

I. The Role of the Law

A. Romans 7:1-2,4,7,10-11,13 . . . Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? [2] For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. [4] Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. [7] What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; . . . [10] but this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; [11] for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. [13] Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

B. Prayer

II. The logical and theological explanation why we are no longer under the law.

A. Romans 7:1 . . . Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

1. As you may recall, last Sunday I pointed out that Paul makes a specific reference the law in Romans 6:14-15, and in both verses he speaks of our not being under the law, but under grace. However, he does not mention the law again until the beginning of Romans 7, for following these two verses, Paul immediately moves to using the master/slave relationship as an example of our relationship to sin and to righteousness. And he continues using the master/slave example to the end of Romans 6. Why? Here are two reasons.

a. First, Paul began explaining the role of the law in the life of the OT Jew and the NT Christian in Romans 2:12, and he continues his explanation up to Romans 13:10. However, his explanation appears scattered because he uses particular issues to build his explanation, which is what he does here in Romans 6.

- b. Second, he moved away from talking about the law because the law is not the driving force behind our sin. We sin because we are serving sin and willingly yielding the members of our body to do the will of sin. Therefore, our problem is not whether we are serving the law or righteousness, but whether we are serving sin or righteousness. The law plays a part in that, but it is a contributing factor and not the cause of our problem.
- 2. So why does Paul return to talking about the law in Romans 7? Because there were those in the church who were insisting that NT Christians had to keep the Law – both the moral parts and the ceremonial parts – to be justified and to receive the gift of eternal life. And when I speak of the ceremonial parts of the Law, I am speaking of things like circumcision, feast days, fast days, and dietary rules, as referenced by Paul in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16.
 - a. So having said, in Romans 6:14, that sin is no longer master over us because we are not under the law but under grace, Paul returns at the beginning of Romans 7 to explain why we are no longer under the law. But he also begins to explain why, though not under the Law, we still have a duty to the Law, and this seeming contradiction will become clear as we go further into Romans.
 - b. Now, explaining all this is not easy, especially when explaining it to Jews who, from childhood, were taught that keeping the Law was essential for acceptable standing within the community of God's people, and for any hope of justification and eternal life.
- 3. And if it was difficult for the first Christians to understand it, we can see why many in the Protestant church today misunderstand and misconstrue the NT teaching on the Law.
 - a. For example, there are those today who believe that even inferring we must adhere to the moral parts of the Law equals a rejection of grace and a turning from salvation by grace to salvation by works.
 - b. There are those who are convinced that the Law is bad, and though it was good for OT believers, it is to be ignored or even rejected by NT believers.
 - c. And these views are held, today, about the role of the Law in the Christians's life in spite of the fact that Jesus said, in Matthew 5:17-20, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. [18] For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

[19] Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (*who kept parts of the moral Law and made it a practice to break parts of the moral Law*), you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

4. If Jesus is right – and of course He is – then we are wise to do our best to understand what Paul is saying about the Law, for according to Paul’s teaching in Romans, there is a way in which we are out from under the Law, and a way in which we have a duty to the Law.
 5. Now let’s return to Paul’s explanation of why we are no longer under the Law.
- B. Romans 7:2-3 . . . For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. [3] So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.
1. In these two verses, Paul addresses our relationship to the Law now that Christ has come. And his example states a principle that is both simple and universally true. We have died to the Law in Christ. Therefore we are free to belong to and serve Jesus Christ.
 2. However, there is one additional truth I want to point out from these two verses.
 - a. Just as the relationship between Christ and the church is likened unto the relationship between a husband and wife, so the relationship between God and the Christian is likened unto the marriage relationship.
 - b. Why does this matter? Because at the core of the marriage relationship is the natural expectation of faithfulness and persevering the relationship until death parts us.
 3. Therefore, for those who need additional motivation for remaining faithful to God and giving faithful obedience to God, this truth can provide additional motivation beyond seeing Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- C. Romans 7:4 . . . Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to

another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

1. As you may recall, at the beginning of Romans 6, Paul speaks of dying to sin and rising to newness of life, through baptism. And here in Romans 7, he adds the fact that in those same baptismal waters, we die to the Law and rise to be joined to Jesus Christ, that is, to be faithful to Jesus Christ, and to serve Him as our Lord and Master.
2. And this is Paul's explanation of how it is logically and theologically possible for one who grew up under the Law to now turn from giving allegiance to the Law to serving, faithfully obeying, and giving married type allegiance to Jesus Christ.
3. Then Paul adds these words: "in order that we might bear fruit for God." Though this is a short statement, it is another of Paul's references to the fact that we cannot live the Christian life apart from the daily empowerment and assistance of God. And though this statement might get lost in the larger context, Paul is working his way toward stating this truth in a way that will make it undeniably clear that the Law cannot empower and assist us. Rather, it is when we live a life of faith, in Christ Jesus, that God gives us everything necessary for life and godliness so that we are able to be partakers of the divine nature and live the Christ-like life (2 Peter 1:3-4).

D. Romans 7:5-6 . . . For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. [6] But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

1. In vs 5, we see that as unbelievers, it is our sinful passions (*strong desires, feelings, emotions*), aroused by the law, that directed the members of our body into sinful actions, resulting in death.
2. We see this same truth in James 1:14-15 . . . But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust (*sinful passions*). [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.
3. However, though the root of sin is in us, Paul says it is the law that stirs up our sinful passions. But how can something good do something bad? How can the law do this?
 - a. Consider: if there is no law, there is no law to break, and if there is no law to break, nothing is illegal, and if nothing is illegal, there is nothing illegal to be desired or obtained. Therefore, the devil

would have no basis upon which to tempt us, and our passions would have no boundaries limiting their gratification.

- b. The only reason the devil could tempt Adam and Eve, and the only reason their passions could push them across the line of obedience into disobedience, is because God had established a law or a boundary between obedience and disobedience, and between good and evil.
 - c. Therefore, where there is no law there is no violation of the law (Romans 4:15), but where there is law, breaking the law is lawlessness, or rebellion against the lawgiver (1 John 3:4).
4. And so because there is a law that can be broken, the devil tempts us to break it.
- a. And his primary means of temptation is to stir our sinful passions to first gaze on, then desire, and finally take what is outside the boundaries of God's Law, or the boundaries of righteousness, or boundaries of love.
 - b. Of course, the devil's intentions are evil, for he wants us to break the Law, not for our pleasure or for some other gain, but for our undoing, our destruction – in order to bring us under the penalty of sin so that we become subject to death and eternal separation from God.
5. But now that we have repented, come to faith in Christ, died and rose again through baptism with Christ, we have been set free from the Law – a freedom that brings us into the place where we can resist the devil's temptations, and put to death our sinful passions, and turn away from the allurements of the world, and live a life of faithful obedience to God – for now we are under grace.
6. But there is more, for we have not only been set free from the Law, we now serve God and His righteousness by means of the empowerment, assistance, and various other workings of the Holy Spirit.
7. Now this Paul's second reference to the necessary and vital work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. He first speaks of this in Romans 2:29, where he says, "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." This is a vital truth, for we cannot live the Christian life apart from God's empowering and assisting work, which He works in us through the Holy Spirit. And Paul says much more about this in Romans 8.

III. The explanation why the Law is holy and righteous and good.

A. Romans 7:7 . . . What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."

1. In verse 7, Paul begins to walk the fine line between explaining how the law, in one way, is a contributor to sin and useless for salvation, and in another way is vital for living the Christian life.
2. Jesus walked this fine line first. On the one hand he exposed the hypocritical law-keeping of the Jewish religious leaders and explained how the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And on the other hand, He said He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it – and His Sermon on the Mount He gives plenty of material, which when applied to how we live, brings us into that spiritual condition where we are fulfilling the fullest intent of the Law.
3. However, there is more to discerning and dealing with the two sides of the Law than what I just mentioned. Both Jesus and Paul distinguish between the moral parts of the law – dealing with love for God and how we treat our fellow man, and the ceremonial parts of the law – such as circumcision, special days, and dietary rules. The moral parts we must keep, for there can be no meaningful obedience to God and enslavement to righteousness without keeping those parts. The ceremonial parts we no longer need to keep, for Christ is the full and final picture of God, and the church is the structure used by Christ to bring us to God and disciple us to spiritual maturity.
4. And so we return to Paul's question, "Is the Law sin?" Never, he says! It is the Law that teaches us what sin is, and why sin is lawlessness, and why we are to stay within the boundaries established by God for living a righteousness life. In fact, as Paul says further on, the Law is holy and righteous and good.

B. Romans 7:8-11 . . . But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. [9] I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; [10] and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; [11] for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

1. Here again, Paul works through the teaching that without laws there are no laws to break, and therefore no sin to commit. But when there are laws, there are laws to break and sins to commit.
 2. However, the Law – which is good and intended to protect me from partaking of those things that destroy what God created for good – opened me up to temptation from within and without, resulting in me breaking the Law and being condemned to death.
 3. And this leads us to Paul's next question.
- C. Romans 7:12-13 . . . So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. [13] Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.
1. Here in vs 12, Paul proclaims the Law to be holy, righteous, and good even though is it useless for salvation, and unable to empower or assist us in living the Christian life.
 2. Which raises the question, is something as good as the Law the cause of something so dreadfully evil and eternally costly as eternal damnation? NO! Paul says. The one and only cause of the evil that plagues our world and the only cause of eternal damnation is sin.
 3. And how evil is sin? We have only to look at sin's dreadful effects on us, the home, friendships, the community, the work place, the nation, the world, and even the church to see how evil it is.
 4. Yet Paul says it is the Law that shows the true extent of sin's evil. How so? By showing that sin, being the vile evil it is, took advantage of what is righteous and holy and good, and in twisting and perverting the Law, used it to produce sin in me and in you.
 5. This is similar to an evil man, who, playing on a mother's love for her daughter, tells the mother her daughter needs help, and offering to help the mother save her daughter, gets the mother to expose where her daughter is, only to take the daughter away from the mother and abuse her. And if you see the ugliness of sin in this scenario, then you can see the evil of sin in taking advantage of God's holy and righteous Law to deceive and kill mankind.

IV. Conclusion

- A. May we see sin for what it is, the Law for what it is supposed to be, and God's magnificent grace as the life-saving gift it is.