

## CHAPTER IX

### ROMANS 7:1-25 – THE REIGN OF GRACE AND THE LAW

CONCERNING Alexander Whyte, the Edinburgh minister, theological professor, and collector of commentaries on Romans, there is an interesting account:

He had a standing arrangement with his bookseller that whenever a new commentary on the Letter appeared, it should be sent to him on a sale-or-return basis. Whyte's habit was immediately to open the new work and read through the author's comments on Romans 7:14-25. If the work did not view the passage as an exposition of Paul's *Christian* experience, Whyte simply re-wrapped it and returned it with a note to the effect, 'This is not the commentary for me'.<sup>1</sup>

The conflicting opinions that face the interpreter of this chapter, especially vs. 13-25, present a daunting challenge, and the reason for this is not hard to understand. A somewhat romantic view of biblical Christianity has led many to believe that, following conversion, the problem of sin in the believer has been substantially reduced, if not eliminated, to a benign level of difficulty. On the other hand, a *prima facie* reading of the concluding verses of this chapter would lead one to believe that the Apostle himself is profoundly troubled with sin in an ongoing manner that hardly suggests the living of a continual victorious Christian life. For the moment, this problem must be held in abeyance until the preceding context is dealt with, and, as Lloyd-Jones rightly suggests, only then can the matters of contention be properly dealt with.<sup>2</sup>

However, several matters need to be considered as introductory principles that draw upon the argument thus far and find continuance through to the end of chapter 8. The most vital matter is the greater emphasis here upon "law" than in any other place in Romans, and indeed in any other of Paul's writings.<sup>3</sup> Further, in contrast with the pre-evangelism consideration of "law" in 1:1-3:20, here the teaching concerns "law" as it relates to the Christian. Thus we are confronted with the matter of what is, in Reformation terms, "the third use of the law," that is the role of the "law," if any, in the sanctification of the believer.<sup>4</sup> A further important matter concerns the ongoing teaching of Paul with regard to "the members of our body," vs. 5-6, cf. 6:6, 12-13, 7:19, 23-25. This is not an issue that merely arises at the end of this chapter. Hence, the earlier teaching is to be born in mind as a key to the understanding of vs. 13-25. Finally, Paul's concern remains for the problems raised in 6:1, 15, and he will not return, with sustained emphasis, to the exposition of 5:21; 6:22 until ch. 8. His liking for instruction that uses contrast and

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson in his foreword to James Fraser, *A Treatise On Sanctification*, p. iv.

<sup>2</sup> "Most people who fail to understand the final section [of Romans 7] do so simply because they have never understood the first section." Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, p. 1. However, many conservative evangelical commentators have accepted this premise and yet arrived at differing conclusions.

<sup>3</sup> The frequency of "law" or νόμος, nomos, in Romans is as follows: ch. 2 - 19, ch. 5 - 3, ch. 6 - 2, ch. 7 - 23, ch. 8 - 5 up to v. 7. The references in 1:1- 3:20, which mostly involve pre-evangelism, are 23.

<sup>4</sup> These three distinctions are: one, the law is a restraint upon sin as a revelation of God's righteousness to the world at large; two, the law convicts of sin showing man's impotence, and thus as a tutor it directs the sinner to Christ (Gal. 3:24); three, the law is a rule of life for the Christian, a guide in sanctification. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 614-5; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 353-4. Concerning this "third use of the law" as commonly defined, Calvin was supportive while Luther was not. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 416-8.

antitheses continues in this chapter. In ch. 5 it was distinction between Adam and Christ, law/sin/death and righteousness/grace/life. In ch. 6 it was between crucifixion/ death/burial/ and resurrection/ life/righteousness, as well as what “you were” and “but now.” So in ch. 7 there is contrast between union with Moses and union with Christ, servitude to the flesh and servitude to the Spirit, the law of the body and the law of the mind, the inner man and the outer man.

#### A. THE ROLE OF CHRIST IN SUPPLANTING THE LAW, VS. 1-6.

The supposed necessity of the sanctifying influence of the law underlies the perverse propositions of 6:1, 15 which denigrate the sanctifying power of grace. So Paul makes further explanation in support of 6:14b. Like 6:16-19, 22, the argument here once again ends with the conclusion that salvation by grace inevitably results in “fruit for God” and “service in newness of the Spirit.”

However what does Paul mean when he speaks here of “law”? If context is any indication, then undoubtedly he has the Mosaic code in mind, especially the decalogue, cf. 6:13-14, 20; 7:7-8, 12, 22, 25. Of course some, probably fearing the antinomian implications of vs. 4, 6 in this regard, that of the Christian having “died to the law” and being “released from the law,” attempt to qualify the obvious intent here, even as is similarly done with 6:14b.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, Paul has in mind the Mosaic administration, signified by circumcision (Acts 15:5), and briefly codified in the Ten Commandments, that ministry of death and condemnation and fading glory, that is surpassed by the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness and remaining glory and liberty (Cor. 3:7-11).<sup>6</sup>

##### 1. The reign of the law declared, v. 1.

In continuation from 6:23, with reference to the legal inference of “sin paying wages” to law breakers, but more particularly 6:14b, Paul focuses upon “brethren . . . those who know the law.” That the church at Rome included a proportion of Jews is strongly suggested by the pervasive influence of at least 150 explicit Old Testament references in this epistle, and especially the necessity of chs. 9-11. However, most likely

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge, very much a Westminster Calvinist, is a case in point here. Concerning Romans 6:14b he writes: “By *law* here, is not to be understood the Mosaic law. The sense is not, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you because the Mosaic law is abrogated.’ The word is to be taken in its widest sense. It is the rule of duty, that which binds the conscience as an expression of the will of God.” *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 205. Concerning Romans 7:4 he similarly writes: “[T]he law of which the apostle is here speaking, is not the Mosaic law considered as the Old Testament economy. . . . Paul here means by *the law*, the will of God, as a rule of duty, no matter how revealed. From this law, as prescribing the terms of our acceptance with God, Christ has delivered us. It is the legal system, which says, ‘Do this and live,’ that Christ has abolished, and introduced another, which says, ‘He that believeth shall be saved.’ Ibid., p. 217. Yet the context here is *sanctification* whereby the law is excluded. *John Murray* agrees with Hodge, *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 243, though James Fraser is closer to the truth when he declares *law* here to be that moral Sinaitic promulgation, excluding the ceremonial law, that includes light given to the consciences of the Gentiles. *A Treatise On Sanctification*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>6</sup> In support refer to Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 410-23, and the essential agreement of Barrett, Bunyan, Cranfield, Luther, Moule.

Paul is simply addressing Gentiles and Jews who have been substantially taught the gospel in the Old Testament, and the law of Moses in particular.

That “the [Mosaic] law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives” most likely draws upon known rabbinic expressions of this idea,<sup>7</sup> though it would also have been known that Roman law was of the same opinion. However more important is the inference that upon death the law of Moses has no validity. So the stage is set for making application of this point to 6:14b.

2. The reign of the law illustrated, vs. 2-3.

That the following illustration does not exactly parallel the applicatory thrust of v. 4 is something that has intrigued many commentators. The death of the husband in vs. 2-3 should be paralleled by the death of the law in v. 4. However, it seems ridiculous to suppose that the sharp intellect of Paul was unaware of this “inconsistency.” Hence, Paul is governed by the principle of 7:1b where the person implicitly dies, and thus is no longer subject to the law. In vs. 2-3, the illustration is not intended to provide parallels at every point; rather its singular purpose is to reinforce the principle that death negates obligation.

a. The law upholds monogamy, v. 2.

A woman is legally bound to her living husband. She is a ὑπανδρος, hupandros, woman, literally an “under man” woman. This union is singular and binding. However, should her husband die, the woman is legally free from the demands of that former matrimonial union. The important point here is that the dead man has absolutely no claims upon the woman; she is no longer “under this man” and in union with him. The woman is “*released from the law*” that previously bound her.

b. The law condemns adultery, v. 3.

A married woman who is in union with another man is an adulteress. Her attempt to be in union with two men is illegal. On the other hand, if her husband dies, the original marital union is legally void, and her subsequent union with another man is not adulterous, but legally legitimate. The important point here is that in this new union, the former marriage has no legal claims whatsoever upon the subsequent marriage. The woman is “*free from the law*” that previously bound her.

3. The reign of the law superceded by the reign of Christ, v. 4.

This pivotal verse, which establishes so clearly Paul’s teaching concerning Christian sanctification resulting from justification, is expanded in translation as follows: “So that as a consequence, my beloved brothers in Christ, you similarly were made to die to the law, that is be disengaged from any justifying and sanctifying union with the law of Moses, by means of the atoning body of Christ. At the same time this new covenant in

<sup>7</sup> “[I]f a person is dead, he is free from the Torah and the fulfilling of the commandments.” Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 412.

his blood was intended to unite you to this Christ himself who is far greater than Moses, that is this Christ who, in being raised from the dead, gives life to those joined to him. The end purpose of this act of death/resurrection for the believer is that, in monogamous union with Christ, you might produce the fruit of sanctification for the glory of God.” Lloyd-Jones is correct when he writes: “Here, then, we have, as it were, the gospel in a nutshell. It is one of the great basic definitions of what it means to be a Christian; and at the same time, and of necessity, it shows us the profound character of the Christian life.”<sup>8</sup>

a. The believer has died to the law.

To begin with there is obvious repetition here, especially concerning the death/sin and life/righteousness aspects of 6:5-14, 17-18, 22. However, the closer focus is now, on the one hand, upon the sin stimulating *passé* law and its impotence with regard to sanctification, and on the other hand upon a new sanctifying law, namely fruitful union with Christ, or “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (8:2-4).

At this point two divergent interpretations face us. Calvin, representative of much Reformed opinion, comments:

[T]his deliverance is not from that righteousness [which] is taught in the law, but from the severe exaction of the law, and that curse [which] proceedeth thence. Then the rule of life which the law prescribeth is not abrogated, but that quality which is opposed to the liberty purchased by Christ, namely, whilst it requireth absolute perfection, because we perform it not, it holdeth us bound under the guilt of eternal death.<sup>9</sup>

This qualified viewpoint retains the Ten Commandments, as Calvin plainly states it, as a “rule of life.”<sup>10</sup> The unqualified viewpoint is represented by Luther who states:

We will not have Moses as ruler or lawgiver any longer. Indeed God himself will not have it either. Moses was an intermediary solely for the Jewish people. It was to them that he gave the law. . . . Moses has nothing to do with us. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses. . . . So, then, we will neither observe nor accept Moses. Moses is dead. His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service. . . . We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver—unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary upon The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly Dabney, Hodge, many of the Puritans, along with the Westminster Confession of Faith, with some variation of thought, all desire to retain the Decalogue as a Christian “rule of life.”

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther, *Works*, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” 35, pp. 164-5. In this same sermon Luther does describe certain benefits of Moses’ writings such as selective practical admonition, promises of Christ, and examples of faith and love. But this revelation is not a creation ordinance for all men. The Mosaic administration was temporal and Jewish. Notice how John Bunyan has a very similar estimate when he, in alluding to Romans 7:4, writes: “[W]hen this [Sinai/Hagar] law with its thundering threatenings doth attempt to lay hold on they conscience, shut it out with a promise of grace; cry, the inn is took up already, the Lord Jesus is here entertained, and here is no room for the law. Indeed if it will be content with being my informer, and so lovingly leave off to judge me; I will be content; . . . but otherwise, I being now made

Concerning the Apostle Paul, what stands out so clearly in his epistles and ministry described in Acts is the fact that, before a critical Jewish world, he makes no qualification such as Calvin represents, and especially here in Romans 6:14; 7:4. He means exactly what he writes, namely that the administration of the righteousness of God as revealed via Moses has been superseded by the more perfect revelation of God's righteousness in the person of the Son of God (II Cor. 3:4-18).<sup>12</sup> In Moses we have a summary of divine righteousness without any enabling dynamic. However in Christ we have a perfect revelation of the righteousness of God that includes enabling dynamic. To have died to Moses in this complete sense does not open the floodgates to antinomian licentiousness as 6:1, 15 suggest. Rather, such disjunction concerning the Law is replaced with a far more glorious union, even marriage to the righteous Lord Jesus Christ, and that without any bigamous recourse.

b. The believer has a new covenant.

The agent of change that transfers the believing sinner from the old to the new administration of God's righteousness is "the body of Christ," that is his atoning work that is based upon the death and resurrection of that "body" (Col. 1:22; I Pet. 2:24). The believer, through faith, has united with Christ's death and resurrection so that he participates in the gracious terms of this new "covenant of grace." Thus the "old/first/Sinai covenant" is supplanted by the "second/better/new covenant" (Heb. 8:6-9). Further, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (Heb. 8:13). Thus it is "God who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (II Cor. 3:6). Notice that in Hebrews 10:5-10 it is "the body of Jesus Christ" which "takes away the first [covenant] in order to establish the second [covenant]."

c. The believer has married Christ.

There is close association between the illustration of vs. 2-3 and the new covenant union that is here described. Only because the old union is dead is it possible for this new union to be valid. An ambiguous relationship, as though Moses was a concubine in the house of Christ, is unthinkable here since the believer is monogamously "joined to another." Clearly, in this relationship, the spiritual health of the new covenant disciple is exclusively dependent on a pure marital union. Necessary spiritual nutrition is inherent in being united to he who rose

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upright without it, and that too with that righteousness, which this law speaks well of and approveth; I may not, will not, cannot, dare not make it my savior and judge, nor suffer it to set up its government in my conscience; for by so doing, I fall from grace, and Christ Jesus doth profit me nothing (Gal. 5:1-5). . . . [S]o long as thou art alive to sin, and to thy righteousness which is of the law, so long thou hast them for thy husband and they must reign over thee: But when once they are become dead unto thee . . . when thou closest with the Lord Jesus Christ; then I say, thy former husbands have no more to meddle with thee, thou art freed from their law." *Works*, II, p. 388. Also refer to Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 414-8.

<sup>12</sup> If it be maintained that the Christian will now conform to the Decalogue through new affections of the heart that conversion has produced, such an allegiance to Moses would in no way invalidate his death sanctions against transgressors of certain laws and required conformity to the whole sabbath system.

from the dead; such union with him guarantees life from him (v. 6; 6:4; Phil. 3:9-10). So in Galatians 2:19-20: “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in [union with] me; and the life which I now live in the flesh [the present life of sanctification] I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

d. The believer has a fruitful union.

Here is the end purpose of Paul’s teaching, namely that the grace of justification inevitably, inexorably leads to the grace of sanctification, or the “bearing fruit for God.” The normal expectation of physical marriage is “the fruit of the womb” (Ps. 127:3). So spiritual union with Christ is to produce “benefit [fruit]” resulting in “sanctification” (6:21-22), or according to Calvin, “holiness and righteousness,”<sup>13</sup> and specifically the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This Spiritual fruit comes forth as a result of union with Christ (John 15:4-8), not Moses, even though vs. 7-12 will uphold the distinctive purpose and essential righteousness of the Law. Lloyd-Jones comments:

Here is the real purpose of the marriage; we need One whose seed is so powerful, who can so impregnate us with His own holy nature that He will produce holiness even in us. That is why we are married to Him, in order that ‘we should bring forth fruit unto God’. His strength is so great, His might is so potent, that even out of us He can bear this progeny of holiness.<sup>14</sup>

In Hebrews 13:20-21 it is “the blood of the eternal covenant” that will “equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

4. The reign of the law superceded by the Spirit, vs. 5-6.

The former union to the law, having been represented by the first husband, is now described in greater detail. Reminiscent of 6:21-22, we are further led to another “you/we were” and “but now” contrast that significantly introduces the first mention of the ministry of the Holy Spirit since 1:4; 2:29. At the same time, Murray points out that, “with the possible exception of 6:19 in which there may be some reflection upon ‘flesh’ as used here, this is the first occasion in this epistle in which the word ‘flesh’ is used in its fully depreciatory [derogative] ethical sense, a sense which appears later on in this epistle [v. 18, 25; 8:3, 8] and frequently in other epistles of Paul [Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 2:3].”<sup>15</sup>

a. The law aroused the flesh to sin and death, v. 5.

Prior to conversion, “we” agreeably lived as sinful “old men” in the body of flesh polluted by sin with the result that the law, by challenge and innocent suggestion, easily inflamed those carnal affections that inevitably reaped the fruit of death.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 172.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>15</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 244.

More specifically, the “we” is the degenerate soul that is encased in a degenerate body comprised of distinctively sinful members. It is the soul that has sinful passions, τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ta pathēmata tōn hamartiōn, that is sinful inclinations, with which the body heartily concurs, cooperates, and contrives. The law, in its denunciation of unrighteousness, yet is a stimulant to the unrighteous soul. The end result is the wages that sin pays, namely the death of body and soul.

In the light of the illustration and its application in vs. 2-4, here paradoxical truth is revealed concerning the law. Whereas it is thought by the natural man, and even the untaught Christian, that the law promotes righteousness, in fact its ministry is the very opposite. Consider the First Commandment, “You shall have no other God’s before Me” (Ex. 20:3). Such a right mandate yet foments greater defiance in naturally rebellious man. This truth is beautifully taught in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* at the house of Interpreter and the scene of the thoroughly dusty room. A man, intending to sweep the room clean with a broom, that is the polluted human heart, in fact arouses the dust all the more. It is the lady who sprinkles the water of gospel grace that brings cleansing. So Bunyan explains:

Now, whereas thou sawest, that so soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about that the room by him could not be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith; this is to show thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it, for it doth not give power to subdue.<sup>16</sup>

b. The Spirit arouses the new man to righteousness, v. 6.

Another “But now,” νυνὶ δέ nuni de, 3:21; 6:22, further highlights the fact that a biblical Christian is a person who is radically different from a natural citizen of this world. The control and dominion of the law over the unbeliever is likened to that of “bondage,” or “captivity,” κατέχω, katechō, meaning “to hold down, to suppress, to confine.” So the language here reverts back to that of slavery and freedom found in 6:16-19. At conversion the believer has been “released,” καταργέω, katargeō, “to render inactive,” from the law which formerly held in bondage, and such emancipation unto grace is likened to that final separation brought by death. Hence the Christian has “died to the law” and works righteousness as a justifying and sanctifying principle, and that being so, the question arises as to how it could be possible for the child of God to “have no other God’s before Me” (Ex. 20:3), which mandate must be an eternal obligation. The answer follows, and this vital matter will be enlarged upon in 8:2-4. The believer now “serves in newness of [the] Spirit<sup>17</sup> and not in the oldness of [the] letter.” Through regeneration, in association with justification, has come a recovery of the *imago Dei* as well as an inclination within the soul toward the righteousness of God (Tit. 3:4-7). The contrast here is between the impotent “oldness of the letter” and the potent “newness of the Spirit” (2:29; II Cor. 3:6-8),

<sup>16</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, III, pp. 98-9.

<sup>17</sup> It is legitimate to translate here “in newness of spirit,” though such renewal of the human spirit amounts to the same truth, that is the necessity of divine regeneration by means of the Holy Spirit.

that is “between the Old Covenant and the New, the old age and the new.”<sup>18</sup> While the law arouses the flesh to sin, the Spirit arouses the soul to holy servitude; while Moses’ revelation of the law to Israel at Mt. Sinai resulted in the response of idolatry, the revelation of Christ at Mt. Calvary resulted in a great harvest at Pentecost through the Spirit; while the “ministry of death in letters engraved on stones came with fading glory,” the “ministry of the Spirit came with greater and remaining glory” (II Cor. 3:7-11); while the ministry of Moses brought the hardening of hearts, the Spirit of Christ has brought liberty and glory (II Cor. 3:12-18). Thus, “the law came in so that the transgression might increase; . . . even so grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life” (Rom. 5:20-21). In this vein of the triumphant effectiveness of grace, its Spirit animated constraint to righteousness as distinct from legal demand (John 13:34; II Cor. 5:14; Eph. 4:32-5:2; I John 2:7-8), Robert Robinson has written:

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I’m constrained to be!  
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Hence, at this point, one could easily anticipate the continuity of thought that Romans 8 presents. However, Paul must respond to two questions that are bound to arise in his audience. First, if the Christian is dead to the law through the law, are you suggesting that the law has inherent weakness? Second, supposing a Christian attempts to be sanctified through the law, what symptoms can be expected to arise?

## B. THE RIGHT ROLE OF THE LAW IN CONVERSION, VS. 7-12.

The repeated emphasis by Paul that the gospel of free and sovereign grace has supplanted the purported justifying and sanctifying role of the law (6:14; 7:4, 6) raises inevitable questions for those readers who have learned of this same gospel via the Old Testament. Further, Paul has just addressed “those who know the law.” Hence, his most recent declaration in v. 6 that the Christian has been “released from the law” needs elaboration, and this is now forthcoming with a defense of the law’s proper role and character.

What exactly is the meaning of “the law,” ὁ νόμος, *ho nomos*, here? Primarily, v. 7 indicates the Ten Commandments, or moral law as some distinguish, though the whole Mosaic code of the Pentateuch is almost certainly assumed including the moral, civil and ceremonial elements. However, when the correct use of “the law” is now explained in terms of its pre-evangelism/pre-conversion usefulness, in view of the broader meaning of the Old Testament that 3:19-20 requires, so here “the law” must implicitly incorporate the whole objective revelation of the Old Testament. Hence a vital question must now be addressed. How can “the law” be discarded, even spoken of so negatively, when at the same time it is acknowledged to be a revelation from God that has been so highly venerated since the days of Moses?

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<sup>18</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 421-3. Fraser designates the “letter” here as the moral law. Refer to his excellent description of the contrasting dominions of “Spirit” and “letter,” *A Treatise On Sanctification*, pp. 167-9.

A further controversial matter must also be considered at this point. It concerns the identification of the conspicuous “I” and “me” of vs. 7-11, and then vs. 13-25. Doubtless anticipation of the truth that follows is the cause of a variety of opinions at this point. Unquestionably Paul is speaking of himself in v. 1, particularly as one deeply acquainted with “the law” of the Hebrews. In v. 7 the obvious literal meaning of “I” would similarly refer to the Apostle while also identifying with other Christians, even as it is generally agreed that the testimony of v. 9 is similarly a personal recollection. So for the moment, and until we consider v. 14 onward, we shall assert that here Paul describes his own confrontation with “the law” of Israel, and that prior to his conversion as the several past tenses here indicate.

1. The character of the law slanderously accused, v. 7a.

Reminiscent of 3:5; 6:1, 15; 9:14, Paul rhetorically asks, “Is the law sin?” This is a stronger statement than, “Is the law responsible for sin?” Rather, the charge is more extreme, “Is the law essentially sin?” So Paul responds to such an absurd proposition with an emphatic negation that he believes should be the obvious conclusion of anyone. However, the opponent here, whether theoretical or real, is probably intending to argue that because the law is holy, then the real problem must be with Paul’s doctrine.

2. The character of the law variously upheld, vs. 7b-12.

Having already taught that the law arouses sin (5:20; 7:5), this point is now expounded upon in greater detail to avoid misunderstanding. Much Bible doctrine involves dual concepts that must be carefully distinguished, such as faith and works, justification and sanctification, deity and humanity, flesh and Spirit, etc. So here the right relationship between law and sin must be carefully discerned.

- a. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin, v. 7b-11.

Literally we read, “But I did not know [aorist] sin except through law,” and in the light of v. 9, Paul probably has in mind a past personal encounter. However, does this statement suggest the principle that apart from the “law,” there is no knowledge of sin? Most commentators agree that for several reasons the answer must be “no.” First, 2:14-15 describes the “law” engraved on the heart. Second, 5:12-14 describes “law” of some kind existing from Adam to Moses; then “the law [of Moses] came in” (5:20). Thus man has always had an innate sense of God’s righteousness. But here Paul has in mind the true character and purpose of the law, especially as he has come to be confronted by its diagnostic capacity to reveal the profundity and gravity of sin. A man may be aware of a personal illness, yet a prescribed x-ray analysis reveals the seriousness of the problem, even though that diagnostic instrument has no remedial ability. Further, the x-ray machine should not be maligned on account of the narrow confines of its usefulness.

- (1) The law of Moses informs of sin, v. 7b.

The instance here of quoting the tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21) is one of only three specific quotations of the decalogue by Paul (cf.

13:9; Eph. 6:2-3). To “covet” here means to lust after, to have illicit desires, and the selection of this commandment may well reflect Paul’s personal experience in this area, or his sensing that the saints at Rome would particularly appreciate this point, or, as Moo demonstrates, “it stands as a representative summation of the whole law.”<sup>19</sup> Morris describes this commandment as, “the only one that explicitly goes beyond the outward action to the inner root of the action.”<sup>20</sup>

- (2) The law of Moses is recruited by sin to stimulate, v. 8.

Sin is now personified; it is revealed to be the real and deceptive culprit for it exploited the law’s legitimate ability so as to seize the “opportunity,” ἄφορμή, aphormē, as if using military initiative. Sin, in detecting a ripe time to attack, grasped that “occasion” when the law was in operation (cf. I Tim. 5:14). Through the agency of the law, sin deceitfully “produced/performed in me [Paul]” a whole catalog of lustings. Suddenly the full ugly measure of his covetous heart was comprehended. Thus a legitimate law such as is found in a produce store, “Do not squeeze the fruit,” yet inflames the sinful heart so that it rises up in rebellion against the commandment.

The corollary then is that, “apart from the law, sin is dead,” or relatively dormant, and the meaning here initiates Paul’s personal recollection in v. 9. Thus sin being implicitly “dead” here is somewhat defined by the Apostle’s own experience, that is of being “once alive apart from the law [and sin’s arousal]” (v. 9). In earlier days, while knowing about the law and sin cognitively, yet he was not troubled by it. So sin being dead refers to a lack of holy sensitivity to the demands of God’s righteousness because of the absence of the law’s revealing work.<sup>21</sup>

- (3) The law of Moses impacts the early life of Paul, v. 9.

By way of expanded paraphrase: “Yes I Paul [emphatic] was once living apart from sensitivity to the law. But having become awakened to the law’s infinite and righteous demands upon my life, sin was so aroused [revived] that it slew me and as a result I died in despair of self-reformation.” There is general agreement that here Paul is personally testifying to his own awakening to profound sinfulness by means of the law, though wide disagreement as to the specific occasion. Did this enlightenment come - (a) at his ‘bar mitzvah’ on his thirteenth birthday, (b) just prior to his conversion at Damascus, (c) just following his conversion having been instructed by Ananias and Christ, or (d) later in his Christian life? The context of vs. 4-6, or conversion being preceded by “arousal to the law” and “death to the law” (cf. Gal. 2:19) would strongly suggest (b), that is Paul’s arousal just prior to

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 279.

<sup>21</sup> “That sin was ‘dead’ does not mean that it did not exist but that it was not as ‘active’ or ‘powerful’ before the law or after.” Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 437.

his conversion (Acts 7:58; 26:14), but following that proud period when he regarded himself as “blameless” before the law (Phil. 3:6).<sup>22</sup>

So the law has come to “shut the mouth” of the self-righteous (3:19), to cause man “to die” at the revelation of his deep-rooted corruption. When a doctor holds up an x-ray film to the light and soberly declares: “Do you see that large mass that attaches to the brain,” then the patient as it were dies on the spot; he is brought face-to-face with stark reality; denial becomes absurd! So the law has this distinctive function of making man aware of the cancer of his soul, and in this regard the law fulfills its divinely designated purpose (3:20).

- (4) The law of Moses results in death rather than life, v. 10.

Hence, this law that was supposed to have brought life, that was promoted to Paul in a Pharisaic environment as an instrument stimulating righteousness and law-keeping, in fact became an instrument of death. In v. 11 this same deceitful twist of purpose seems to be suggested. Of course the law, not given until Sinai to a redeemed people, did promise life for those who responded with perfect obedience (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12),<sup>23</sup> though this offer was to a people already corrupted by Adam. Here is revealed that moment of shocking truth that shakes a man when he, having confidently believed that his human performance would obtain acceptance, discovers by revelation that, in the sight of God, “all of his righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Is. 64:6). For Paul, the law that had been identified as a friend became a savage and merciless assailant; yet the cause of this onslaught was his own sin!

- (5) The law of Moses is recruited by sin to slay, v. 11.

There is obvious similarity with the thrust of v. 8, except that here a more comprehensive explanation is given concerning the ultimate and devious design of sin. Whereas in v. 8 sin recruits the law so as to arouse sin, here the more deceitful intention of sin is exposed, including its ultimate design for death to the soul through the increasing burden of crushing guilt.

Of course underlying the idea of “deceit,” ἐξαπατάω, *exapataō*, an intensive compound meaning, “to beguile thoroughly/wholly,” is that of personal intent which goes deeper than the personification of sin. In other words, it is Satan who conspires to mislead, after the manner of the serpent in Gen. 3:1, 13 (cf. II Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:14, where the same Greek word is used). The commandment, “You shall not eat from it or touch it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil],” was used by the serpent when he deceitfully suggested to Eve that in eating the forbidden fruit she could be “like God” (Gen. 3:5). The law, although impotent according to its essential character, is yet an innocent tool that is satanically used to delude man into thinking that by this means he may attain life and righteousness. However, this supposed

<sup>22</sup> Supported by Augustine, Calvin, Haldane, Hodge, Luther, Murray, Owen.

<sup>23</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 439.

deliverer snaps back to savagely devour its devotee so as to make it a slaughtered victim, evicted from the garden of Eden and fellowship with God.

So, as Lloyd-Jones writes: “Sin does this work, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:17, by ‘darkening our understanding’. It prevents our thinking clearly, it misrepresents everything; it gives us rose-tinted spectacles; it perverts everything, changes everything, transforms everything.”<sup>24</sup>

b. Through the law come God’s good, righteous demands, v. 12.

Thus the law of Moses, having been on trial so to speak because of the charge of v. 7, is thoroughly vindicated according to its essence and purpose. It is a transcript of the righteous character of God insofar as He requires us to be like him in *certain* ways that relate to our distinctive creatureliness. He does not command us to be independent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent; He does command us to be holy, faithful, truthful, gracious, etc. Hence the law remains “holy” in that it has been “set apart” by God for a specific purpose, while at the same time it reflects the holy character of God (Is. 6:3). Clearly the fulness of the Mosaic law has elements that are linked in time with the distinctive applicability of this code to Israel; yet this Jewish outer framework contains the unchanging core of the nature of God. The law remains “righteous [just]” in that its proper administration or working, according to its purpose, is equitable and fair, never partisan. The law remains “good” in that it is morally pure and profitable for man, even as the tenth “commandment” represents.

Such a declaration does not in any way detract from the fact that the Christian is “not under law but under grace” (6:14), has “died to the law” (7:4), or has been “released from the law” (7:6); however it does eliminate any charge that man’s problem is due to the fault of the law, or indeed God, even if that law was misused by sin. It should be borne in mind that in 8:2-3, the believer will be informed that he has been “set free from the law of sin and death,” that “the law was weak through the flesh,” and that a new “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” has supplanted the Mosaic administration. The old code remains “holy, just, and good” in its heart and setting, yet “Christians [ought] never to return to the law — whether Mosaic or any other list of ‘rules’ — as a source of spiritual vigor and growth.”<sup>25</sup>

C. THE FRUITLESS ROLE OF THE LAW IN SANCTIFICATION, VS. 13-25.

Paul now reverts back to his concern that the law is *unproductive* regarding sanctification in the life of the Christian even if the regenerate soul agrees with its essential goodness. While he again speaks of it as “good” and “spiritual” in vs. 13-14, 16, thus reiterating the thought of v. 12, yet he returns to the dark side of the law insofar as, unlike Jesus Christ, it does not produce righteousness, but rather is “the law of sin and death” and “weak through the flesh,” vs. 23, 25; 8:2-3. Thus the key terms that must be distinctly understood here are,

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, p. 160.

<sup>25</sup> Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 441.

first “law,” then “sin/evil,” “I/ego/inner man,” and “flesh/body/members,” especially with regard to their usage up to this point. Note that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not mentioned here until v. 25, and the Holy Spirit until 8:2.

That the Apostle describes in this section the realm of his present experience is maintained for the following reasons. 1. The conflict of vs. 14-25 is paralleled by Galatians 5:17 which appears to describe Christian conflict. 2. The present tense emphasis of vs. 14-25 indicates the likelihood that Paul refers to his Christian experience.<sup>26</sup> 3. Paul’s religious experience before his conversion seems proud and confident (Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-6), while here his soul seems in a turmoil. 4. The preceding context of 5:1-7:7 addresses the sanctification of the believer. 5. The triumphant cry of v. 25, surely that of a believer, yet describes the mind serving the law of God while the flesh serves the law of sin. 6. The inner man is repeatedly described as being inclined, according to heart and will, toward the law of God and the good. The chief objection to this perspective,<sup>27</sup> which sees Paul as describing an unregenerate seeker, concerns the seeming less than victorious reign of sin as described in vs. 14, 19, 21, 24-25, and this matter will be dealt with in subsequent comments.<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones rightly declares concerning v. 14: “I am carnal, sold under sin’. We have here what is, in many ways, the key statement of the whole of this section; . . . all the commentators are agreed that this is the most significant statement in the whole section.”

#### 1. The right role of the law restated, v. 13.

While this verse, with its three “aorist tense” verbs that are the last of this chapter, expands upon the cumulative truth of vs. 7-12, yet the importance of its connection with v. 14 requires that it be more closely associated with the repetitive “present tense” truth that is now about to be set forth. Again Paul is emphatic, as in vs. 7-8, that the law is essentially “good” even though he will continue to maintain that it is functionally weak. Now he denies that the law is responsible for punitive death, let alone that it is intrinsically sin and thus evil. The challenge here may be the thought, “Well, if the law is not evil in itself, yet it certainly was responsible for my condemnation to death!”

But Paul again responds, “No.” Rather, the culprit remains to be “sin,” that manipulative foe previously described as using the law as an innocent tool so as to “slay” sin’s victim, vs. 8-9. So here sin delights to use the law so that the sinner might recognize his “exceeding sinfulness” and consequently be subject to an unwitting agent of death through condemnation. Thus the law, while not in any way being culpable with regard to sinful man’s mortal condition and destiny, is sin’s x-ray machine, magnifying glass, and scalpel, whereby the human cancerous soul is exposed in all of its ugliness so that the patient is brought to utter despair and the only hope of death.

Hence the concluding emphasis of this verse reiterates Paul’s perception of the law as being analytical, diagnostic, and informative, not remedial and sanctifying. Further,

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<sup>26</sup> Lloyd-Jones rejects this proof on the grounds that Paul is here using “the dramatic present” that can in fact refer to a past event. While this may be a possibility, yet the surrounding and predominant use of the common temporal present, especially in contrast with the prior aoristic emphases of vs. 8-11, makes his suggestion improbable. *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, pp. 183-4.

<sup>27</sup> Supported by Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Bunyan, Owen, Haldane, Hodge, Shed, Morris, Murray, Cranfield, Packer, and rejected by Wesley, Sunday and Bedlam, Lloyd-Jones, Moo.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent survey of the opposing views here refer to Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 284-8.

there is obviously the suggestion here that the law, while being good in itself, yet can be deceitfully used by sin; in this way a Christian is deluded into believing that the law will encourage him to grow in his spiritual life, while in fact, like a seeming tamed animal, it suddenly rises up to devour the one who holds it close to his breast. It is this thought in particular that readies us to understand the truth of v. 14.

2. The work of the law in relationship to the flesh, vs. 14-20.

The ensuing conflict is perhaps best understood if we ask ourselves whether, apart from this passage, any other parts of Paul's writings include a somewhat parallel account. Surely our response here must be positive. Consider Romans 13:14 where the exhortation, obviously addressed to the believer, implicitly understands the propensity of the flesh to militantly lust against the Christ clothed new man. As a result, in I Corinthians 9:26-27 Paul declares, "I discipline [rigorously control] my body and make it my slave [rather than my master]." Then in Galatians 5:16-17, the tension here in the believer, which Luther associates with Rom. 7:14, 23-4,<sup>29</sup> is similarly described as being between the Spirit controlled new man and his rebellious vehicle of flesh, as Colossians 3:5 likewise suggests. Also consider the "groaning" of Romans 8:23; II Corinthians 5:2-4. Thus we remind ourselves that, according to our study of Romans 6:6, the implicit revelation of the new man is set against the tyranny and vanquished power of "our body of sin." Here the same biblical dualism is described in more profound detail.

a. The Christian self muses about the *law* and his *flesh*, vs. 14-16.

The connection here with v. 13 concerns the innocent holiness and sin exposing character of the law, and now a far more intimate consideration of how sin, inherent in the flesh, uses this law to arouse sin in the believer to an excruciatingly disturbing level, sans any gracious remedy.

(1) The law and corrupt flesh by definition, v. 14.

"For we know," in itself suggests that Paul expects his Christian audience to appreciate, almost as an axiom now readily accepted, that what he is about to say concerns their present common experience.

(a) The spirituality of the law.

Obviously the "spirituality" of the law wraps together the aspects of "holiness," "righteousness," and "goodness" described in v. 12, yet there are shades of II Tim. 3:16 here as well. The law has come from God, and thus it is Spirit generated; it has an impeccable character.

(b) The believer's carnality under the law.

But when the law is used by sin in the flesh, then this self-condemnation is to be expected. What is meant by Paul being *σάρκινος*, *sarkinos*, here? This is a vital matter. The word means "composed of flesh;"

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle To The Galatians*, p. 502.

Goodspeed's translation of "physical" is probably best here while the NIV having "unspiritual" is probably the worst.<sup>30</sup> Some make much of the parallel of spirit/flesh here with spirit/flesh in I Corinthians 3:1-3, where Paul addresses weak believers, so that "flesh" here means "carnal person." It is this understanding that introduces problems here in understanding v. 14. To be "carnal" in Corinth was not the same as here being "composed of flesh."<sup>31</sup> Rather, the related terminology and overall picture of Romans 6:6, 12-13, 19; 7:5, 23-24, concerning our "body of sin," "mortal body," bodily "members," "body of this death," etc. seems far more determinative in that Paul here is primarily describing the physical body, as Luther affirms commenting on 6:6.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd-Jones objects to this interpretation since Paul is saying that "I" am carnal here as opposed to "my body is carnal." But vs. 16, 18 indicate that the Apostle can describe "I/himself" as "carnal" when in fact he means "my flesh." In other words, the bodily component of a Christian, as sinfully impregnated, constitutes the believer as being carnal.<sup>33</sup> Thus the exposure of the law to this carnal realm will stimulate a sense of sin, personal corruption, and groaning.

(c) The believer's captivity under the law.

Paul's confession that he is "sold in bondage to sin" in an expanded form means "having been sold over to ownership and dominion by sin." So it is the absolute sense here that causes Moo to write that this statement, "clinches the argument for a description of a non-Christian here."<sup>34</sup> Lloyd-Jones argues at length for a similar opinion.<sup>35</sup> However, it is significant that Moo defines "body" in 6:6, 12-13 as "the whole person." Certainly if "the whole person" here is "sold in bondage to sin," then a seeming insuperable problem arises with regard to that same person being a Christian.<sup>36</sup> However, if it is the believer as

<sup>30</sup> Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 290.

<sup>31</sup> James Fraser, *A Treatise On Sanctification*, pp. 270-1; also Murray, *Romans*, I, pp. 259-50.

<sup>32</sup> "Therefore the term 'body of sin' ought not be understood as something mystical, as many people do who imagine that 'body of sin' refers to a whole mountain of evil works, but rather it refers to this very body which we are carrying around. It is called the 'body of sin' because it inclines against the spirit and toward sin. And the seed of the devil dwells in it." Martin Luther, *Works*, "Lectures On Romans," V. 25, p. 314; also Theodore Zahn.

<sup>33</sup> Let it be emphasized here that "carnal" or being "composed of flesh" must be understood according to 6:6, "our body of sin." That is, the body and its members are polluted with sin (7:18, 23, 25). Notice here in v. 14 that it is the flesh that is in bondage to sin. Thus pure material flesh is not intrinsically evil, yet it is, according to the fall, spiritually diseased and subject to dissolution. Concerning Ephesians 6:12 where Paul declares that, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood," the context suggests conflict with external foes that are spiritual in nature, and not "mere frail men (Gal. 1:16), with all their physical and mental infirmities (respectively I Cor. 15:50 and Matt. 16:17). William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 454.

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Romans, An Exposition Of Chapter 7*, pp. 176-257. He denies Paul is describing either the regenerate or unregenerate state, but rather a person in transition and partially awakened, being troubled by the law and near conversion.

<sup>36</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 375, 382-4.

“composed of flesh” who is “sold in bondage to sin,” then such captivity is not necessarily to be attributed to the Christian “new man.” Further, the following tension between the “I” that wants to do the good as opposed to what “sin does” vs. 19-23, makes v. 14 consistently explicable. So Luther comments on Galatians 5:17 (cf. Ps. 38:1-10; Matt. 26:41; Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 9:26-27; Heb. 12:1):

Here [and Rom. 7:14, 23-4], not only the schoolmen, but also some of the old fathers, are much troubled, seeking how they may excuse Paul. For it seemeth unto them absurd and unseemly to say, that that elect vessel of Christ should have sin. But we credit Paul’s own words, wherein he plainly confesseth that he is sold under sin, and that he is led captive of sin, that he hath a law in his members rebelling against him, and that in the flesh he serveth the law of sin. Here again they answer, that the Apostle speaketh in the person of the ungodly. But the ungodly do not complain of the rebellion of their flesh, of any battle or conflict, or of the captivity and bondage of sin: for sin mightily reigneth in them. This is therefore the very complaint of Paul and of all the saints<sup>37</sup>

Again, it needs to be stated, as John Stott confirms,<sup>38</sup> that the law in particular causes the believer to make such a cry of anguish since it is such an able stimulant of sinful flesh, which is the point that v. 13 reminded us about.

(2) The law arouses the corrupt flesh, v. 15.

The axiom of v. 14 having been established, particularly a distinction between Paul as the representative “I” and his “sinful flesh,” there is now an invitation for the Christian to inwardly reflect upon how the law, given its earlier defined role in vs. 7-13, impacts upon his life as a new person in Christ who yet inhabits a corrupt mortal body.

The “I/flesh” conflict is mysterious, frustrating and paradoxical. Exposed to the law, as v. 16 suggests, there arise conflicting responses. As the law is comprehended, the “I” approves of its positive and negative moral imperatives and disapproves of its opposites. On the other hand, the sinful body naturally acts in opposition to these imperatives and pursues that which is unlawful. More specifically, if I pursue sanctification by looking to the law, while I may admire the holiness that is commanded, yet that very law stimulates the “sinful flesh” so that it rises up in active opposition to that which the “I” approves. Thus my actions surprise me since they are in opposition to the desires of my heart that is alive unto God. Therefore such perplexity calls for careful analysis and understanding on the part of the Christian. What needs to be grasped is that, as with vs. 8, 11-13, the real

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<sup>37</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 502.

<sup>38</sup> “The right way of applying Romans 7-8 is to recognize that some church-goers today might be termed ‘Old Testament Christians’. The contradiction implied in this expression indicates what an anomaly they are. They show signs of new birth in their love for the church and the Bible, yet their salvation is law, not gospel; flesh, not Spirit; the ‘oldness’ of slavery to rules and regulations, not the ‘newness’ of freedom through Jesus Christ. They are like Lazarus when he first emerged from the tomb, alive but still bound hand and foot. They need to add to their life liberty. John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, p. 210.

culprit here is “the law of sin which is in my members,” and not “the law [that] is good,” v. 16.

- (3) The law is approved by the dominant new self, v. 16.

The conditional or “if” sentence here assumes the overall premise to be true. Hence, “Since I find myself [that is my body of sinful flesh] doing that which I [the new self] do not approve of, then in fact I [my body of sinful flesh] is the culprit doing that which I [the new self] disapprove of!” Thus the focus moves from the law’s impeccable character, even if a carnal stimulant, to the resultant tension that now results between the flesh and the new self. It is as if the law, albeit good, has been used to stimulate an argument, and then draws back to let the disputants fight it out, as vs. 17-20 relate.

What is this acknowledgment by the new self that “the law is good”? It is the ready acknowledgment that the law, though functionally weak as 8:3 plainly states, is yet essentially holy; that is the law is morally pure and unsullied; it is just and beneficial in its prescriptions.; it is in no way a willing accomplice in carnal crime!

- b. The Christian self muses about *himself* and his *flesh*, vs. 17-20.

Here a great depth of somber, agonizing self-contemplation is reached; and while the law is not specifically mentioned, yet its distinctive ministry of condemnation underlies the whole of the introspective conflict thus described. For while 8:3-4 describes, “what the law could not do [in terms of producing the righteousness of the law], weak as it was through the flesh,” here we observe what the law can do as a stimulus to sinful flesh. There also needs to be a reminder of the conspicuous absence here of mention concerning the indwelling Holy Spirit, so that we are presently considering a more deficient form of Christian sanctification.<sup>39</sup> It is that condition whereby an authentic Christian is deceived by attempting to use the law as a means of attaining spiritual maturity (Gal. 3:1-3). Paul could presently understand, drawing from earlier experience, the soul-chilling effect of such a focus. This is not at all meant to subscribe here to a “carnal Christian” perspective. At any time a mature believer may descend to this appreciation of himself as a “wretched man,” and the law will ably help him in this plunge. But surely Paul does not teach that he must be perpetually *locked into this focus*? It is undeniable that Romans 8:1-17 describes a contrasting ascent of the smitten, redeemed soul to a more blessed plain where, “the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” v. 6.

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<sup>39</sup> John Stott writes: “Many commentators have paid insufficient attention to what Bishop Handley Moule called ‘this absolute and eloquent silence’ in Romans 7 about the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned only in verse 6. Since that verse characterizes the Christian era as the age of the Spirit, one would have expected this chapter to be full of the Spirit. Instead, Romans 7 is full of the law (mentioned, with its synonyms, thirty-one times). It is Romans 8 which is full of the Spirit (mentioned twenty-one times) and which calls the indwelling of the Spirit the authenticating mark of belonging to Christ (8:9). If then we are looking for a description of the normal Christian life we will find it in Romans 8; Romans 7, with its concentration on the law and its omission of the Spirit, cannot be held to describe Christian normality.” *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

- (1) “I” do not do what law-aroused “sinful flesh” does, v. 17.

The temporal emphasis here, “Now, no longer am I [the new self] the one working it [that which I hate],” implies a former unconverted state when the old self was working in agreeable conjunction with the overtures of sinful flesh; but now any evil intent and lawlessness is caused by sin that inhabits my fleshly body. Thus sin is again personified and described as the corrupting guest that defiles the residence, and offends and propositions its owner! But is this an escape from responsibility concerning personal sin? Cannot the believer, in antinomian fashion, be unconcerned about personal sin because, “I [the new self] am not doing it, but rather it is my detached body of sin”? Consider this reasoning through to v. 20.

- (2) “I” am willing to do good in opposition to law-aroused “rebellious flesh,” v. 18.

With greater clarity, description continues of the biblical dualism that distinguishes between soul and body in the Christian. Paul’s body of sinful flesh is wholly corrupt and rebellious, yet implicit is the truth that something “good” does inhabit this carcass, and that obviously is the “new self.” Thus the tension is described as between the inclination of the “new self” toward “the good” and the disinclination of the body to perform “the good.” What is “the good”? Two different Greek words are used here. Paul’s body is void of “[essential] good” ἄγαθος, agathos, and it is not disposed to doing “the [noble, praiseworthy] good,” τὸ καλόν, to kalon, both of which related qualities are derived from God (Ps. 118:29; Mark 10:17-18).

- (3) “I” am in active conflict with law-aroused “sinful flesh,” v. 19.

The polarization that the Christian endures is now clarified as a conflict between “good” ἄγαθος, agathos, and “evil,” κακός, kakos, but more particularly “good as opposed to evil desire” and “actual [not possible] evil practice.” In other words, agreeable contemplation of the law and its essential goodness yet results in the stimulation of sinful flesh. The frustration is like that of a person with an itchy rash; the temptation is to scratch the irritation, though the result is greater itching. What is really needed is a healing balm. But why does the flesh here seem to dominate in terms of evil being actually practiced, in spite of good desires? Because the law is incapable of producing righteousness, as 8:3 plainly indicates; the law in fact scratches the sinful flesh only to make it more irritated and active. Contemplation of the law for the purpose of practicing the good, though with the best of intentions, is utterly deceitful, and just as counterproductive as the thought of scratching an infectious itch; the thought may seem reasonable, but the result is greater irritation. The only healing balm is the soul sanctifying Spirit of grace which is productive of life and peace in the mind (6:14; 8:6; Heb. 13:9).

- (4) “I” am not deceived by the doing of law-aroused “sinful flesh,” v. 20.

Another “if” clause assumes the premise to be true. “Since I [my sinful body of flesh] is doing the evil that I [the new self] disapprove of, then I [the new self] am not the active perpetrator of this sin that inheres within and erupts by means of my body.” So through vs. 17-20, this dualism could be understood as justification of avoided responsibility.” Murray responds:

The following propositions are clearly implied. (1) The flesh is wholly sinful—no good thing dwells in it. (2) The flesh is still associated with his person—the flesh is *his* flesh and it is *in him*. (3) Sin is also associated with his person, for it is in his flesh that sin inheres. Hence verse 17 [and vs. 18-20] cannot be interpreted as a disavowal of responsibility for the sin that dwells in him or for the sin committed in frustration of his determinate will.<sup>40</sup>

Further, the purpose of Paul needs to be kept in mind here, namely the situation envisaged as to what happens when the Christian resorts to the law for sanctification; in such a scenario, the question of responsibility is not a matter that Paul is concerned about.

3. The work of the law in conflict with the “new self”, vs. 21-25.

In this conclusion of his thesis, Paul explicitly reverts to the distinctive roll of “the [Mosaic] law of God,” although νόμος, nomos, used seven times in these five verses, takes on additional meanings.

- a. The law of God and “the new self,” v. 21.

This is acknowledged to be one of the most difficult verses to interpret in Romans. The NASB commences, “I find then the principle that evil is present with me,” while the NKJV reads, “I find then a law, that evil is present with me.” Yet “the principle” or “a law” is ὁ νόμος, ho nomos, more probably referring to “the law [of Moses].”<sup>41</sup> Thus H. C. G. Moule gives a good literal translation as follows: “So then I find the Law, with me willing to do what is good, [I find, I say,] that with me what is evil is present.”<sup>42</sup> Here the Christian persists in seeking sanctification through the supposed encouragement of the law, and an element of deception is present in that the inner appreciation of the law’s essential goodness leads him to believe that he must surely be on the right track. The only problem is that strong sollicitation to evil is present, even increasingly so as the law is pursued. Hence the law appears to be admirable; its purity is glorious, most desirable, especially according to the diseased; yet their malignancy only finds encouragement, not healing.

<sup>40</sup> Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 263.

<sup>41</sup> The articular ὁ νόμος, ho nomos, is the predominant and frequent expression in ch. 7 here, and the context, especially as paralleled in v. 22, strongly suggests that the definite article should be emphasized.

<sup>42</sup> H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 133.

b. The law of God and the conquest of man v. 22-25.

The remainder of Paul's argument concerning misguided appreciation of the role of the law is portrayed as a battle, or a "Holy War" so to speak. The conflict described in the preceding vs. 17-20 is now illustrated, using military metaphors, in parallel with Galatians 5:17-18.

(1) The vocal cry of the *inner man* that brings rejoicing, v. 22.

"For I muse with inward delight in the law of God according to the inner man." Most likely, in the light of v. 22, a broad understanding of "law" is in mind here that certainly incorporates the Mosaic code. Of course this enjoyment must be within the parameters of the right use of the law as described by Paul (3:19-20; 4:15; 7:7; I Tim. 1:8-10), since he also warns concerning the misuse of the law (Acts 13:39; Rom. 8:3). As a Jew in particular, Paul reverently appreciates that the law has come, uncorrupted, from the mouth of God, and thus is "holy . . . righteous . . . good . . . spiritual," vs. 12, 14. Thus Paul can happily reflect on the character of God revealed in the law, as well as its ability to cause men to understand their bankruptcy as thorough sinners. The law is excellent as a "ministry of condemnation [having fading glory]" (II Cor. 3:9-11). While Paul could be said to appreciate that "the law leads to grace," yet he never speaks in terms of "the grace of law."<sup>43</sup>

(2) The vexed cry of the *smitten man* that brings captivity, v. 23.

This complex statement restates the dichotomy of vs. 14-21 except that the "inner man" of v. 22 is now described as "the law of my mind," that is the "renewed mind" 12:2. The Christian then is not a spiritual schizophrenic having two egos designated as an old man and a new man. Rather he is a new man, a singular regenerate ego, that, while highly esteeming the law of God, at the same time finds an opposing law arising that is intrinsic to "the members of his body;" it is "the law of sin in his bodily members" cf. 6:6, that is a principle natural to all of Adam's race. Indeed it would seem that, based on v. 8, the law of God that is so admirable yet at the same time is used by sin to arouse conflict, even "wage war against the law of his mind." Thus sin in the flesh assails the ramparts of Paul's spiritually renewed mind; in spite of his high regard for the good law of God, Paul has a raging battle that, should he continue to look to the law of God, will lead to his captivity. In other words, to look to the law in neglect of gospel grace will lead to sin overwhelming the regenerate soul. This man, while recognizing the good in

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<sup>43</sup> Ernest Kevan's *The Grace Of Law* is an excellent study of Puritan theology. In the Foreword he comments: "The title of this book may seem to require justification, but it is my hope that this has been sufficiently provided in the substance of the work," p. 14. The overall argument, derived from systematic Covenant Theology, is reasoned as follows: "This subservient aim of the Law [in driving sinners to Christ according to Galatians 3:24] means that the Law is nothing less than the Divinely-appointed instrument of grace," p. 125. However, especially in Paul's writings, there simply is no such plainly stated synthesis. For all of his love of the law, yet the Apostle frequently and passionately distinguishes the antithetical and subordinate role of the law with regard to grace.

the law, is yet impoverished and lacking in appropriate defense, that is gospel accouterment and union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. The cry of v. 24 is that of a man taken captive by sin through the law; such imprisonment is that of a Christian who is looking in the wrong direction for the keeping of his saved soul.

(3) The vanquished cry of the *wretched man* in captivity, v. 24.

Now Paul admits to incarceration that inevitably results from his infatuation with the law of God; he postulates his status as a Christian who, although saved by the gospel, yet has suffered from a flirtatious relationship with Moses in neglect of the gospel, which wrong bigamous relationship is excluded in 7:1-4. The cry, “O wretched man [assailed new man?] that I am” concerns this believer’s misery and agony that consumes his regenerate soul or ego, with regard to longed for “emancipation from the body of this death,” that is “the law of sin in my members” according to v. 23. This tormented saint yearns for deliverance, expressed in the future tense of  $\rho\acute{o}\upsilon\mu\alpha\iota$ , rhuomai; cf. 11:26 where Christ is “the Deliverer” of “all Israel.”

However, surely this pathetic cry, though emanating from a mature believer,<sup>44</sup> is not to be understood as that of a triumphant child of God; rather we have here the expressed pain of a soul lashed by the merciless aggravation of the law! Yet, even for the man who rejoices in the balm of gospel grace there remain the distressing overtures of the flesh so that “groaning” continues as a periodic response (8:23; II Cor. 5:4, 8). In our earthly pilgrimage the flesh remains a perennial problem for all believers; nevertheless, the greatest relief will come from the application of an ointment called “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” rather than flagellation by means of “the law of sin and of death” (8:2-3).

In John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* this principle is well illustrated. Faithful describes to Christian his encounter with aged Adam the First, representing the flesh and the old man (6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), who offers him his three daughters in marriage, the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life. At first, in a moment of carnality, Faithful is inclined to accept this proposal; then he roundly spurns it only to be pinched in his flesh by the old man so that he cries out in pain, “O wretched man that I am!” Then Adam the First sends an assailant after Christian, in fact Moses, who beats the pilgrim to the ground and continues to batter him. Though Christian cries out for mercy, Moses declares, “I know not how to show mercy.” Then another man comes who beats of Moses, and he is recognized on account of “the holes in his hands”!<sup>45</sup> The point here is that the remedy for carnality and the anguish of guilt in the Christian is not Moses but Christ.

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<sup>44</sup> He is mature in his self-analysis and appreciation of the law even though, for a time, he has become entangled with the law; legalism could easily ensnare Peter (Gal. 2:11-14) who had earlier confessed his commitment to the gospel of grace for Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:11).

<sup>45</sup> *John Bunyan, The Works of John Bunyan*, III, pp. 118-9.

(4) The victorious cry of the *liberated man* through Jesus Christ, v. 25.

The opening exultant response here may well be better joined to v. 24 so that the subsequent comment, appearing as enigmatic to some, might stand alone as a conclusion that is more related to the whole issue of dualism introduced at v. 13.

## (a) The triumph of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, v. 25a.

Since v. 4, the name of Christ has not been mentioned until here, and thus it is right to conclude that a whole new emphasis is about to dawn. Thus we might expand in paraphrase this tone of hope as follows: “Let free acknowledgment be given that God alone, through His Son Jesus Christ, delivers from that captivity which the law ruthlessly secures.”<sup>46</sup> But is Paul here describing a present gospel oriented deliverance, or that which is the believer’s future, victorious, consummate hope when “this mortal [body] must put on immortality” (I Cor. 15:53, 57; II Cor. 5:4), or both? The answer here must surely arise from four conclusions that have been deduced from the text thus far. First, consideration of the triumphant reign of grace revealed in 5:15-21, having been interrupted in chapters 6-7 by several challenges to this truth, is now about to be resumed in 8:1-25. Second, Paul has described his own Christian experience, and this verse adds considerable weight to this opinion. Third, he continues to deal with conflict that arises when the Christian attempts to be sanctified by means of the law, and this verse, along with the explicit legal references in 8:2-7, makes this point undeniable. Fourth, it follows then that the cry of v. 24 refers to desired rescue from the misery of the overwhelming struggle that has been considered from v. 13; in other words the yearned for deliverance concerns a legal conflict and not simply carnality in general; again, 8:2-7 seems to make this exceedingly clear.

Admittedly, many commentators have exclusively understood this expression of triumphant hope as a confident declaration of future emancipation from this corrupt body of flesh at the day of resurrection.<sup>47</sup> Yet the connected contrast with chapter 8, while undoubtedly incorporating this perspective, yet also appears to include a present realization of emancipation.<sup>48</sup> Concerning a future aspect, the later verses of chapter 8, specifically vs.11, 18-25, stimulate hope, anticipation of the day of resurrection, “the redemption of our body,” v. 23. However, the future tense of “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” in 7:24 surely finds a present realization in the fact that,

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<sup>46</sup> Murray is correct when he concludes that, textual variants notwithstanding, “[t]his is the answer to the question of vs. 24.” *Epistle to the Romans*, I, p. 269.

<sup>47</sup> Haldane, Moule, Murray, Pink.

<sup>48</sup> Morris rightly declares: “Clearly Paul’s words express gratitude for a present deliverance, but it is likely that they also have eschatological significance. The deliverance we have today is wonderful, but it is partial and incomplete. It is but a first instalment of greater things to come, and Paul looks forward to that great day with his burst of thanksgiving.” *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 297.

“the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death,” 8:2.<sup>49</sup> Further, 8:1-10 as a whole appears to have a present emphasis whereby “the requirement [righteousness] of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit [of Christ],” v. 4.

(b) The conflict of the legal mind with the law of sin, v. 25b.

Liberal commentators, being so perplexed by this seeming resignation to the ongoing dominance of the flesh that so starkly contrasts with the prior triumphant declaration juxtaposed in this verse, feel free to amend the text without the slightest manuscript justification.<sup>50</sup> Of course such arrogant “scholarship” is an affront to the doctrine of biblical inspiration. A more literal translation reads: “So then, on the one hand I myself, with my mind, am serving the law of God, but on the other hand with [my] flesh [I am serving] the law of sin.” Is therefore the “ego” divided here so that its affections oscillate between the good and evil, between the “law of God” and the “law of sin”? Does indeed the “new man” at times act in *agreement* with the flesh? The preceding context would suggest “no,” especially vs. 17, 20. Hence, the inferential “ego” is but a concession to the fact that the flesh is very much a part of the overall person, though strictly it is not identical with the “I myself with my mind.”<sup>51</sup>

However Paul is not saying that the flesh is in reality regnant over his redeemed ego, any more than this is the case in Galatians 5:17. What he is saying is simply that while there is a measure of present deliverance by means of the reign of grace through the Spirit in 8:1-5, yet the conflict is ongoing and heightened when the law is sought as a helper; there is no present truce with or final overthrow of the enemy; indeed sin is strengthened and emboldened through the law when it confronts the “new man.” The present indicative here of δουλεύω, *douleuō*, “to serve,” describes the reality of continuous conflict, while the subsequent truth of 8:2 prescribes the gospel grounded means of victory over “the law of sin and of death,” which here in vs. 25 is “the law of sin.” Thus while v. 25a has introduced us to the glory of gospel sanctification, v. 25b sums up the conflict that attempted legal sanctification engenders and has been described in vs. 13-24. As John Stott states: “God’s purpose is not that we should be Old Testament Christians, regenerate indeed, but living in slavery to the law and in bondage to indwelling sin.

<sup>49</sup> Here the verb “to set free” is the aorist of ἐλευθερώω, *eleutheroō*.

<sup>50</sup> Moo rightly describes this subjective emasculation as, “little more than desperate attempts to make the text say what we think it *ought* to say, when we should be figuring out what it *does* say.” *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 466n.

<sup>51</sup> Moule explains: “In strict grammar it [I myself] belongs to *both* clauses; to the service with the mind and to that with the flesh. But remembering how St. Paul has recently dwelt on the Ego as ‘willing’ to obey the will of God, it seems best to throw the emphasis, (as we certainly may do in practice,) on the *first* clause.” *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*,” p. 135.

It is rather that we should be New Testament Christians who, having died and risen with Christ, are living in the freedom of the indwelling Spirit.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Stott, *Message of Romans*, p. 215.