the Knowledge of Sin Results***
- ***Paul’s Full Knowledge of the Power of Sin Should Still Be Teaching Us!***

- ***An Analogy with the Mosaic Law Teaches Truth About the Law Today***

Romans 7:1-4

1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.

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

4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

- Twice, Paul makes this statement, here and also at the end of his lengthy section about divorce and remarriage in 1 Cor. 7. The subject was clearly an important one for him. The law applies only during the life of the one who is under it.
- The apostle is writing primarily to those of Jewish heritage here, and verse 1 makes that clear, since no Gentile was ever under the law of Moses. Many in the Roman assembly were Jewish, it seems. And he says here that they knew the law very well indeed.
- Verses 2 and 3 are an illustration of what Paul is teaching here, though they do not represent an analogy technically, as the terms do not properly correspond.... But the teaching is that the Mosaic Law bound a woman to a man for life (as in “till death do us part”, common in Christian marriage services since 1549).

So the obvious conclusion the apostle intends here is that a marriage is not to be broken, for it is sacred before the Lord God. The wife is bound to her husband for life — until he dies, at which point she is freed from the bondage or law of her husband and is free to marry again. But the

text goes right on beyond this to the main teaching, which is all about what the previous chapters were teaching about the bond of all to Adam apart from Christ's death for sin and sins, and then his glorious resurrection that alone could break that bond and set us free by means of our justification [See Romans 4:32]. By his resurrection, we are now no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ".

- This is stated so well in verse 4: By Christ's death and resurrection, we have been set free from our previous bondage to Adam and his sin and have now passed from death to life, where "fruit", not compliant works, are the focus. Praise God!

But now the teaching reaches a deep subject indeed, but an important one, the relationship of law and sin dwelling in us still. For Paul, this teaching is most important, and it should be for us as well.

- ***Our Nature of Sin Is Encouraged by Law and the Knowledge of Sin Results***

Romans 7:5-6

5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

55 O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?

56 The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.

57 But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- So in such powerful words as these, Paul teaches the way of deliverance from the bondage to Adam and his sin. Now, though, Paul's teaching becomes intensely biographical as he goes back to a time in his life that was transforming indeed.
- He begins by stating affirmatively in verse 5 that there was a direct connection between the Law and sins for Jews, who were under that Law. It is not a positive comment at all. But the Old Testament reveals bondage to that Law in such detail that we may hardly read it without exclaiming, "Who shall deliver me?" as the apostle does near the end of the chapter.
- Verse 6 is central now to his "argument": "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held ..." As Paul teaches us in

verse 4, after the analogy is applied to our current circumstances. Now, he writes, our identity in Adam as his offspring and therefore as ones bearing his curse of sin and death has ended, and we have a new identity in our risen savior, Christ Jesus. We are now in Christ and no longer in Adam, and that has made all the difference.

- Take note here that the apostle is writing of how the Lord God sees us and not about how we may see ourselves. And the latter will be the subject of his personal testimony in verses 7 and following.

- ***Paul's Full Knowledge of the Power of Sin Should Still Be Teaching Us!***

- Verse 7 explains the dynamics of the reality we find dwelling in ourselves. That he chooses a member of the Ten Commandments is bold indeed, isn't it? This teaching is absolutely critical for our understanding.

Romans 7:7-11

7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

- Here we have the detailed teaching where the apostle dives down to the depths regarding sin and its indwelling power. It is a very negative statement indeed, with little positive teaching. The positive conclusion with the hope implied so strongly is left to the end of the chapter, or, since there are no chapter divisions in the original, the introduction to chapter 8.

He states much-needed truth here regarding the fallen realm where the law works. After all, "the law works wrath" (Rom. 4:15), even in this case, since it is God's Law, the Law worked wrath to those who were under it, the Jews. I thank God that in Romans, Paul makes this clear.

- Last time we asked the question of whether Paul experienced all of this before or after his salvation. We saw how all the evidence here in this extended description points us to this as a post-salvation experience. For he writes in verses 9 & 10: "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.”

- When was Paul alive apart from the Law, one must ask? Surely not as an unbeliever, since according to Galatians 3:12, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.” So Paul, before he was saved, was “living in the Law” and under the bondage of slavery to it. Yes, it was all “unto death”, but he did not know it, of course. He was, as far as he knew, “alive and living in the Law”.
- He reveals here what the Law actually is and how it worked in him — that he had no true knowledge of lust of the flesh, that sin nature that still dwelt within him though he were now a believer, until sin, the nature within, took occasion by the commandment, “thou shalt not covet” and deceived him, and by that law “killed him.” Under that law operating in his life then, he testifies here that he began to possess a knowledge he did not have before and to know lust in a new way because the law had said “thou shalt not covet or exercise strong desires”.
- But now, as a believer, he was alive “apart from the Law” entirely, until, though, he placed himself back under it and that one commandment in particular, “thou shalt not lust, or have strong desires”. At that point, he writes here, “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.”
- So what is Paul’s point here in this section? Simply put, it is that the Law, though given by God and therefore good and holy in itself, provided opportunity for the indwelling nature of sin to be emboldened, therefore bringing rebellion against that Law and then judgment. So instead of life resulting, it was death as demanded by that law.
- So the bottom line is this. When Paul, as a believer, had placed himself back under law, then he had works leading to judgment by that law and not fruit in living. And that is true for all of us today.
- Will we take God at his word, or will we go back as Paul did to law and religious works for deliverance? Or will Paul be our guide to liberty and life?

Our Outline: “Paul Learns Liberty From His Bondage to the Flesh Through Its Dominion”

- ***The Law Is Good, But It Provokes A Deep-Seated Task Master Within, Sin***
- ***The Facts of Our Struggle Prove the Bondage of the Will***
- ***This Conflict Between the Flesh and the Spirit Has No Human Solution***

- ***Oh, Blessed Grace: Christ Himself Is Our Deliverer from This Enslavement!***

I. The Law Is Good, But It Provokes A Deep-Seated Task Master Within, Sin:

- Our disappointments with life’s spiritual journey as believers teach us that we may have a multiple personality disorder due to indwelling sin, a nature devoted to that, and one that dominates our spirit so easily. But, as the apostle teaches us here, this is not really so, since we only have one human spirit, not two. Paul will conclude that next, but here he states the reality of the conflict with a nature within that desires evil. Praise God, we also have a new nature that desires God’s path of joy and peace. Amen.

[READ] Romans 7:12-17

12 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

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

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

16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

- Here we reach the heart of Paul’s teaching and his basic “argument”. It is based on the simple observation that in the effort to keep the commandment (here, the prohibition against lusting or strong desires), the flesh within was encouraged by the sin nature within contrary to what that law demanded. So his efforts were doomed to failure.
- But the actual divine logic presented here is given in three parts:
 - The teaching is first summarized — verses 12-14 — His experience with the law convinced him that he (and all by implication) was a hopeless case. He was unable to keep the law that was commanded due to the weakness of his flesh [REWORD?] and the way the law itself excited it and further encouraged it. “But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” And then the truth he knew so well: “For we know that the law is spiritual” and then his unavoidable conclusion: “... but I am carnal, sold under sin.” **The divine logic**

and purpose are seen here so clearly. The Law revealed the depths of sin present in us all as he had taught so powerfully in chapter 3:

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The Law had not been given to bring righteousness for the Jew but to magnify the sin within so its true depth might be known. This is one of the foremost teachings in the Romans, Dispensationally Considered, as we have seen so well.

- The conflict is now described in unforgettable terms — verses 15-16 — where he describes his own experience in which he saw clearly that there were two opposing principles or faculties within him, with the evil one dominating. This was a hopeless condition for him, for he desired to keep the law which was good and honorable.
- His conclusion is quite unavoidable — verse 17 — and here many have disagreed, since their view of human nature is so different from the apostle's. But his logic here is inescapable. His chosen wording is telling. We could spend some time here, but we will not. Let's keep it simple, as in fact he does: "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Or, he, Paul, did not desire the outcomes, but he was overwhelmed! So he blames the nature of sin indwelling him. It might seem that this is a convenient escape, blaming something else seemingly beyond his control. But in fact, it is in line with the entire teaching here. There is one person only, the "I", but two natures in the believer, the one oriented towards evil and sin, and the other oriented towards good and righteousness.
- So, the apostle teaches, we as persons possess a spirit, and that spirit is what Paul here calls "I". The grand question is, of course, how can we be delivered from this bondage? He already answered it so well in the previous chapter, but here he, through his own testimony, underscores the ease with which a believer may still be deceived by legalisms and religiously inspired false teachers.

This is critically important teaching indeed. Many refuse it, sadly. But we are caught, as it were, between the two with the

sin nature in dominance. He now continues on this theme, knowing that many will not be easily convinced of its truth:

II. The Facts of Our Struggle Prove the Bondage of the Will!

- Paul's teaching here now follows highlighting his testimony regarding the depths and power of sin dwelling within him and every believer:

[READ] Romans 7:18-20

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

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

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

- The teaching is summarized first with these words — "... to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.": As a believer, he does indeed desire that which is right and good, and obedience is his intent.
- His conflict is again described — "but the evil which I would not, that I do": But the facts were there, and he knew them so well. The repetition here in the teaching surely reflects the repetition of his failures in law-keeping.
- The conclusion is surely unavoidable, if we are honest about it and not blinded in our fleshly minds — "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me": Again, it is not I but that sin that has compelled me! He cannot escape that conclusion.

For his spirit was renewed as a believer AND the new nature dwelt within desiring what pleased the Lord always. But the nature of sin was demanding and seemingly irresistible.

III. This Conflict Between the Flesh and the Spirit Has No Human Solution:

- Paul summarizes his teaching here before closing this subject in the next verses.

[READ] Romans 7:21-23

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

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

23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

- The word “law” is used 7 times here in this one chapter, and not always in quite the same way. Sometimes it refers to a part of the Law of Moses. In other places (and more commonly here in chapter 7), it refers to a principle of action that describes realities within all believers. In other words, “this is just how things work.”
- Many have written (especially anti-dispensational, so-called “covenant” teachers) that we have here the natural state of the unbeliever. But that cannot be since Paul, in that case, would have to be lying when he writes that “when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man...”
- This then is the ongoing state of the believer. He is teaching from his own experience, that two principles operate within us all, and not only one. They co-exist, and the believer finds himself enslaved by the dominating influence of the power of sin dwelling within, the sin nature, so that he was led “into captivity to the law of sin which [was] in [his] members.”
- Last time, we looked at earlier verses where the apostle explains the essence of the Law carefully, using one of the Ten Commandments as his example. That was the law about coveting or having strong desires. You will remember that he wrote in verses 7-11 that when he applied that commandment to his own life, he learned that the more he tried to keep that commandment, the more his flesh responded to thwart his efforts at law keeping. He concluded from that what we are considering here today regarding indwelling sin and its dominance over our captive spirits, enslaving them, as it were, with no apparent exit possible. For this is the revealed relationship between the commandment and our fallen natures, such as they are.

Now unless we are willing to claim that the apostle was wrong about all of this and that his understanding and therefore his example are false (and many do exactly that, sadly), we must accept his teaching here. But there is light at the end of the tunnel, Praise God!

IV. Oh Blessed Grace: Christ Himself Is Our Deliverer from This Enslavement!

[READ] Romans 7:24-25

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25 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.

- These are the most wonderful and hopeful words found here in this chapter. They are truly blessed, and they delivered me for so many years now from a truly dark night of the soul into the glorious liberty Christ had already secured for me and all believers once and for all through his completed sacrifice.

For there is a way forward, the apostle is writing about here. There are two ongoing realms of servitude here. But there is a strong and penetrating ray of hope here as the apostle exclaims, from the depths of his own heart and experience, as he testifies boldly that he had been set free, and we may be too! Praise God for his redeeming AND justifying grace and its abundant!

Indeed, the rest of the story is in chapter eight!

Conclusions / Exhortations:

- Thanksgiving is grace receiving! Never forget it. Chapter eight, with its glories, is now so well introduced. But there should be no chapter division right here. Rather, it could be at chapter 8, verse 5.
- Let's conclude with the reading of those words from the beginning of chapter 8 that could have been properly placed here at the end of chapter 7 by the translators, for they are the conclusion of it all, based on what was just written in the final two verses:

Romans 8:1-4

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

3 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:

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

- These verses are so hopeful and not a reason to lose hope. In four bold statements, the apostle states the truth that truly does transform if only we would take it to heart, believing, and resting in its full meaning with correct understanding. For Paul's letter to the Romans, Dispensationally Considered has that key to life abundant written so boldly that it is hard to remain ignorant, if we consider it dispensationally, that is!

