

Romans 7

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 10 August 2009 14:10

This chapter follows on from the last, by speaking of the dominion of the law, which Paul defines as spiritual, not about rites and ceremonies. Paul spends much time on how the old man can sometimes help us to sin. However, Paul also proclaims the sublime superiority of the Lord and the law of grace.

We can overcome the continual hassling of the old man to cause us to sin. But, in reality, it is not possible, for neither the old man nor the devil can *cause* us to sin! As new creatures we are under a new Master, the Lord. The only way we can succumb to sin is if we *choose* to do so, to our shame.

In this chapter are hard-to-understand statements by Paul, but the overall message is plain: we are not under the control of Satan anymore, even when we sin. Our Master is God, through Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, though He knows we are fickle and often foolish. So, next time you truly think you cannot escape a sin, remember these facts! And if you decide to sin, you can return to the Lord through repentance. We are NOT SLAVES TO SIN!

Note that in this chapter Paul refers to several different 'laws'; the main law of God, the 'law' of sin, etc. Do not confuse them!

Verses 1 - 3

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

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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.

Paul is speaking now to Jewish Roman Christians, 'Brethren... that know the law'. He categorically says that "the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." How can this be, when he previously said we were free under grace? There can be no discordance, so it must be true.

By way of illustration, he compares it to a marriage, where the woman is married until her husband dies. Until that time she cannot ever be loosed from her bond. If she married someone else whilst he was still alive, it would make her an adulteress. As soon as he is dead, she is again free to marry.

The meaning is that marriage is for life. There can be no legitimate freedom apart from death. It means that whoever we are 'married' to in the Christian sense – Jesus Christ – is our only legitimate relationship. There are no others, unless we wish to act against the law. Note that: we can certainly enter into a wrong relationship, but it is *always* wrong, and never condoned. The proper relationship is ours forever. We can try to negate it by doing wrong, but it is not legitimate and thus has no actual control or legal bond over us. So, the 'dominion' is a legal one, because no man can overturn God's legal relationships.

Verses 4 - 6

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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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.

Because of this, says Paul, we have died to the law: we have been reborn as new creatures in Christ. Instead of being 'married' to Satan and sin, we are now 'married' to Jesus Christ and must bear good fruit for God. As we saw in chapter 6, we are completely free from the legal punishment for sin – death followed by hell. We have 'died' to sin and Satan and are now alive in Christ.

As people bonded to Satan we were under his command and could never be released. The only way we could escape him was to be released by One Who is greater than Satan – Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice on the cross. Once He released us we became new creations, this time bonded to Christ. Our spirits were made alive, and it affected our souls. For the very first time, we were able to exercise choice. Yes, we can sometimes enter into sin, but under Christ it is our sad choice and not an enforced action ordered by Satan.

As unsaved, the "motions of sins", identified as wrong by the law, caused us to continue in sin, which leads to death and hell. The word 'motions' carries the meaning of suffering a calamity or evil, because of our inward state, sin. Now, however, Christ has freed us from this awful condition and ultimate end. As unsaved people we were dead inside, because our spirit was dead. Now free, we can "serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."

It is worth repeating that our new relationship destroys the shackles of sin and the 'old man'. The old man belongs to the body and the soul, and has no part in our new spirit. Before, when our spirit was dead, we had no relationship with Christ or the Father and therefore could never choose to do good, or to be saved. Since salvation, our spirits are taking us to heaven, even though our old man tries its best to trip us up. He cannot, unless we deliberately turn to him and allow his voice to persuade us. This is a vital truth to understand.

Verses 7 - 12

1.

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.

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2.

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

3.

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

4.

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

5.

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

6.

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

So, is law sin? This is much like asking if God is the author of sin. The answer is, again, "God forbid"! The law's purpose was, and is, to remind us we are sinners. It defines what is sin, against God and soul. Without law we would not know we were sinners, or what sin is. Paul says he only knew his flaws were lust because the law told him that he should not covet (to lust after something forbidden).

Would we still be sinners if the law was not given by God? Yes, because no man is perfect in his own right. Even if we were deaf, dumb and blind, we would still be accountable to God as sinners. The giving of the law, then, is an act of mercy and grace. In giving the law, God gave us the opportunity to obey and to consider our innermost beings.

The law was, and is, like a bright light shining into every part of our being. Without it the

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darkness of our souls would not be recognized and shown up. Today, if we drive too fast, we only know it is 'wrong' because the law of the land says so. Without it, we would feel no guilt, because there is no law against it. Of course, speeding can kill even if there is no law against it, but without the law, claims to its inherent wrongness wait until someone is killed. The law, then, is a check against our human excesses and ability to wreak mayhem.

Paul said that he knew "all manner of concupiscence"... desires for what was forbidden, because of sin, which was 'dead' without the law. He was once a Pharisee and did not realize that even the *thought* to sin is itself sin, though he kept the law perfectly in a legalistic sense.

"I was alive without (or, outside) the law once". What does that mean? It means he felt secure, once, when he was unsaved, because he thought his obedience to the letter of the law was sufficient. But, when he came to Christ, and realized just how sinful he was, he 'died' to sin. His whole world was turned upside down, as what he thought was godly was really sin. His original state without Christ was deceiving, and so he committed ever more sin, until Christ stopped him on the Damascus road.

The law and God's commandments are holy and good. God's judgments upon men are justified and true.

Verses 13 - 16

1.

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.

2.

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

3.

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

4.

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

If the law was good, and Paul 'died' to it, does this mean the death of the law was good for him? "God forbid"... no! So that sin might be shown for what it is – evil, the law was required, as a signpost. When Paul saw what his sin really was, he died to it, by being a servant of Christ. Thus, the law was good, because it highlighted Paul's sinful self. And when Paul saw just how sinful his sin was, he was appalled by it; it was, indeed, extremely wicked.

The law, thought by so many to be only for the body or the unsaved, is actually spiritual in essence. But, because of our sinfulness, we mistake the law to be only for the body, and nothing to do with spirituality. Working under such a delusion, we can sin where we thought we were pure; we do what we should not do, and do not do what we ought to do! We even do things we hate doing. All these things are made known to us by God's law, which sheds a great light into our darkest imaginations, proving that we need the law to show us what is sin. In itself, then, the law is good. It must be admitted that these sections by Paul are often very hard to understand. They were hard even to Paul, as he wrote them. Yet, they contain deep truths.

The law, then, has never been consigned to the past. It is still with us, as a schoolmaster, teaching us what is right and wrong. We are dead to its legal penalties and requirements, because Christ has saved us. Yet, the law still stands as a godly reminder of our past, and as a pointer towards what is holy and true.

Verses 17 - 22

1.

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

2.

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.

3.

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

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4.

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

5.

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

6.

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

Once he was saved, says Paul, it was not he who wished to sin, but the old man who remained within. As a saved man, Paul wanted only to live righteously. But, his old man always wanted him to return to sin. This does not mean anyone is free to sin, or is not guilty for sinning. (Paul is merely saying that as a Christian he did not wish to sin, but sometimes fell back into the 'old ways').

As far as Paul was concerned, his body was not fit for much, because sin continued to influence it, through his mind (soul). In him was "no good thing". He was referring not to his spirit but to his body and soul. He wanted sincerely to do what was holy, but was hampered by the body and his 'old man'. He wanted always to do good but sometimes failed. And though he did not wish to sin, his body and 'old man' lured him to do so, especially when at a low ebb.

Paul repeats that if he sins, it is not 'him' – saved self; his spirit – but his old man and his body. These are no longer a true part of him, for the body will be destroyed. He will get a new body, and at last his spirit will rule his soul, and his new self will triumph eternally, and always be holy.

Therefore, it is a 'law' to Paul, that sin remains an influence within, even though he is a new man in Christ. But, the sin remaining is not his true self, which delights in God and His law. This reinforces what he said in chapter 6, that the enlivened spirit rules, and not sin. Thus, his 'real' self desires after God... and it is this that really matters.

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In everyday life, then, we can expect saved men to sin. But, what we should NOT expect, is that they remain in sin, or wish only to sin. If such a wicked desire is displayed, then we may legitimately question their claimed salvation.

Verses 23 - 25

1.

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.

2.

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

3.

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

Paul complains to himself, that his desire to be holy can sometimes be 'at war' with his 'old man'. When he submits to it, he is said to be in "captivity", which rules his body. This does not change the facts shown in chapter 6, which clearly prove that we are only captive when we decide to be so. Which is why he says of himself, "O wretched man that I am!" His body belongs to death, and so it will die, but his soul and spirit will live forever. Despite these forlorn statements, Paul thanks God for Jesus Christ, because though his body and old man want to serve sin, he is free from their control through salvation, and his spirit wishes only to serve God.

Never forget the personal accountability of all this. Christians sin only when they wish to. Their Master is Jesus Christ, not Satan. And the Father allows us to repent when we have sinned, even though it is deliberate. The law of sin has been superseded by the law of grace, which is greater. Unsaved sinners have no option but to obey their father, the devil. They have no connection with God and no way to serve Him – though they do not want to anyway. So, whilst Paul bemoans his own failures, he knows his spirit is safe, and that his failures will not harm his entry into heaven.

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I must repeat a simple fact: that, as Believers, we are no longer subject to the claims of Satan. If we sin, we do so by choice. Yes, it is a sign of ingratitude to God and of our decision to follow the old man. But, we have the remedy in Christ, and can repent. Then, after repentance, we begin again. If there is a constant struggle with sin, it is only because we have not yet dispensed with it in our lives. Even though we may be hit by temptations time and again, we need not be doleful... we should just hand it over to the Lord and carry on with holiness. I repeat: the 'struggle' only arises if we have not yet dealt our sin a fatal blow, and we still harbour a desire for it in our hearts.

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