

Romans 7:1-6 (NKJV)

**1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?
2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.
3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.**

1

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

2

- In Rom. 7-8, Paul describes how to have victory over sinning in our Christian lives
- In ch. 7 he describes how NOT to have victory – by depending on the law
- A large segment of his audience are Jewish believers who continue to cling to the rituals of the Mosaic law, expecting the keeping of those rituals to sanctify and make them spiritual and pleasing to God
- In ch. 8 Paul explains that the way to have victory over sinning is by depending on the Holy Spirit, who lives within

3

- All believers have the problem of indwelling sin, and our tendency is to deal with it through reliance on self and some system of our own devising
- That will ensure that we do NOT experience victory over sinning

Rom 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

- Paul directs his attention “to those who know the law” – the Jewish believers

4

- The equivalent in the 21st century church:
- Those believers who think they must hold to certain rules or standards or lists to be sanctified and spiritual in God’s eyes
- Multitudes of individual believers and many churches have fallen prey to this mentality, including large segments of fundamentalism

5

- Paul says, “Don’t you know that the law has dominion (rule) over a man as long as he lives?”
- Once they have died, the law cannot rule over them
- Paul illustrates with an example from the Mosaic law – the commands about divorce and remarriage
- Paul’s purpose is not to speak to the doctrine of divorce and remarriage, per se, merely to use it as an illustration of the extent of the law’s authority over a Jewish person

6

7:2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.

7:3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

- The Mosaic law specified that a married woman was bound to her husband in marriage as long as he was alive

7

- If the wife married someone else while the husband was alive, she was considered an adulteress

- But once her husband had died, the wife was free to marry another, for she was free from the “law” of her husband

- What’s the point?

7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

8

- In a spiritual sense, those Jews who had become believers in Jesus Christ were now dead to the law
- Ch. 6 – when you were regenerated, you died with Christ, you were buried with Christ, you rose with Christ

- From that point forward, you are free from any legal system that binds

Gal 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.

9

- Because you died to the law, the law no longer has dominion over you
- Your new “spouse” is Christ, so to speak
- Incidentally, this passage is NOT teaching that you are now Christ’s bride
- The determination as to which believers comprise the bride of Christ will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ – they are His faithful servants who will be glorified to co-rule with Him as bride and co-regent in the Millennium

10

- Paul is simply applying the illustration of vs. 2-3 to the Christian life: You died to the law; you are now married to Christ

- The purpose of this new union: “that we should bear fruit to God” (v. 4)

- We are now to live in holiness and righteousness and, thankfully, that is made possible by Jesus

11

7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law [Hodges: *the yearnings for sin that the law produced*] were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

7:6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held [back] by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.

- Prior to believing on Jesus for eternal life, the Jews did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within

12

- Consequently, their fruit was unto death (spiritual deadness)
 - That is because the law was a dominating presence and actually prompted inward yearnings to sin – how so?
- Zane Hodges:** In the light of Paul's subsequent statement about the law arousing lust (v 7), it is likely that he has in mind the way negative commands so easily awaken yearnings for forbidden sin ... These yearnings were ones that the law actually produced, as in fact it did in the case of the command not to covet (v 7).

13

- Like putting a sign on a newly painted park bench that reads, "Do not touch! wet paint."
 - And what does everyone want to do? They want to touch it, in spite of order NOT to
 - Paul says the law had that effect
 - The sinful urges within our bodies – fueled by the fires of the law – resulted in our bodies bearing fruit to death (spiritual deadness)
- Zane Hodges:** As Paul will make clear a little later, this is not a reflection on the law itself. On the contrary, it is the result of the law's counterproductive influence on the flesh.

14

- Bob Wilkin (note in Hodges' Commentary):** Paul was describing the view of the law held by the Pharisees of his day. Their legalistic devotion to the law, rather than to the One who gave the law, was a terrible error. When Jews came to faith in Christ for everlasting life and gave up trying to be justified by means of the law, often they would continue to look to the law as the means of sanctification.
- But without the aid of the Holy Spirit our inward yearnings are dominated by fleshly responses

15

- Now that we have died to the law and, therefore, have been delivered from the law's dominance in our lives ...
- We can live in newness of life through the Holy Spirit, rather than oldness of the letter (i.e., the law)
- Law-living (legalism) leads to spiritual deadness – for the law holds us back, it hinders us
- On the other hand, Spirit-filled living leads to spiritual life and vibrancy, leading us onward and upward

16

- 2 Cor 3:6b** The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- Why would any Christian, who has died to the law through union with Christ, return to the law's dominance in their lives?
 - Is that not an outright rejection of the Holy Spirit?
 - Is that not setting oneself up for defeat and failure?
 - Tragically, legalism holds back multitudes of Christians from victorious Christian living

17

- Paul makes an important clarification:
- 7:7** What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness [i.e., lust] unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."
- 7:8** But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.
- After warning in v. 5 of the law's tendency to produce yearning to sin, Paul asks, "Is the law itself sinful?"

18

- For the third time within two chapters, he answers emphatically, “Certainly not!”
- Rather, the law’s purpose is to shine a spotlight on sin
- Paul gives an example: He would have never known that coveting (i.e., lusting) is sin, without the law, which commands, “You shall not covet.”

19

Zane Hodges: How sin did this has already been suggested (in v 5) in Paul’s mention of “the yearnings for sin” that the law awakens. But the responsibility for that lies with sin itself. All that the law actually did was to make Paul aware of the evil dispositions his own heart was capable of harboring. In this way, sin took advantage ... by stimulating and drawing forth from Paul the sinful desires inherent in his sinful nature.

20

- Apart from the law, sin is dead; that is, sin is not a moral dilemma unless God announces that something is a moral dilemma through the law
- When God says, “Thou shalt not,” He is defining what is sinful
- The “sinful nature” to which Hodges refers is defined by Paul as “sin that dwells in me”
- Thus, I prefer to call it “indwelling sin” – it is resident in the soul-aspect of our being – and that is why our souls need saving

21

- Paul becomes transparent about a lapse of sinning in his own life
- 7:9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.
- Paul uses the first-person pronoun “I” in this chapter numerous times to refer to his own personal struggles with sin and the law
 - This has prompted many theologians to claim Paul is talking about his life prior to regeneration

22

- That view especially appeals to Calvinists, because of their adherence to Perseverance doctrine
- They cannot imagine that Paul could struggle in this manner as a believer
- But Paul is talking to believers about matters of sanctification
- So it would make no sense for him to give an example from his life before the time he has regenerated

23

- His statement in v. 9 also would not make sense if referring to his life as a Pharisee
- Pharisees were wrapped up in legalism and, therefore, deadness
- Paul says, “I was alive once without the law.”
- Thus, he is speaking of his life AFTER believing on Jesus, when he was dead to the Mosaic rituals and alive unto Christ
- But something happened to steal away his victory over sinning – he says, “the commandment came, sin revived, and I died”

24

- In a moment of weakness, Paul resorted to legalism (“the commandment came”), he stumbled into sinning (“sin revived”), as the Mosaic law shined a spotlight on his sin
- The sin produced spiritual deadness in his soul (“I died”), and he remained in that condition for some time, as long as he continued in legalism
- Didn’t this also happen to Peter at Antioch (see Gal. 2:11ff)?

25

- 7:10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.
- 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.
- Paul describes how the principle of v. 5 impacted his own life
 - The law produced in him a yearning to sin – lust? (v. 7)
 - By yielding to sin, Paul discovered that his Christian life became spiritually dead

26

- In fact, the sin, which took advantage of him via the commandment of God, “killed him” – fellowship with God was instantly severed
 - That raises a question:
- 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.
- 7:13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.

27

- Paul wants to make something very clear
- He insists that the law is holy and just and good
- The law is not to blame for his sinning! Far from it!
- Sin is the problem – sin used the law to arouse desires, so that Paul yielded, and sin produced deadness
- The law of God merely did its job of putting a spotlight on sin, making it appear sinful – in fact, “exceedingly sinful”

28

- 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.
- In contrast to the law, which is spiritual, believers who yield to sin are carnal, fleshly, sold out as the slave of sin
 - By choosing to sin, they place themselves back under sin’s dominion
 - They present their members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin rather than presenting them to God
 - That had happened to Paul at some point earlier in his Christian life

29

- He exposes his past errors in Rom. 7 so we can learn from his mistakes
- 7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.
- In the first sentence of this verse, he admits to spinning his wheels and not accomplishing anything of spiritual value
 - In the latter half of the verse, he describes sin’s grip – when one is unable to do what they know is right and can only continue in what they know is wrong – habitual sinning

30

- This behavior confirms the law's function of doing good – keeping a spotlight on sin

7:16 If, then, I do what I will [wish] not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

- But then Paul says something unusual

7:17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

- Is Paul passing the blame?
- Not at all! He is simply being specific

31

- When Paul says “it is not I who keeps sinning,” (“doing what I wish not to do”), he is referring to his *inner man*, i.e., the realm of the *spirit* (see vs. 22, 25)

- His spirit had been regenerated
- He died with Christ, he rose with Christ and is now in union with Christ – and that is true of all believers in Christ
- The old man died, the new man lives – that is a reference to your spirit (2 Cor. 5:17)

32

- Consequently, you have a new master, Jesus Christ
- The old master, sin, is powerless to rule over you
- But you can continue to submit to the old master – how can that happen, if your old man is gone?
- Because while your *spirit* has been saved (regenerated) ...
- Your *soul* has NOT been regenerated

33

- Rather, your *soul* is in the process of being saved – but that happens over time, as you submit to your new master
- In that realm of your being, there will be a constant struggle – and the struggle is because of “sin that dwells” in you – aka, indwelling sin
- So while your old nature has been eradicated, replaced by the new – and that happened in the realm of your *spirit* when you were initially saved ... Your *soul* is in the process of change, aka *sanctification*

34

- But indwelling sin resists the saving of your *soul* – see v. 17
- Paul is NOT passing the blame
- He is pinning the blame, specifically, on the rightful realm of his being – NOT his *spirit*, or *body*, but his *soul*
- Specifically, sin that continues to dwell within his soul – indwelling sin
- When you got saved, though your spirit changed instantaneously, your soul and body did not change

35

- But since you were given a new master, you were then able to start cooperating with God to bring change to your soul –
- Hopefully that has happened in your life as you become more and more changed into His image, over the course of time, step-by-step, as you make choices to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh
- God is merciful and gracious to His children through-out the process, for He knows that it takes time

36

7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

7:19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

- By using the term *flesh* Paul is NOT referring to the body
- Gnostics believe the body is evil, and that goes back to Manichaeism (3rd century AD)

37

- If the body were the problem, then we should flagellate our flesh, as some do, or become ascetics, at the very least, denying the body privileges – that is not biblical
- The problem is not the body, per se, it is the soul
- A fleshly soul is self-seeking, having sinful desires, worldly pursuits, and enjoying material pleasures

38

- Fleshly behaviors are often carried out in the body, but they are rooted in the soul, so the body, per se, is not evil
- The FLESH within the soul is evil (see v. 18) – i.e., *sin that dwells in me or indwelling sin*
- Thus, the soul needs to be saved from sinning and indulging in fleshly appetites
- Paul says “to will is present with me” (v. 18)
- In other words, in his *spirit*, his innermost being, Paul desires to do right and wishes to carry that out

39

- But he doesn’t know how to carry out those wishes in his sinful soul
- In fact, he frankly admits:
- I can’t seem to do the good that I want to do
- And the evil that I want to avoid, is what I end up doing
- What a perplexing problem: a *spirit* that wants to do right; a *soul* that doesn’t want to cooperate because of indwelling sin but, instead, teams up with the body to do evil deeds

40

7:20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

- As Christians, we discover a new law (principle) that governs our lives by default
- Although we have died to sin, and sin is no longer our master, we find that sin aggressively works to usurp the authority of our new master

41

- Our regenerated spirit wants to live righteously, but indwelling sin (fleshliness) in the soul continually fights against doing right
- Is that your experience?
- It certainly was Paul’s, at least at one point in his Christian life

7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

7:23 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.

42

Paul has already given one law (principle) ...

1. The law of indwelling sin (v. 21) – “evil is present with me” – the soul’s propensity to sin

Then he adds three more laws!

2. The law of God (v. 22) – the moral aspect of the Mosaic law – the ten commandments, summed up by Jesus in two commands in the NT – love God and love your neighbor – aka the law of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:2)

- The desire in one’s regenerated spirit (the “inward man”) to live righteously

43

3. The law of sin in the members (v. 23) – i.e., the body – which carries out the evil that has been festering in the soul, and often results in addictions

Examples:

- Lust in the soul that often manifests in fornication or adultery in the body
- Cravings in the soul to take in a substance that will make one feel good or alter the mind/consciousness, often leads to alcohol or drug addiction

44

4. The law of the mind or thoughts (v. 23)

- Seeing that the law in the members (i.e., the body) was against the law of the mind, the context implies that Paul views the law of the mind as GOOD
- It wants to do right and maybe thinks about the downsides of addiction or sexual fornication, but is often overwhelmed by bodily cravings, so that the law of sin in the members wins out

45

- With two of these laws working against us in the soul and body, how can we ever live righteously, finding victory over sin?

- Paul expresses this same frustration:

7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

- Do you sense his desperation? Do you feel his pain?
- Victory over sin seems like a no-win situation
- Is this not the same thing you experience as a child of God?

46

- Is there any relief from this dilemma?

YES! 7:25 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.

- Jesus is the answer!
- He cuts through the overwhelming presence of sin in the soul that plays out in the body
- Paul concludes by saying the mind wants to serve the law of God (rooted in the spirit) but the flesh (soul in league with the body) wants to serve the law of sin

47

- That is a dilemma, but Paul says the way to navigate this common problem in Christianity is through Jesus Christ

- In the next chapter he will tell us HOW to have victory over sinning through Jesus Christ

- But in this chapter, he has made very clear how NOT to have victory over sinning:

- For first century Jews it is through continued dependence on the Mosaic rituals for pleasing God

48

- Practicing circumcision and keeping the dietary laws and sabbaths and feast days and the 613 other Mosaic laws will not please God, for it will not make one spiritual
- By way of application for twenty-first century believers, spiritual deadness and defeat are ensured for those who think they must hold to certain rules or standards or lists to be sanctified and acceptable to God
- Legalism in all of its forms is deadening – for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life!

49

- Jesus is the answer! And Paul is going to break through the gloom of ch. 7 in ch. 8, which is about living in the power of the Holy Spirit, who alone brings life
- If you are living in legalism, forsake that sinful approach to God and seek His forgiveness
- Learn the principle that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:2)

50