

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 7, Verses 13-25
Notes from Tuesday November 2, 2010
Last Revised on November 4, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

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

Our study last week took us through Verse 12 of Chapter 7.

Tonight we will read from Verse 13 to the end of Chapter 7.

And tonight I will forgo my usual long review, in order to focus more specifically on the argument being developed in and around Chapter 7.

Review

Q. What is the main subject of Chapter 7?

A. Law.

As we have noticed before tonight, this chapter begins with Paul addressing his readers as “*brothers*” and as “*those who know the law.*”

This is consistent with our understanding, gained very early in this letter, that Paul is addressing people who are **Christian**,

and that included among the Christians to whom Paul is writing are many who **are** familiar with the “*law.*”

By “*law*” Paul probably means approximately all of what we call the Old Testament.

And at least some of these people to whom Paul is writing were, like Paul himself, very familiar with the scripture before becoming Christians, insofar as they, like Jesus, Paul, and all of the Apostles were **Jewish**.

These were people who knew their **Bible**.

And not just academically but as something that governed their **life** and explained their **history** and their **culture** and their personal **identity**.

These were the **most** religious people of that time and place, pious people, like many of the Jews and Christians who have filled synagogues and churches in all times and places,

like many who are in places like TBC today...people who care **deeply** about the law,

people who attend **Bible studies!**

people who would freely join Paul in saying, as he does say in **2 Timothy, 3:16,17** that “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*”

These are the people, especially here in Chapter 7, but in Romans generally to whom Paul is writing.

Is interesting to read what he is saying here about the **relationship** between we who love the law so well, and the law **itself**.

Q. In verses 1-6 of Chapter 7 (see especially Verse 4) how **does** Paul describe the relationship between we devout Christians and the “law?”

A. He says that we have **died** to it. (Hmm...)

Q. What does Paul **mean** by this?

Q. Does he mean that we are free to **break** the law?

A. No! In **Chapter 6**, Paul makes it very clear that this is precisely **NOT** what he means.

There, in Chapter 6, if you will remember, Paul says that we have **died** to sin and been reborn as **slaves of God**.

And he urges us **not** to let sin reign in our mortal bodies... (**6:12**)

Q. Does this, then, mean that **keep** the law we **do** not sin?

A. **Clearly** not.

But don't take **my** word for it. Would someone please read **1 John 1:10**

This is a consistent teaching of the **whole** Bible._

There **are** no “good Christians” and **certainly** none that are good in their **own** estimation.

Q. So in what sense, then, can it be said that we Christians have “**died to sin**?”

A. Well, near the beginning of Chapter 6 Paul explains how in baptism we identify personally with the death and resurrection of Christ who, **himself**, “**died to sin once for all**” (6:10)

A. In this way we are “**dead to sin**,” in **Christ**.

A. And having been set **free** from sin and become slaves of God, the **Holy Spirit** comes to live in us, leading to **sanctification** and blessed **eternal life**. (6:22)

A. Our blessed eternal life will be lived **bodily**, but not in this permanently corrupt and sinful body we now inhabit. Soon enough **this** body will **literally** die. The **spiritual** body which we inhabit for eternity will be perfectly free from sin!

OK. So in these **several** senses we can understand that believers have **died to sin**.

Q. But have we answered the question with which we began?: i.e. what does Paul mean when he says that we have “died to the **law**?”

A. Our old self is **already** dead and dying to sin, and the law has nothing further to say to **dead** people.

A. Any other ideas....of what Paul might mean when he says we are “**dead to the law**?”

Q. Well then, if we have died to **sin** (6:2) and if we have also died to the **law** (7:4) does this mean that the law **is** sin?

(n.b. That was the question posed in 6:7 which began last week’s lesson.)

A. **No!**

Of course it is **logically** impossible for the law set forth by God to **be** sin.

That is a bit of **intentional**, attention getting, **nonsense** if I am reading this correctly

Because **sin** is (Q. **What?**) something which is **not** OK with God.

And **law** is (Q. **What?**) an expression by God of what **is** OK with God.

Therefore, while there is a strong connection **between** law and sin,

this is clearly **not** because they are one and the **same**.

It would be **more** accurate to say that law and sin are **opposites**.

But they are not exactly opposites **either**!

Because, as Paul teaches, there **can** be sin **without** law. (5:13f)

Indeed this is a point that is **very** well developed in Holy scripture.

Long before the law was **given** on Mt. Sinai the world was **rife** with sin.

Will someone please read **Genesis 6:5-8**

OK. So we can understand that the law **is** not sin, and neither is the law **responsible** for sin.

But what the law **does** do, and I dare say that this is the primary **purpose** of the law,

is to **reveal** our sinfulness to us much more clearly.

Without the law, much of our sinfulness might simply remain latent, lie **sleeping**, so to speak,

so that we can hardly **notice** it or noticing it we fail to understand just how **bad** it is.

And if you will recall that is the sense of last week's lesson in **7:7-12**

Please follow along with me as I reread that now:

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 7-12 (Review)

7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.

10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.

11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good

and this is precisely why the law is fatal to us,

because, apart from God, we are sinful and can never keep the law

Therefore rather than the law saving us from sin and death,

sin uses the law to hasten our demise.

So, while we could not logically say that law and sin are the same thing,

we might possibly be inclined to say that they are both bad things

or at least both of them are harmful to us,

insofar as both of them tend to kill us.

This leads us into today's lesson.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 13

Will someone please read Chapter 7, Verses 13, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read that same verse in English.

13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Thank you.

Q. By "*that which is good*" Paul means what?

A. The law.

At least “that which is good” **includes** the law and that law **stands for** it,

The law is the speech to Man of He who created **all** that is good!

Q. So what do you think, “Did the law **bring** death?”

Paul gives the answer: “**by no means!**”

The law makes it plain that **we** bring death upon **ourselves**, that we are “*without excuse*” for our sin.

What brings death is **sin**

Sin produces death in us, **through** the law.

In this way we are able to **see** sin, and see it for what it **is**.

i.e. we are able to see that we have freely chosen to turn away from God, and that it is in our **nature** to continue to do so forever and, therefore, that our **death** and destruction is both fitting and proper.

The death which Christ dies **for** us, is the death which we **unquestionably** deserved.

It is the law which **helps** us to see this, **despite** our deep depravity and dulled moral sensibility.

Questions or comments before we read on?

Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 14-17

Will someone please read Chapter 7, Verses 14-17, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Thank you.

(Verse 14)

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

Remember, Paul is speaking to his “*brothers*” those who “*know the law.*”

It was the deep conviction of godly Jews then and now,

and the central tenant of evangelical Christians

that the Bible is the breath of God

the speech of God who Himself is Spirit.

The law, in other words, comes from Heaven, where there is no sin, where everything is in complete conformance with God’s perfect character.

What the law makes clear to us, is that we, we children of Adam and Eve are in rebellion.

We have freely chosen to turn away from God

We have chosen to sin, and have sold ourselves into slavery to sin.

The law helps us see this.

Verse 15 reads:

(Verse 15)

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Again, please remember that Paul is not speaking only of himself.

He is speaking both of himself and of others like himself.

He is speaking of those who, like himself, do believe in God and who are being saved by God.

Paul is not here speaking of himself prior to his conversion, as some have supposed.

 Only a converted, Spirit filled believer can **think** such thoughts and **make** such statements.

 We **agree** with God. We **want** to obey Him. We can **see** that what he requires is perfectly **good**.

 We can even see that what God requires is perfectly good **for us**

 and that it arises from His perfect **love** for us.

 and **STILL** we do not obey.

 Verse 16 continues:

(Verse 16)

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

Believers **despise** their own sinful thoughts and actions

 which means that we **agree** with what the law requires, that it is **good**.

 How can **both** things coexist in one person?.

 Only **believers** know this experience.

 Only with the help of the **law** and the **Holy Spirit** we can truly perceive our own sin

 and our **need** for the Saviour.

Verse 17 reads

(Verse 17)

So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

This is not the statement of a man who **excuses** himself for sin.

 It is the statement of a man who **recognizes** evil within himself.

 By the grace of God, this man has somehow been able to see **himself** for what he truly is: wicked beyond repair, fit only for death and destruction.

Questions or comments before we read on?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 18-20

Will someone please read Chapter 7, Verses 18-20, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Thank you.

In the preceding verse, Verse 17, speaking on behalf of all believers, Paul says that it is not I who sin, but the sin that **dwells** in me.

Q. Does this then mean that we who are basically good have come to notice in ourselves a little “**sin problem.**”

A. No, it does not mean that at all.

Verse 18 reads

(Verse 18)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

The **non-believer** may view himself as basically good, but with a little sin problem.

The believer knows better: he knows that **nothing** good dwells within himself

by which Paul means in his “**flesh**”

By “***flesh***” Paul probably means to include the **whole natural man**, including everything that we bring into this world with us from the womb.

He does **not** mean to include God the Holy Spirit, who is of course perfectly good, and those parts of us which are regenerated and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

It is, indeed, the Spirit which enables us to see that we, in and of ourselves, contain **nothing** good.

We continue to **doing** evil all the time, even after God has enabled us to see that what we do **IS** evil.

Notice this: God has given to Paul and other believers the **knowledge** of what is good, and he has planted in us the **desire** to do what is good, but our flesh **does** not do good and is **incapable** of it.

Which is to say that flesh, the natural man, is **inherently** and **irretrievably** sinful.

Earlier and elsewhere Paul said that the flesh is "*sold under sin.*" (v.14)

Again, this is a consistent teaching of the whole Bible: for so long as we live, here in this body of flesh, we will **continue** to sin.

The end of our sinning comes only at **death**.

This does **not** make sin OK (as the world thinks).

But (contrary to the thinking of the world) it does mean that death, for a believer, is a **good** thing.

It is our final **escape** and release from our own sinful behavior.

In death we are set **free** to obey only God!

Verses 19 and 20 repeat the substance of what has already been said. They read:

(Verses 19 and 20)

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Such is the **struggle** of the child of God, the believer in Christ, from the moment that he first believes until the moment of his death.

We **continue** to struggle against sin, and to **sin**, and to **grieve** over sin.

Our relationship with God is infinitely the best thing that we have and we long to see it perfected.

But it comes at the price of being forced to see, with increasing clarity, how wicked we really are, and how necessary it is for us to die and to be reborn.

in the figurative sense, surely, but also in the literal sense.

For so long as this body lives, sin will continue to dwell within me.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 21-23

Will someone please read Chapter 7, Verses 21-23, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Thank you.

I find these verses a little difficult, and others have too, mostly because of the varied and repeated use of the word "law."

We need to notice, right away, that few if any of the occurrences of the word "law," in the verses that we just read, are referring to "the Law" of the Old Testament.

Verse 22 comes close, maybe, when it speaks of the "law of God in my inner being" but that is more likely referring to the new heart God will give us, with the words of God written on it, and to the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit, than to the written word of Holy Scripture.

This may be similar to the "law of my mind" which Paul referred to in Verse 23,

and which is opposed to "another law" waging war against it.

and which makes us captive to the "law of sin" that dwells in my members.

Clearly then we are using the word law in these verses in a much more general way than we

normally do, and somewhat **figuratively**.

Q. And what is a “**law**” generally speaking?

A. Generally it is a **rule** which people are required to obey.

A. But we also speak figuratively of the “**laws of nature**” in which case we mean certain things that always seem to happen, just as if they were rules which the natural universe consciously obeyed.

It is in this **latter** sense that I read Verse 21:

(Verse 21)

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

I think Paul is saying that it seems almost like a “**law of nature**” or a general principle governing the universe in which we live, that whenever we find ourselves wishing to do what is right, there is also the opportunity and the risk and, indeed, almost the certainty of doing evil instead or in addition.

It is virtually impossible for us to **anything** which is truly and purely and simply the “**right thing**”

Verses 22 and 23 follow in explanation of this basic point advanced in Verse 21

(Verse 22)

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

Paul and the believers to whom he is writing, and hopefully we as well, should all understand from our own **experience** the point being made in Verse 22, even though we may struggle to explain it non-believers or even to ourselves. Poetic language is required.

Deep **inside** ourselves, in the part of our soul which has been **regenerated** and is being **sanctified** by God, the Holy Spirit, we delight in God and in all that is good and pleasing to Him.

And this **delight** in our inner being is not **hidden** from our conscious perception,

Our minds are **aware** of this part of ourselves.

This awareness is part of what **happens** when we believe.

But sadly this is not our **only** perception of ourself,

Indeed the **first** perception, of a spark of godliness within ourselves, necessarily leads to a **second** perception

Verse 23 reads:

(Verse 23)

but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

this **other** law, the law of **sin**, dwells in me also.

I know this because it wages **war** against the first law,

frustrating and **contaminating** my most valiant effort to do “what is right”

When Paul says that the law of sin dwells in his “*members*” I think he means in **every** part of his natural body, **including** his mind.

But when he says that this other law, this law of sin, wages war against “*the law of his mind*,” I think he means to say that he perceives his “*inner being*,” referred to in Verse 22, the one which delights in the law of God as being a part of himself which somehow resides within his mind and which is transforming him **through** the renewal of his mind.

This does not mean that our minds are ever **without** sin, or that the Christian struggle is by any means a struggle **between** mind and body.

Our struggle, rather, is between the law **of God** (in the general sense meant here) and the law **of sin** which is woven throughout all of fallen creation, including us!

The believer is, in this regard, is in a **wretched** and **divide** and **war-torn** state.

There is a war raging **within** him.

The non-believer is **spared** this inner turmoil, and cannot understand it.

But Paul clearly does understand it.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Chapter 7, Verses 24-25

Will someone please read Chapter 7, Verses 24-25, in Japanese

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Thank you.

Again, Verse 24 reads

(Verse 24)

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

This is what law can accomplish --- this cry: “*wretched man that I am!*”

Now I am speaking of the Law again, meaning God’s law.

God’s law is perfectly good. Believers agree. We delight in it.

But we simply can’t keep it. And it can **not** save us from this “*body of death.*”

Q. Who can deliver us? Who?

A. The answer comes in Verse 25a

(Verse 25a)

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

“*God*” delivers us,

and He does it “*through Jesus Christ*”

who has become “*our Lord*”

This is the gospel, which Paul has been called and set apart to proclaim.

The conclusion of this argument follows in the last part of verse 25, which reads:

(Verse 25b)

So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

With our **flesh**, with what we received through the womb from Adam, we serve the law of **sin**.

This is true of both **believes** and non-believers. **All** flesh is sold under sin and bound to die.

But among those whom God has graciously **delivered** through faith, including all who can truly say “*Jesus Christ our Lord*”

there shall be **life** after death.

In our inner being there is a place which has been **regenerated** and is being **sanctified** and which shall be **glorified** and live forever.

We are aware of this new birth within us and it is transforming our minds: causing us to delight in the things of God.

Here it is, in this regenerate part of my mind, that I **serve the law of God**

And until death finally brings me **rest** from my struggle, and sends me safe and perfect to be with God, I shall **constantly** struggle to overcome the corruption that remains and wars against me, in my mind and other members.

This thought points us onward into Chapter 8, which is next week’s lesson.

Any questions or comments?

Closing Prayer