

Romans Chapter 7

Verses 1-6

Paul now continues and expands on his theme of the relationship between the believer and the law. Although the law is *“holy, righteous and good,”* as Paul says in Vs. 12, the sinner is in subjection to the law and therefore is condemned because the law, in its justice, uncovers the sinner's transgressions before God. Paul compares the sinner and the law to marriage. Paul's point is that death brings an end to a marriage and the widowed partner is free to begin a new relationship and marry again. Likewise, in the eyes of the law, because our marriage to sin has ended in our spiritual death, we cannot be seen as adulterers because we have gone after a new spiritual partner (Jesus), and therefore cannot be condemned by the law for our new relationship to God. As believers we die through being united in Jesus in His death which breaks the chain of disobedience that shackled us as sinners to Adam. The resurrection of Jesus gives the believer a new relationship, in which a true, if not yet perfect obedience is offered to God. Having the Holy Spirit living inside of us ensures that this new relationship will bear life fruit for the glory of God.

Paul goes on to argue that our death in Jesus has severed our obligations to the law as a strict commandment. Our freedom from the law frees us to become the bride of a new husband, Jesus. In this new covenant, the law, which is unable to produce holiness in a sinner, is overturned by the resurrection power of Jesus and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within us.

The imagery and symbolism of marriage is applied to Jesus and the body of believers known as the church. The church consists of those who have trusted in Jesus as their personal Saviour and have received eternal life. Jesus, is the bridegroom, who has sacrificially and lovingly chosen the church to be His bride (Eph. 5:25-27). Just as there was a betrothal period in biblical times when the bride and groom were separated until their wedding, so is the Bride of Jesus separate from her Bridegroom during the church age. Our responsibility during this betrothal period is to be faithful to Him (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:24). When Jesus returns, the church will be united with her Bridegroom and the official *“wedding ceremony”* will take place and with it, the eternal union of Jesus and His Bride will be fully realised (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:1-2).

There is also some confusion as to the role of the New Jerusalem in the new kingdom. In our eternal state, believers will have access to the heavenly city known as the New Jerusalem, which is also called *“the holy city”* in Rev. 21:2 & 10. In his vision of the end of the age, the apostle John sees the city coming down from heaven adorned *“as a bride,”* meaning that the city will be gloriously radiant and the inhabitants of the city, the redeemed of the Lord, will be holy and pure, wearing white garments of holiness and righteousness. Some have taken Rev. 21:9, to mean the holy city is the bride of Christ, but this is a misinterpretation because Jesus died for His people, not for a city. The New Jerusalem is not the church, but it does take on some of the church's characteristics. The city, which is called the Bride, is a collective term because it encompasses all those who are the bride, in the same way as all the students of a school are sometimes referred to as *“the school.”*

Believers in Jesus are the Bride of Christ, and we wait with great anticipation for the day when we will be united with our Bridegroom, until then, we must remain faithful to Him. The unity of Jesus and the Church, shows us the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This is often expressed by the image of a bridegroom and bride. The theme of Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church was announced by John the Baptist (Jn 3:29). Jesus referred to Himself as the *“bridegroom”* (Mk 2:19; Matt. 22:1-14; 25:1-13;). The apostle Paul speaks of the whole Church as a bride *“betrothed”* to Christ so as to become one spirit with him (2 Cor 11:2). The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb (Rev 22:17; Eph 1:4; 5:27). *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”* (Eph 5:25-27). He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as He cares for His own body (Eph 5:29).

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” Jesus Himself says in the Gospel, “*So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*” (Mt 19:6).

Verses 7-12

Paul goes on to explain that the negative effect of the law on fallen humanity does not devalue the law itself. God ordained that the role of the law was to reveal the nature of sin to a fallen world. The law not only defines sin but it provokes sin within man. In itself the law brings us knowledge of the reality of sin in our lives and our lack of moral standards. In effect the sinful heart of man takes the law and uses it to increase the sin in their lives. The law stands as a revelation from God as to what is right and wrong. In turn the law directs our moral standards but lacks the power to produce the obedience that the law demands (see Gal. 3:21). The sinfulness of man reacts to the standards of God resulting in disobedience and defiance of the law.

In Vs.9, Paul looks back at his life before his conversion and says that, in his own estimation, he was alive because of his knowledge of the law. But, his trying to obey the law made Paul realise that the desires of his heart, in particular coveting (Vs.7). This law caused Paul to constantly sin although he may not have always realised it, but when he did realise it, he couldn't stop himself. Therefore Paul says in Vs.11, that this driving force within him “*deceived me and through it killed me.*” This personal testimony of Paul's serves to illustrate how sin and the law relates to everyone. The law is “*holy, righteous and good*” according to Vs.12, and this is true because it reflects the character of God which is holy (Lev.19:2). It is beneficial for us because we are created in the image of God, who is Himself good.

Verses 13-25

Paul starts this passage with another rhetorical question, “*Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?*” Again the answer is no, it was the sin within Paul that caused his spiritual death by leading him to break God's law, which is good. Although several interpretations have been put forward, it is thought that Paul's use of the present tense from Vs.14, may mean that he is now talking from his present experience. Paul may be describing himself and fellow Christians who, although they are free from the condemnation of the law, do not yet perfectly fulfil the requirements of the law. While Paul's desire is to fulfil God's law, he is distressed that the sin within him opposes that desire. However, he is looking forward to the time of future deliverance from his frustration (Vs.24). Paul distinguishes between his “*mind,*” which strives for obedience, and his “*flesh,*” which continues to sin. What Paul is doing is demonstrating his experience as a Christian because unregenerate people have no struggles against sin, instead they sin freely.

In describing his own conflict Paul is describing the conflict every regenerate Christian finds in their lives in Christ. The problem is that although Jesus dwells within us, we still have our sinful nature. Martin Luther of the Protestant Reformation also spoke about this problem when he coined the phrase, *simul justus et peccator*. *Simul* is the word from which we get the English word simultaneously, or, ‘at the same time.’ *Justus* is the Latin word for just or righteous. *Et* simply means and. You know the death scene in Shakespeare's play, Julius Caesar, after Caesar has been stabbed by Brutus he says, “*Et tu, Brute?*” And you too Brutus? Lastly, *Peccator* means sinner. What Luther was saying is that, in our justification we are at one and the same time righteous or just, and sinners. In one sense, we are just. In another sense, we are sinners; and how he defines that is simple. In and of ourselves, under God's scrutiny, we still have sin; we're still sinners. But, by imputation and by faith in Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is now transferred to our account, then we are considered just or righteous, which is the very heart of the gospel. Total conformity to God's will in this life is beyond us, we have been released from the power of sin, but we are not yet free from the presence of sin. Paul is trying to show how, for Christians and Jews alike, God's law exposes sin but does not bring deliverance from sin.

The law sets the standard to which our life, which is governed by the Holy Spirit, should conform.

But because we are “*of the flesh*” (Vs.14), we cannot fully reach those standards. Instead, we bear the remnants of Adam's ruin while God builds us up in our new life with Jesus. As a scholar Paul is able to analyse but not to explain the contrast between himself and the “*sin that dwells within me,*” (Vs.17), the conflict between sin and grace in his life. Our new identity as Christians is accompanied by sin, but our new identity will, in the end, triumph over sin. Vs.24, is not a cry for help because Paul knows who will deliver him, it is “*God through Jesus Christ.*” Paul's desire is not for death but for the deliverance he will receive in his resurrection. In our new life which we live under the sanctifying guidance of the Holy Spirit, we continue to bear the marks of sin.