

ROMANS 7:1-8 "Dead To the Law, Alive To Christ"

Today's text picks up on the thought of what Paul says in Rom 6:22 "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

One of the benefits of being yoked to Christ is holiness, or as other translations put it, sanctification. It's more literal translation is a state of purity. And of course the ultimate benefit is eternal life.

As Paul often does, being the teacher that he was and being instructed by the Holy Spirit, he gives a little different slant on the same subject to give us another perspective so that we might better understand our salvation and the privilege we have in Christ to honor our Lord.

Rom 7:1 "Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?"

In the words of William Barclay: "The basic thought of this passage is founded on the legal maxim that death cancels all contracts."

He's speaking to people who know the law. The church in Rome was made up basically of Gentiles and yet he brings in the law, which to most commentators speaks of the Mosaic law, though it could include all Moral laws given to us by God, which would bind all people, not just the Jews.

The Gentiles, especially those in Rome, would have been very familiar with the O.T. law as there was a large Jewish population in and around Rome, and since the O.T. law had been translated into Greek, most of those Gentile believers would have sought out the word of God in the O.T. scriptures.

What Paul is proposing here is that the law of God has jurisdiction over a person while he is alive. All of the blessings as well as the curses are in effect while one is living.

However, at death, the necessity of the law for the purpose of living under its rules is brought to a close. At that point judgment takes place and the law has served its purpose and is no longer needed for that person.

With that little preface Paul then goes on to make his point of how the law affects us and how it is made void as a means of binding us.

Rom 7:2-3 "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. 3 So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man."

What Paul is doing here is to show us how marriage is an example of a relationship involving the law. And by the way, for those people who scoff at the notion that marriage is only a piece of paper legally binding two people and therefore isn't necessary, Paul brings to light here that there is a law much higher than that of the state which hands out those pieces of paper.

The law Paul speaks of here is God's law, and according to that "law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive." Not to stay with your husband is considered unlawful and places the woman in a position of becoming an adulteress if she marries another man while her first husband is alive.

She is obligated to stay with that man according to God's word. Now, the law also clearly speaks to the man who is also under the law regarding his relationship with his wife.

For example in Deu 22:22 "If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel."

God's law is meant to be followed. However, I am not going to get into all of the ramifications of marriage, divorce and remarriage at this point, because that is not the point Paul is making.

This is not a teaching on all of the particulars of the marriage of a man and a woman. Paul is simply using an analogy which involves God's law, which these Christians in Rome already understood and believed.

And so, Paul is basically saying, 'You already know what God says about the marriage relationship according to God's word. And you know that the opposite is true. If the man dies, the woman is no longer under obligation to the law which bound her to that man.'

She's a free woman from that relationship. That relationship no longer has any power over her. And here's the point Paul is making.

Rom 7:4 "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God."

What he means by this is that you and I were married to the law in the sense that we were under its jurisdiction. And because we were united to the law, in this sense, we were also united to the penalties the law enacts on all those who disobey it. The outcome is what Paul spoke of in Rom 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death..."

Being united to the law in that sense brings with it all of the responsibilities of living under the law. Only one thing can free us from the legal binding relationship we have with the law. Someone must die. Now, in the analogy Paul uses, the husband who dies frees up the wife. If we follow the analogy exactly, the law, which is compared to the husband, must die.

But it isn't the law which dies, it is we who die to the law. How do we die to the law? We die vicariously. The word vicarious simply means taking the place of another person or thing. We died to the law and its penalties when we placed our trust and faith in the person who took our place and paid our debt on our behalf.

Now, don't lose the analogy here that Paul uses. When we died to the law we were then able to be joined to another, not unlike the marriage relationship where when the husband dies and the wife is able to join in another relationship.

The former relationship has no jurisdiction or power over the new relationship. That's why Paul could say in Rom 6:14 "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

His point is begging the question, 'why, if your former husband is dead, would you want to go back to the grave, dig him up and try and carry on any kind of relationship with him when the relationship is cut off because of death?'

'Why are you telling me that your former relationship still has a power over you when that husband is dead and in the grave and you're now united to a new husband who is very much alive and has the power to give you all things in this new relationship?'

Rom 7:4 "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God."

If we belong to the risen Christ whose death secured this new relationship, then let us live in this new relationship without being tempted to go back to the grave. And let us bear fruit in this new relationship. The fruit of the old relationship to the law and death, because of sin, can only produce things related to death.

The new relationship we have in Christ must be producing the kind of fruit which shows life. If any area of our lives is demonstrating a relationship with the old nature, which has been crucified in Christ, then we must come to our new husband, that is Jesus, and ask forgiveness and seek His life so that we may live in the newness of that relationship in the power of the Spirit.

The fact that Christ has risen from the grave defeating sin and death gives us great hope that we have that same resurrection power to walk with our Lord and not to feel powerless when that attraction to the grave, (the old nature) becomes strong.

The fruit of our first marriage was sin, the fruit of our new marriage is holiness. This is the point Paul makes in Rom 7:5-6 "For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, [Or the flesh] the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

Outside of Christ we were still married to the law. And the law works in conjunction with our sinful nature. Now, when we speak of our sinful nature and the law coming together we're speaking not just of a nature which wants to sin, but a nature which wants to work with the law trying to achieve righteousness in a fleshly way according to that law.

That's just another way of identifying self-righteousness, which the flesh loves to boast in. And this attitude of self-righteousness is to be avoided among Christians, who may feel tempted to think that their obedience, or their good works, place them above others when it comes to being reconciled to God.

We can't add anything to our salvation. This is what Paul means in Gal 3:2-6 "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you

receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? 6 Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Some Jews at the church in Galatia wanted to bring the law back into salvation as a requirement to be added as a means of justification and sanctification. In other words, they wanted to dig up the dead body of their former husband and bring it into their new relationship which finds its life in Christ alone.

And sometimes, as believers in Christ, we are tempted to dig up what is meant to stay in the grave. Christians are sometimes notorious for making up all sorts of rules and regulations for themselves and others that are meant for making holy lives, not realizing that the rules themselves don't make anyone holy anymore that the law in itself could make us holy.

Only the Holy Spirit of God is able to make us truly holy from the inside out. This is why we must be careful not to place the burden of our rules and regulations on others with the idea of binding consciences for the sake of holiness.

'You can't go to movies, if you're going to be a part of this church. You ladies can't wear make-up or pants if you're going to be a part of this church. You guys can't wear beards or tatoos if you're going to be a part of this church. All girls must wear hats or some sort of covering before you enter the doors of this church.'

We may laugh at this but the list of rules and regulations that people prescribe for the sake of creating a sense of holiness are longer than we have time for this morning. My wife was once rebuked by an older Christian lady for wearing finger nail polish to church.

Paul's response would be Gal 3:3 "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

It's not as though holiness is separate from God's word, but our holiness is not an external working only, but an internal love for

our new husband in Christ. The source of holiness is God, who is holy, and His working in our hearts.

In fact God makes this contrast of natures in the O.T. when He promises that holiness will spring forth in His people from a true love for God, not out of the letter of the law.

Jer 31:31-33 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

And so holiness is connected to the word of God, but it's a holiness which springs from the new heart we have in Christ who died so that we, in His death and resurrection, might be freed from our old master of the law and its penalty of death; separation from God.

And so we read in Rom 7:6 "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

Now, at this point there are those who feel that the law is of no use, that it's inherently evil, and that we should have no association with it as believers in Christ. The term theologian's use for these people who believe such things is antinomians, which means "anti-law".

In one sense we must all be antinomians. We must all be against the law as a means of earning righteousness before God or growing in the grace of God, but on the other hand we must not be against God's law as a means of pointing unbelievers to Christ and as a means for believers to recognize sin and flee from it in the power of the Spirit.

Now, if we were to stop here Paul might be accused of saying that the law is of no value and the means by which sin abounds, which would place the blame for sin entirely on the law.

But, notice what this man of God, who is saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, says of the law.

Rom 7:7 "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! (NAS - "May it never be"). Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."
[Exodus 20:17; Deut. 5:21]

Paul is saying that the law has a very good purpose. For one thing it reveals what sin is so that we may know what God considers ungodly which is to be avoided.

He brings up coveting in our text. The word covet in the Greek is *epithumeo* and it means to set the heart upon. A direct act of taking something does not even come into the picture, just setting your heart upon something which doesn't belong to you is sinful, if your heart continues to want whatever it is.

And the "whatever it is" is mentioned in Exo 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Paul uses coveting precisely because it's a sin of the heart which no one can see except that person and God. No one is exempt from sins of the heart. Now just thinking of some sin doesn't make it sinful. Putting your heart to it is what is referred to here. Wanting it, even though you know you shouldn't seek after it.

Paul says the law is very good in the sense that it lays out the guidelines for what God says is against Him and His holiness. You see the law, in a sense, is a measure of God's holiness.

God says you shall not lie, which infers that He is truth. God says you shall not commit adultery which infers that He desires faithfulness because He is faithful.

And so the law gives us a glimpse of God's holiness. In the case of coveting, or lusting, as the word could be translated, God reminds us that all things belong to Him and to desire something outside of His revealed will is to steal from Him.

And that can be done in the heart as well as actually taking possession of something which doesn't belong to us.

Well, if the law is good according to verse 7 then where do these evil desires originate from if I can't blame the law?

Rom 7:8 "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead."

Sin is the problem. My sin and your sin is the problem. Adam's sinful nature given to me, inherited from him, started the problem. That sinful nature which desires to please self and not God.

Remember what Paul said back in Rom 5:18-19 "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

Sin was put to our account in Adam. The righteousness of Christ is put to our account when we by faith exchange "husbands" (Masters) when we trust in His atoning sacrifice on our behalf. That's where the term vicarious atonement would come in.

It is our sin which takes its opportunity through the law which produces in us, as Paul says in verse 8, coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead.

In other words, apart from the law our ability to recognize sin as sin is not active. That's what dead means; without life, without the ability to act on something.

Where there is no law our eyes are closed to the heinousness of sin which displeases our God and keeps us a slave of sin. The law is a means of grace to show us the sinfulness of sin so that we might recognize our need of a Savior.

And so is the law sinful? May it never be! Rather as Paul says in Gal 3:24-27 "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

But realizing that and living in that reality can sometimes become blurred by our propensity to try and dig up the old man which was crucified in Christ.

In fact, that's why Paul goes on to say to the Galatians in Gal 4:9 "But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is

it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"

Let us be careful not to turn back to those things from which we were delivered. Not just for the sake of saying that, 'I'm doing alright and I've been on the straight and narrow', but for the sake of saying God is at work in me and through Him I am able to honor and glorify my God, my Lord and my Savior.

We'll talk more on this next week as Paul continues his thought, but I'll leave you with this. We will always be tempted to dig up the old man with its lusts and passions for self, but never forget what it is that Christ did to deliver us from the penalty and power of sin which separates from God.

And as we meditate upon this new relationship we have with our God in Christ may our love for Him and His for us, direct our paths Godward, always seeking the things above that He may demonstrate His love and power through us for His glory.

One of my favorite passages is one of my favorite promises from God concerning me and you in Christ.

1Pe 2:9-12 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

Such glorifying of God is done in and by the Spirit, not by the letter of the law. Live as people who have the law written on your hearts and whose obedience comes from a love for God who first loved us and sent His Son to die in our place for the penalty of our sin.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below, praise him above all ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.