

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 7, Verses 1-6
Notes from Tuesday October 19, 2010
Last Revised on October 25, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we Completed Chapter 6

Tonight we cover the first 12 verses of Chapter 7.

Let's begin with some review to put tonight's reading in perspective.

Review

The overall theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**.

In the very first line of this letter (please turn there with me in your text and follow along) we are told that Paul was, "**set apart for it**."

This means that Paul was given a special, apostolic, responsibility, and authority, to **proclaim** the gospel,

which is, Paul tells us (1:3), **God's** good news concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, meaning Jesus of Nazareth.

So what **is** God's good news concerning Jesus?

Well, for one thing, it includes the fact that, by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was declared the **Son-of-God-in-power**, (1:4)

The final, the ultimate, **Messiah** has appeared and been anointed by God to rule Israel and all Humanity forever

and this is in **fulfillment** of **all** that God had promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scripture. (1:2)

This gospel is, at least, the **goal** and **purpose** of **everything** which concerns **man** and the whole **creation** of which we are a part.

Physicists and mathematicians have, in recent years, been in search of something they call the "**Theory of Everything**" meaning a mathematical and

theoretical apparatus which is capable of giving a unified explanation of the **physical** universe.

Such work is very interesting, and important, and useful.

But here, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have something which transcends **infinitely** the “Theory of Everything.” The gospel truth comes to us from outside of nature and somehow explains why there is nature to begin with!

The gospel speaks to the **goal** and **purpose** of the **Creator** of everything, at least insofar as we humans and the universe that we inhabit are concerned,

and it speaks to our **relationship** with Him, and not just here and now but forever.

This is big stuff, the most important thing there is, and it was Paul’s awesome responsibility, with the help of God, the Holy Spirit, to explain **this** as best he could to ordinary folks like you and me.

Often, as in Antioch, or Ephesus, or Corinth, Paul had the opportunity to spend months or years with a group of people .. face to face ... unfolding this great mystery...living with them as an example and admonishing and even disciplining them as they grew into a fuller understanding to the gospel.

But as he explains in **Verses 8-15** of the **First Chapter** of this letter, Paul has not even had the opportunity to visit Rome once, by the time he wrote the letter before us.

Until he can get there, to Rome in person, as he desperately longs to do, this letter we are studying would need to be his means of teaching the brothers and sisters there.

It is fortunate for us, who live in these days beyond the lives of the Apostles, that Paul needed to set so much of his teaching down in writing, and rather systematically in this letter, so that we could study it now.

Verses 16, 17, and 18 of Chapter 1 (as we have frequently observed) are a powerful preview and summary of much which is to follow in this letter.

Paul begins his systematic exposition around about Verse 18 of Chapter 1.

Starting there, in Verse 18, and continuing until the end of Chapter 1, Paul examines the **ungodliness** and **unrighteousness** of men

We must understand that except for a sliver of time at the beginning of time, which the Bible calls Eden, all men everywhere, excepting only Christ, have been sinful --- meaning that we have all more or less constantly and completely set ourselves opposite to the perfect will of

Allmighty God. Which is to say that God has allowed us to persist in gross disobedience for almost as long as our race has existed.

Why?

This is one of the eternal questions that finds its answer in the gospel.

In **Chapter 2 and also the first 20 verses of Chapter 3**, Paul makes it clear that such ungodliness and unrighteousness has always pervaded all of humanity, even the most law-abiding among the Jews.

We need to understand that the Jews have learned through their special history and communicated to all Men of all generations through their holy Scripture, that Man is incapable of justifying Himself, even with the help of Law and Prophets and all the rest.

Israel is the picture of what Law and Prophets can accomplish among Men. (Finally nothing.)

Thus **in the remainder of Chapter 3**, Paul makes it plain that, insofar as nobody, not even the most law-abiding Jews, ever could justify themselves even by keeping the letter of the Law, much less living a life free from sin,

God graciously purposed to put his own son **Jesus** forward to satisfy the demands of Law and Prophecy for everyone: **Jesus did it because we can't.**

and by the grace of God --- there is no explaining it --- all who **believe** in what God and His Son are doing for us, are **justified** by this **faith**,

therefore **none of us** can boast,

because our salvation is by **grace** through faith.

This brings us almost to the end of Chapter 3.

But Chapter 3 ends with Paul asking whether faith, the gospel, **overthrows** the law, and by giving a negative answer to this question, and advancing the proposition that faith actually **upholds** the law.

Paul, then, did **not** see Law and Gospel as opposing forces, neither did he see the Law as a **bad** thing.

He just saw Law as something which **never** saved **anyone**, and he also saw that faith, which can and **does** save us, is the very thing which finally does enables us to obey God in a manner consistent with the precepts of the law.

This situation, Paul goes on to explain in **Chapter 4**, is nothing new, but has always been so.

 Chapter 4 is all about **Abraham** --- who is in many ways the best example of **faith** and one of the better examples of obedience set forth in the Old Testament.

 God **spoke** to Abraham and **promised** to bless him, in ways that seemed fantastic and quite **impossible**.

 Nevertheless Abraham **believed** God and this, his faith, was counted to him as **righteousness**.

 The same has been true for all of God's **other** men and women of faith before and after Abraham.

 They **believed** that God was willing and able to do what He said.

 And this faith was counted to them as **righteousness**. (Cf. Hebrews 11)

 And now **all** these promises which God has made to his faithful children of old, have found their "yes" in **Christ**. (2 Cor 1:20)

 Now this gospel of grace, long hidden, has been fully and openly **revealed** to Mankind, in and through Jesus Christ.

 Now this **particular** revelation of Christ at Calvary is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

 All who can and do believe it, are justified, declared righteous before God, and "***we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***"(5:1b)

 Paul begins to explore this peace we have in **Chapter 5**.

 OK to here?

 Again, crossing from death to life was not our doing, not even a little bit, it was by the grace of God through a faith he planted in us, **but now what?!**

 In **the first 11 verses of Chapter 5**, Paul speaks of the peace, and joy, and hope, and love that believers experience, even in their suffering,

 as we contemplate the fact that God in Christ came down to suffer **with** us and for us while we were still his enemies.

 How can **our** suffering (which we more than deserve) be compared with **his** suffering?!

 And now that we have been **reconciled** with God, and in this awesome way, we are all the more confident of our salvation,

 because we know that Jesus rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God interceding for us!

 In the remainder of Chapter 5 (**Verses 12-21**) Paul carefully illuminates the power and efficacy of the gospel, by discussing how it has completely overcome the Fall of Man.

 The first Man, Adam, **disobeyed** God and so sin entered the world and with it came death for all men, because all men (save Christ alone) have sinned.

 In other words, Man has basically **always** been fallen and sinful and mortal.

 Yet the **obedience** of Christ unto death has, by God's grace, atoned for every sin committed by by every one who trusts in Him.

 "What shall we say then?" Paul asks at the beginning of **Chapter 6**.

 "Are we to **continue** in sin that grace may abound?"

 "**By no means!**" he answers himself in the first part of **Verse 2**.

 and then asks the question "How **can** we who **died** to sin still **live** in it?"

 He then refers in Verses 3 and 4 to the meaning of Christian **baptism**,

 a rite in which we identify ourselves **personally** with the death and resurrection of Christ,

 in order that we might walk in "**newness of life**."

 It is our **abhorrence** of sin, especially our **own** sin, and our desire to **die** to sin, that leads us first to **faith** and Christ and then into a public **profession** of faith through the rite of baptism.

 It would be truly **absurd** to emerge from the waters of baptism, and to take our place in the body of Christ, which is the Church, with the sense that it is OK now to continue in sin or, that **any** of our sins (past, present, or future) are somehow OK.

 Christians do **not** think this.

 On the contrary, Paul continues in **Verses 5-11 of Chapter 6**, by becoming **united** with Christ,

 we are set **free** from sin and death,

 and assured a blessed eternal life **with** God, which surely **will** be a life

eternally without sin!

Therefore he concludes this baptismal meditation in **Verses 12-14** of Chapter 6 with this **admonition** for our present life on earth:

that we **must not** allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies.

A similar set of issues is examined in **Verses 15-23 of Chapter 6**, which was last week's lesson.

As we have seen, whereas Verses 1-14 of Chapter 6 are centered on the images of **death and resurrection**,

Verses 15 - 23 are preoccupied with the metaphor of **slavery**.

We will want to be careful not to let our justifiably negative feelings towards the human institution and practice slavery prevent us from perceiving what Paul is teaching here about the wonders of becoming "**slaves**" to God.

Paul is basically trying to help us see that there are only two alternatives available to us.

Apart from Christ, all men and women, are slaves of **sin**. This is alternative **number 1**.

But when we become followers of Christ, we become **slaves of God**, in the sense that Paul means here. This is alternative **number 2**.

You can't be both --- i.e. a slave to sin **and** a slave to God --- that is **logically impossible**.

You cannot be **neither** --- there simply is no independent third alternative.

These are the categories that Paul sets up here.

Men and women who chose to remain slaves of sin will surely die, and this is what all men and women have chosen, unless and until they become slaves of God.

Paul is interested, just here, in the behavior of these faithful **slaves of God**. What **should** they do? And what are that actually **seen** to do?

His answer is that, because they are already saved from sin and death and bound for a blessed eternal life, believers in Christ **should** sin no more, even in this life, and this is what they are **actually** seen to do, albeit imperfectly.

If Christians suddenly became sinless like Christ, or if any of us every could attain to that degree of perfection in his life, well then, there would be no need

for admonition....no need for parables and sermons and apostolic letters.

Everything we know lets us know that Paul does **not** expect to arrive in Rome one day and find a church filled with people exhibiting Christ-like **perfection**. For that we must wait for heaven.

Yet he does expect each and every Christian to have that desire, to become perfect, and to **long** for the day when we can be **free** of this sinful body and clothed in our heavenly body and, finally, be “free to sin no more.”

This desire for and this tendency toward holiness and fellowship with God, is the **ongoing** work of the **Holy Spirit** in each Christian believer for so long as we tarry on this earth.

Paul will address the work of the **Holy Spirit** in Chapter 8.

But for tonight and the next week or two, we will be in **Chapter 7**.

which explores our relationship with the **Law**, now that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (5:1)

Does anyone have any questions or comments before we read on?

OK. Let's read on.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 1 - 6

Will someone please read the first six verses of Chapter 7, in Japanese.

Thanks. Will someone please read these verses in English.

1 Or do you not know, brothers---for I am speaking to those who know the law---that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

2 For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.

3 Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

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

6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Thank you.

Here clearly, in what we just read, and throughout Chapter 7 Paul is preoccupied with the "**law**."

I think his meaning includes the Ten Commandments and probably all or most of the other laws which God gave to **Moses**.

His meaning may be broad enough to include the entire **Pentateuch** and some or all other parts of the **Old Testament**.

I don't think his meaning is so broad a to include all laws generally, wherever we may find them.

For example I do **not** think he means to speak of **Roman Law**.

Verse 1 reads:

(Verse 1)

Or do you not know, brothers---for I am speaking to those who know the law---that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives?

Here and rather often in this section (compared to the rest of the letter) Paul refers to his readers as "**brothers**"

And here in Verse 1, he alludes to his readers' **knowledge** of the "law"

This is at least, I think, an appeal from Paul to his fellow **Jewish** Christians.

And this whole letter presupposed the **presence** such Jewish Christians in Rome.

But this whole letter also seems, to me, to presuppose that even the gentile Christians in Rome are **reasonably** familiar with Jewish Scripture.

So here in Verse 1, Paul is apparently making a point that he would expect most of his readers to "get" based on their **Biblical** understanding of law.

Although here the point he is making may be one that anyone would get, who was even somewhat familiar with the principles of contract law.

Or maybe someone who is not very familiar with any kind of law would get the point that Paul is making in Verse 1.

Q. Which is what?

A. That the law has nothing to do with dead men.

Jurisprudence is only of interest to the living.

The dead are past caring.

Think about it.

Q. So how does this point connect with the flow of Paul's argument up until now?

It must connect somehow, judging from the way that verse 7 begins: "***Or do you not know, brothers...***"

This grammar suggests that the point that dead men have nothing to do with the law is being offered here in Verse 1 in support of some point which Paul has made previously.

A. For centuries it has been most common to connect the thought in Verse 1 of Chapter 7 with the point made in Verse 14 of Chapter 6.

Do you see it?

In 6:14 Paul concludes his thought about us having died with Christ and been reborn with him unto a new kind of life, with the statement: "***For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under the law but under grace.***"

When we "die" we are no longer subject to the "law" which was written only for the living.

Like all men, Christians do literally die, at which point, like all men, we are no longer under the law.

However our old self "dies" when we become a Christian, as is symbolized in baptism, and as Paul has been discussing before this point in the letter.

Paul means to say --- I think --- that our old self which was under the law and, indeed, subject to death under the law, became free of the law when it died.

Our **new** self has been born, **not** under the law again, but under **grace**, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Do you all read it that way?

OK, now, let me try to help you with the next step in reading this passage, by suggesting that you skip next to verse 4.

Verse 4 reads:

(Verse 4)

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Paul is still referring to his readers here, with uncharacteristic frequency, as his **“brothers.”**

which suggests to me that he is identifying particularly strongly with the more **biblically** literate, mostly **Jewish**, cadre among his Christian readers, those who are having trouble adjusting their understanding of the place of the law among Christians.

He tells them that it is helpful to think of themselves --- the selves they used to be, **before Christ** --- as being **dead** and therefore no longer under the law.

Clearly he is speaking of the kind of death which we Christians achieve **“through Christ”**

Christ died to sin **“once for all”** paying in his body the full requirement of the law.

When Christ was reborn, we were reborn with him, and not reborn unto the law.

What is important about us now (to skip ahead a bit to Chapter 8) is not knowing the law and trying to obey it,

but bearing within ourselves the very Spirit of God, which produces fruit which is consistent with the law and, indeed, surpasses it.

A Christian’s behavior is **accidentally** lawful because it is **naturally** Godly!

This I believe is the central thread of the argument begun at 6:14 and which carries on with various embellishments until the end of Chapter 7.

Before we pick that argument back up again, let’s now have a look at Verses 2

and 3 which.

Verse 2 reads:

(Verse 2)

For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage.

Here I believe Paul is just embroidering his main point --- i.e. that death disrupts our relationship with the law.

We have one kind of relationship with the law; law affects us in some way, and then there is a death, and our relationship with the law is affected by that death.

Of course for the person who dies, law becomes irrelevant.

But even survivors are sometimes set free from the law by the death of another.

And easy example is marriage.

A husband and wife are both bound by the law which governs their marriage.

But when one of them dies, the marriage is dissolved, and both of them are set free from the law of marriage.

Likewise when a Christian dies and is reborn in Christ, his marriage with the law is dissolved and he is free to enter into a new relationship with Christ, without suffering the charge of adultery.

Verse 3 reads:

(Verse 3)

Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

I think Paul here is trying to reassure his Jewish brethren that accepting Christ does not make them adulterous with respect to God the Father or the covenant of marriage into which they entered with YHWH when they said that they would keep all of His laws.

That covenant has ended and been replaced by a better one.

Just as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews argues so convincingly.

We can now reread Verse 4 in its proper sequence:

Again it reads:

(Verse 4)

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Now we see how the marriage analogy helps the central argument.

Our old self is dead to the law.

Our risen self is alive to Christ.

His Spirit in us is to bear fruit which, by the way, will be better than obedience to the law, it will be an expression of the will of God in us

Verse 5 then reads:

(Verse 5)

For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

This is nothing new.

We well understand that fallen man is fallen, and does what he wills to do, and what he wills to do is unrighteous and ungodly.

The law does not help fallen man. It can only kill him.

Q. How?

A. By making our sinful nature more obvious.

A. By multiplying our sinful deeds and desires.

A. By holding God's righteous standard before the eyes of men and women who are completely ungodly and unrighteous.

To those who are dead and dying, the law avails nothing.

The history of Israel proves this.

And paves the way for the gospel and the New Covenant.

Verse 6 reads:

(Verse 6)

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

The old is gone, the new has come.

Now we are free, and we serve God freely in the new way of the Spirit

because we want to, because that is our new Spirit Filled nature

we no longer try that demonstrably impossible thing of trying to imitate the love of God by keeping to the letter of the law, despite our fallen nature.

It never worked.

And the gospel demonstrably does!

(n.b. this is where we ran out of time on October 19)

Closing Prayer