

Romans 7**By: Charles Stanley****From: On the Epistle to the Romans**

We have now in detail that from which we have been delivered in Romans 6. And it is impossible to understand this chapter unless we see this order. The truth of Romans 6 must have its full place before we attempt to understand Romans 7. The apostle had said, “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” This is a very important statement, and the apostle now explains how we have (that is, those who were under it) been delivered. He then describes the condition of a quickened soul under law before deliverance. This he does very fully, and finally takes up with joy the theme of deliverance, thus leading on to Romans 8.

First, then, how were those under law delivered from it? “Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law), how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?” This fact shows the importance of the truth already brought out — identification with the death of Christ; reckoning ourselves dead with Him, and alive to God. For if those once alive under it were still alive under it, they must be responsible to fulfill its every “jot and tittle,” or it must curse them. Thus Christianity in that case would be valueless. Man would be still under the curse. The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives. His responsibility to law only ends in death. The law as to marriage proves this: death alone dissolves the tie of responsibility. While one husband lives the wife cannot be married to another. She would be an adulteress. This was self-evident to all who knew the law.

In like manner the believer cannot, so to speak, have two husbands. He cannot be alive in the flesh, married to the law (under law), and also be married to Christ. No doubt men say this must be so, that you must have both the law and Christ; but we are not explaining what men say, but scripture. God tells us we cannot have Christ and law. And as a wife is only delivered

from the old husband by death, so we can only be delivered from the old husband, the principle of law, by death. Now while it is true we have not actually died, yet mark the importance of the truth we have learned in Romans 6 to reckon ourselves dead, identified with Christ in death. Only now this is seen in its special bearing on law in the first place.

Verse 4: “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Thus they were as dead to the law by the body of Christ as though they had actually died. They pass from under its dominion into another entirely new state. They have no more to say to the old husband; but enter into a new relationship, married to a new husband, to one raised up from among the dead, even Christ.

But would not great teachers tell you this is antinomianism, to be dead to the law, to have no more to say to it, or it to you? This would lead to bring forth fruit unto sin. It would be dreadful, say they. But what does God say as to this? He says all this is “that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” This is perfectly in keeping with what has gone before. “For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” To be under the law, is to be under its curse, for all are proved guilty (Ch. 3). But now we are one with the risen Christ, all sins forgiven, sin judged, that we may bring forth fruit unto God.

Verse 5: “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death.” This verse determines the character of the teaching that follows. You cannot say, when we were in the flesh, unless you have been delivered from that state. You could not say when we were in London unless you have left it. It is very important to understand this. It is often asked, is this part of Romans 7 the proper experience of a Christian? Certainly not, or it would not have said, When we were in the flesh. Yet it is, as we shall soon see, the experience through which most, if not all,

Christians have passed. Then again, it is said to be the experience of the unconverted. Neither can this be; for they do not delight in the law of God after the inward man (vs. 22). It is evidently the experience of a quickened soul, born of God, having a new nature that delights in the law of God after the inward man; but one who is still under law (in his conscience), and has not yet learned what deliverance by death is.

It would be true to say, the experience described from verse 5 to 24 is the wretched experience of every person born of God, if put under law. And when we remember how many Christians are in that very condition, there is no wonder that so many are thus miserable. We must understand then the words, “For when we were in the flesh,” to mean while we were under the first husband, the law. The law can only have to say to man as alive. It so regarded man, and commanded and required obedience, as regarding the one under it alive in the flesh. Once dead, all commands and requirements cease. You cannot tell a dead man either to love God or his neighbor; but being alive in a nature which can only sin, the command can only bring out transgression. The law might require righteousness; but as man was not righteous but guilty, it became thus a ministration of judgment and death.

The Christian position however is this, to reckon himself dead as to the flesh, and alive to God. A wholly new life to God. The whole subject will be greatly simplified if we keep these two things distinct: the old life or old nature, called the flesh — the ground on which man was tested under law; and the new life, or the new nature, which the believer has, even the very eternal life of the risen Christ. We have seen how we have been delivered from the slavery of sin by being dead to the one and alive in the other. It is not that sin is eradicated, but we are dead to it.

Verse 6: Now it is this same principle of death, and resurrection-life in Christ, applied to the question of law. It is not that the law is dead, or abolished in itself, but we are dead to it: “But now we are delivered from the law,

dead to that wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.” The law did produce all this truly miserable experience, but now we are delivered from the law. Can you truthfully say so? It is most important to have this question settled before we examine that wretchedness from which we have been delivered. By the death and resurrection of Christ we are not only fully justified from our sins, but we have passed from one condition of sin and death, into an entirely new condition; yes, new creation of life and righteousness. From what we *were* to what Christ is. We stood with Adam in sin and death; we now stand united, one with Christ in resurrection, where He is and what He is. “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). His very life is communicated to us. This is as real to faith now, as it will be shortly to sight – a new creation in Christ Jesus.

It must be seen that this is full, complete justification from sins and sin, and deliverance from all claims of law. Again we ask, Are you thus delivered? There must be this complete deliverance to serve in newness of life. Have you thus passed from the flesh—the Adam state, to Christ? Can you say, yes, it is now all Christ? Do you say, the flesh is still there, and it is sin? That is true. And the law is still there. Quite true.

And I have sinned. Yes, that also is true. But what did Christ die for? Was it not for both your sins and sin? And are you sinning now, or delivered from sin? We shall, however, see all this more fully brought out in Romans 8. We only press this point: it is a delivered soul that can understand the awful experience described in what follows. The unconverted or the deceived Pharisee knows nothing of this bitter experience. It is even when the new, holy nature has been implanted, and with it the deep soul-longing for true holiness; and then to find no power in the flesh to do that which we long to do.

Yes, the law of sin and death is like a slave master, and there is no power to escape. And the more we attempt to keep the law, addressed to men as alive in the flesh, the deeper the

wretchedness of doing the very things the new and holy nature hates. Yes, that which would give no trouble to one unconverted, or rather to one not born of God, fills the quickened soul with intense misery.

Is this your state? If quickened and under law (in conscience), we are sure it is in some degree. Oh, how much of the excitement and effort of this day is to drown and help you to forget your misery. Well, do not despair; we believe every one born of God passes more or less through this; and often those who pass through the deepest are those chosen to glorify God the most. We do not question that both equally mistake the chapter, who make it the experience of an unconverted sinner, and on the other hand, the proper experience of a Christian. Let us then look at it carefully.

Verse 7: If left to ourselves, even when there is the new life, the new, holy nature implanted, we should naturally turn to the law, and place ourselves under it. This is always the case where the Holy Spirit is not known. And it is remarkable, in these verses, that the Holy Spirit is not once named. As we have said, there are few that do not now pass through this experience; and those who have got deliverance can look back, and see the great profit they derived from this exercise of heart. The first thing, then, we learn is this—that the law is not sin; it is by it we learn what sin is. The law found the root. “For I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” When the new nature was given, the spirituality of the law was felt. A man without the new nature would say, Lust is not sin, unless you commit the very sin in transgression. But when the law comes home into the conscience, it detects the lust, and I say, Why, that is sin. Yes, the very lust is sin; that is, the nature is sin.

Verse 8: And that nature, being sin, takes occasion by the commandment to work in me all manner of desire for that which is forbidden. “For, without the law, sin was dead.” It was inactive. Forbid a child to go into the garden, at once he desires to go; and, if will be at work, he goes. Now, not only may the nature be inactive, but, I think that I am alive.

Verse 9: “For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” You never met a person, before he was quickened, but that person thought he was alive, and could do, and live. Yes, he says, I thought I was alive without the law once. Ask a natural man, are you saved? He will reply, I do not know; I hope so. I attend my place of worship, and I am doing the best I can, and I hope I shall be in heaven at last. Oh, yes, he says, I am alive. There is not a thought in his soul that he is lost. Not a word does he confess of the least need of a Substitute on the cross. And if you will but ask, even professing Christians, you will get, where you least expect it, such an answer.

Now, the moment a soul is born of God, all this is changed. Why, he says, how is this—I have a nature that desires the very thing God forbids? He turns to the word of God’s law, and he dies to all hope of being in the flesh what he thought he was. “And I died.” Yes, now we have the hard death of the old “I.”

(This means that by having his conscience under law, the law writes the sentence of death in the conscience. Clearly, physical death is not meant; thus “I died” refers to work in the conscience.)

He longs for holiness, turns to the commandments ordained to life: those who do it shall live in it (see Ezek. 20:11), but he finds it unto death. He finds sin has the mastery, and uses the very commandment to slay him. Do not forget that this is “when we were in the flesh.” How the last hope of goodness in the flesh was driven out of us!

Verse 12: The law was of God; it was not bad, or sin; it was “holy, and just, and good.” It was not death to me; but sin, that it might appear sin. Oh, to find that I—my nature—as a child of Adam, was only sin, and that by the commandment it might, and did, become exceeding sinful.

Verse 14: Deeper still. “For we know that, the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Yes, the law justly demands

righteousness. And what do I find in me? “I am carnal, sold under sin.” Do you know this? Have you learned it as a helpless slave of sin? That is all that the old “I,” the flesh, is—to hate the thing I do; to find I have no power to do the thing I would; and all the while to own that the law is good, and only requires of me what is good.

Verse 17: “Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” This is a discovery. I learn that there is a nature, sin, while in me, yet I can look upon it as distinct from myself, the new “I.” “Well, I say, what, then, is there in that old nature, the old “I”? There is not a bit of good in me, that is, my flesh, or old nature.

Verse 18: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.” This is very humbling, to find in myself, as a child of Adam, no power whatever to do good — yes, the very opposite. “For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that do I.” This is the true character of the old nature, even when the new nature desires to do good, and to be holy—yes, when the new nature is holy, as born of God. So that it is not the new nature, the new “I,” that does evil, as the old nature is doing the very thing the new nature condemns.

Verse 20: “Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it”—no longer what I am, as a new creature — “but sin that dwelleth in me.” Then there are two principles, or natures, in the man born of God. The principle of the old depraved nature is called a law.

Verse 21: “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” This is the fixed principle of the old nature — “when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Yes, you say, that is just what I have found, to my deep sorrow; indeed, it has made me almost conclude that I cannot have been born of God at all. Those who are not born of God never discover themselves to be half as bad as you find your old self to be. But do not the very

next words prove that you are born of God — that is, that you have a new “I,” or new nature? “For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.” Surely this proves, beyond a doubt, that there are two natures; for how could the old nature, which is sin, delight in the law of God? But it is so. “For I delight in the law of God AFTER THE INWARD MAN.” Well, you say, it seems like a contradiction. That is exactly what the two natures are to each other; yes, in direct contradiction to that inward man which delights in the law of God. It says:

Verse 23: “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” Thus, to deny the two natures in a man born again is to deny the plain teaching of the word of God. Did not Jesus say, “That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit?” Thus it is a wholly new birth, new nature, new creation, that is of the Spirit, and is spirit.

(The reader should bear in mind that Old Testaments saints were born again but were not in the new creation. The new creation began when Christ rose from the dead. He is the beginning of that new creation (Rev. 3:14).)

That which is born of a sinful flesh, or nature, is, remains what it is — flesh or sin. And here we learn, if under law — that is, if we are on the ground of the flesh, under law for its improvement, as thousands are — then we find, in the war of the two natures, that we are brought into “captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” It is a terrible fact, but the utter badness of our old nature must be learned practically, if we do not believe what God says about it. But if all this be the case, a man born of God, under law, not knowing the distinction of the two natures, must be extremely wretched, if sincere, and earnestly longing for holiness and righteousness of life. That is just what we find.

Verse 24: “O wretched man that I am.” And it is now no longer, “who shall help me to improve the flesh,” but, “who shall deliver me

from the body of this death?” Yes, self, the old man, the body of this death, must be given up. We must have a Deliverer, and that Deliverer is Christ.

Verse 25: “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Few words, but, oh, glorious deliverance and victory! After arriving at the full discovery of my utter helplessness, and the unchangeable badness of the old nature, the eye is now lifted up to Christ, and the heart swells up in the full joy of thankfulness. This deliverance will be more fully explained in the next chapter.

There is one mistake often made here, against which we must most carefully guard. It is often said, or implied, that what we have seen as to the old nature, the flesh, the law of sin in the members, is all quite true of a believer before he gets deliverance; but after that, *it* is changed, or eradicated—at all events, greatly improved, suddenly or gradually sanctified, and that there is no such evil nature left in the delivered, or sanctified, saints. Is this so, or is it not so? Let the very next words, *after* our deliverance and thanksgiving, determine this important question.

Verse 25: “So, then, with the mind [or, new man] I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh [the old nature], the law of sin.”

(The correct expression for new man is “*new nature*,” similarly as the “*old nature*” is used. “Old man” and “new man” are generic terms and refer, respectively, to Adam and Christ. Scripture does not speak of “*my old man*” or “*my new man*” as if there were many of each in the world.)

We are no longer on the ground of the flesh, as alive under law, seeking to improve the flesh — no longer in the flesh. But that the flesh remains in the delivered saint is stated in the strongest possible way — in the very person who, with the new mind, or nature, serves the law of God. But the flesh and the law of sin still remain in me.

(In this text (Rom. 7:25) two laws are noted, corresponding to the two natures. A law is a fixed principle of operation. There is not merely one nature that is gradually improved. The new nature is fixed in character and operation; and the old nature is likewise fixed in character and operation.)

We may cavil, and reason, and ridicule, but here is the truth of scripture, and what every believer finds to be true. So that we need preserving, spirit, soul, and body, blameless (1 Thess. 5:23).

Place that old nature under law, try to find some good in it, and immediately our experience will be, as here described.

One question more, before we leave this subject. How is it that so many Christians are in this experience? Simply because, though born of God, they are, through false teaching, or defective teaching, placed under law, and have never known the true character of deliverance. Let us, then, in the next place, inquire what that deliverance is.

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