

Study 8: Romans Chapter 7

Introduction

Paul continues leading the readers down a pathway, and asks and answers questions that would be raised by the libertines in Rome. He is still answering the second question as chapter 7 begins.

Body of the Study

How is marriage used as an example of Law?

Who died so that we might be free from the contract?

The application

The third question – Is the Law sin?

The fourth question – Do I die because of the Law?

How does the spiritual warfare manifest itself?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *When Paul says “it is no longer I that do it”, is he rejecting responsibility for his sins?*
- *How do you reconcile this battle with what Paul says about the christian serving righteousness?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 8 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 8: Chapter 7

Introduction

Paul continues with his rhetorical questions (questions to which the answers are, or at least should be) obvious.

He is still leading the readers down a pathway, in asking and answering questions that would be raised by the libertines in Rome. He is still answering the second question as chapter 7 begins.

Body of the Study

How is marriage used as an example of Law?

Paul is still answering question 2 (from 6:15). The discourse on marriage is not (*per se*) for the sake of educating the readers on issues of marriage (as he does in 1 Cor 7), but rather it is an illustration of law. He says “...*I speak to them who know the law...*” (7:1). Marriage is given as an example of a relationship, – a covenant, – a contract.

We must not *go beyond what is written* here to try to make Paul say that there can be no such thing as divorce and remarriage etc, because he does not mention it here; or further – that Paul says that the two are bound as long as they are both alive. What Paul is doing is to *illustrate* the issues of Law through marriage, and Law is his subject, not marriage. But everything that he says about marriage is absolutely true and correct and to be taken literally.

Two people are in a relationship, and are bound by the covenant of marriage as long as they are both living. But the covenant of marriage – the law that they voluntarily entered into – is only binding whilst they are both alive. Once one of them has died, the law – the covenant – of marriage to the former partner is no longer binding on the remaining person. On the other hand, if a woman leaves her husband (and equally if a man leaves his wife) and gets married to another she/he commits adultery. (Paul is ignoring the issue of divorce here, which of course takes them out of the marriage contract if it is done scripturally – because of the adultery of one of the marriage partners. His purpose is to illustrate Law, and marriage is only the example).

The application – specific to the Law of Moses – is that if we still lived under Moses’ law and we then entered into a contract with Christ, then God would regard that as “*spiritual adultery*”. ***But***, we have died to the Law of Moses (7:4), and that death occurred through the body and sacrifice of Jesus. And it is to and through Jesus that we have now entered into a covenant relationship with God. Note what Paul says here “...*that you might be married to another, even Him who was raised from the dead...*” (7:4 NKJV).

The relationship to God in the times past was through Moses’ Law, a relationship that was based on a Covenant. We are now under a new Covenant, and in a relationship with God through that New Covenant. We cannot be in relationship with God under two Covenants. If that were the case, we would be spiritual adulterers. The only valid conclusion is that the first covenant has been broken. Drawing Paul’s parallel a little further, it is because one of the partners has died. Paul says that “...*we have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ...*” (7:4).

Who died so that we might be free from the contract?

The contract was between “us” and God, and the contract documents (the Covenant) was Moses’ Law. We died to the Law when we were baptised into Christ. But equally, God (in the person of Jesus) died so that the Old Covenant might be broken and replaced by the New Covenant (compare Col 2:14).

The idea that the breaking of the Covenant can only occur through death is a strong one. God gave assurance to the Old Covenant when He established it by sanctifying it with blood (Heb 9:18-22). The blood symbolised life, and required the life (*resulting in the death*) of the lamb. And Jesus *is the lamb* of God (Jn 1:29). Through His death He accomplished the sanctifying of the New Covenant (Heb 9 23-28), and at the very same time the termination of the Old Covenant. The termination only occurred through the death of one of the parties to the Covenant – the death of God Himself in the person of Jesus.

The application

Paul makes some quite specific application of what he has said. He begins in verse 5 “...*when we were in the flesh...(our sins)...bore fruit to death...*” These sins were aroused by the law, and there is a war going on between our inner selves and our fleshly nature. Paul will elaborate more on this, but he introduces it here.

Law is not to blame for sin (as he is about to show in verses 12-14), but it shows us up and condemns our actions. Sin when it has come to fruition leads to death. But we have been freed from that. We have died to sin. We have been made alive by Jesus, and now walk in newness of life (6:4,11). “...*we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by...*” (7:6 NKJV). Importantly, Paul makes the point that we no longer serve and are bound by the letter of the Law – that is that unless we kept it perfectly and to the letter, then we really failed to keep it at all. We now serve God by the newness of the Spirit. This is a bit of a play on words, as Paul both contrasts the ideas of keeping the Law literally (under the Old Covenant = the letter), and keeping the spirit of God’s Law (under the New Covenant, the Law written on our hearts – Heb 8:10). Paul also has in mind the action of the Holy Spirit. We serve God in the newness of the Spirit. We have been made alive by the action of the Holy Spirit (as he will go to great lengths to show in chapter 8), and it is through that action that we have entered our covenant relationship to God *by being born again – of water and of the Spirit* (Jn 3:5).

The third question – Is the Law sin?

The answer is exactly the same as the first and second questions – *certainly not!*

The basis of the question lies in the idea that we need to be *delivered from the Law*, and that someone might grab at the idea that all of this is the Law’s fault.

About 1 year ago (as I write this in mid 2003) a group of youths were having fun jumping off a bridge on the canals around the Gold Coast in southern Queensland (as many young men are wont to do). The bridge was well sign posted that said “no jumping or diving from the bridge” or words to similar effect. But the young lads ignored the sign (as many young men are wont to do), and had fun jumping into the water during the warm weather. Unfortunately the canal was not very deep, and one of the young men hit his head on the bottom when he jumped in headfirst. Unfortunately he broke his neck and became a paraplegic.

The story is tragic, but sadly not that unusual. What was unusual about the case was that a few days later (perhaps the next day) some of the other young men who had been diving with their friend appeared on television and blamed the authorities for the accident. The TV reporter pointed out (and showed to the TV viewers) the sign that said “no jumping or diving”. The young man acknowledged the sign, acknowledged that they knew the sign was there, and that they understood what it meant. But his response was “everyone sees the sign and everyone ignores it. It’s the fault of the authorities because they aren’t out here policing and enforcing it. They know it happens but don’t do anything about it!” The young man was very angry about what had happened to his friend, and was looking to put the blame to someone else.

So, coming back to Romans and using our example, is it the fault of the authorities? The Law had been given so that we might know what we ought (and ought not) to do. We knew what it said,

but ignored it and went against it anyway. The authorities (in the example) had done what they needed to do to ensure that everyone was aware (and understood) the danger. It was not their fault that the young men ignored the signs. It is not the fault of God, nor of the Law itself that we ignore what it says and go about our lives without keeping it. There are consequences to our actions.

Paul says that “...*we would not have known sin except by the Law...*” (7:7) If the signs had not been on the bridge, the young men would not have (reasonably) been able to understand the dangers that would follow from jumping off the bridge.

But the young men *did* see (and *did* understand) the signs. The consequences were clear and should have been obvious.

So, what was the problem? Paul describes the problem for us “...*sin took opportunity by the commandment, and produced all kinds of evil desires...*” (7:8). The water in the canal looked cool on a hot day. It was a great way to cool off. And it was such fun. The authorities don’t allow it, but they never police it and stop it, and we are unlikely to get caught in any case. And, after all, everyone does it.

It is always very easy for us to make a rational case to ignore what is right and to do what is wrong (or not to do what is right). But when we come to our senses, we can see that what we are doing (or have done) is wrong – and we *knew* it was wrong all the time – but we went ahead and did it anyway. “*For sin, took occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*” (7:11).

Through the Law, we knew what was right and what was wrong. Whilst we failed to keep it, the problem was not with the Law, but with me. The Law was intended for our good, but because we didn’t do what it said we were condemned by it. The problem does not lie with the Law, but with us.

The fourth question – Do I die because of the Law?

The answer is exactly the same as the other three questions – *certainly not!*

Like the young men in our story above, neither the signs nor the authorities are to blame for the consequences of the accident. The danger was always there – *whether there were signs or not*. There were always consequences to the actions that were taken. The young man might *try* to blame the authorities (the law), but they are not the problem. The signs and the action that the authorities took were good. It was to help us know what we ought to do and ought not to do. The problem lies *with us*.

There is a war going on inside us. We know what we ought to do, but we are tempted and succumb to the temptation. “...*The law is spiritual, but we are carnal...*” (7:14 NKJV). We are *fleshly*, in contrast to the law, which is *spiritual*. *Inside*, we *know* what we ought to do, but the temptations just seem too strong – and we always seem to rationalise our way into doing what we *want*, not what we *ought*. Our flesh wins out over our spirit. When we look back at things, we say how stupid we were for doing that. And then the next thing we know we go and do the very same thing again. “...*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...*” (7:15 NKJV).

When we look at things rationally, we can see that the law is good. It is us who are not good, and because our inner being wants to do good, it is the sin in us that causes the problem. (7:16-17).

Some discussion is worthwhile here on the concept of inherited sin. Paul is fighting his fleshly desires. This is not to say that he was born with and inherited sin. What he did inherit (as we all do) is the human and fleshly *nature*. Man has the ability to choose to do right or to do evil. In the garden of Eden, Adam chose to do evil and took himself out of the intimate relationship with

God. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus had a choice (He could have called 10,000 angels), and He *chose* to pay the price and put man back into that intimate relationship with God again. Each one of us has the same choice as Adam, and we have *all made the same choice* (there is none righteous, no not one (3:10)).

How does the spiritual warfare manifest itself?

The following verses are not peculiar to the Apostle. They describe the struggle that goes on in all true saints, determined to serve Christ in keeping with His law, but plagued by imperfections. While showing the futility of expecting holiness on a law basis, Paul builds his case of the need for mercy (cf. Gal. 3:24) and the hope available in Christ.¹

There is an inner conflict going on within Paul (and us). We know what we should do, but we do the very opposite. (7:17-20). The root cause of the problem is sin. The sin dwells in our bodies and “...takes opportunity to produce all sorts of evil desires...” (7:8). The consequence is that we allow sin to prevail over our spirit “...I do what I will not to do...” (7:16).

The conclusion that Paul draws, he describes as a law. This is kind of like Newton’s laws of motion. Things do not do what they do because Newton made a law about them, but rather the laws describe what is real and existent. The law that he describes is that *evil is present with us, even though we seek to do good*. But there is another law going on as well. *Our flesh wants to do evil, and the two are in constant conflict*. (7:23).

What is the answer to this? How can we resolve this constant war and conflict? Paul says “...who can deliver me from this body of death...” (7:24). The only answer (and the obvious one is God – we can only reconcile our inward desires and fleshly desires when we put on Christ). So, even though we end up doing the things that we ought not to do, and really don’t want to do, in our hearts we serve God, despite our human failings.

Trying to win out on our own is an impossibility. Every time we try we fail. We want to please God but end up sinning time and again. God is right and just in condemning us for our sin, even although we are Christians! What hope do we have!

In the next chapter, Paul starts to put into place the state of the person who is caught up in this constant battle.

¹ Turner, Robert F: Reading Romans p 59.