

Romans 7 v1-13

Introduction

Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage as this. Not only complicated but seems so remote and difficult to understand. Only makes preacher's task difficult in being true to teaching of Scripture and yet endeavouring to make matter clear and relevant – and if possible – interesting to the congregation. Spiritual biography – laying bare heart and soul.

Going to concentrate on verses 7-13, but include verses 1-6 towards the end. Teaching is about God's law which is summed up in the Ten Commandments. In the Old Testament there are many passages speaking of the wonders of God's Law.

Great peace have they which love thy law Psalm 119:165; **The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul** Psalm 19:7; **O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day** Psalm 119:97. Godly men loved it. Expression of God's will. Longed to obey it.

But Paul is dealing with a difficult aspect. Speaking out of own experience and from own observation – ever present temptation to misuse Law. Forgetting God's grace, i.e. religion which is merely law keeping. Idea that by obedience to Law we can earn merit in God's sight.

What is the Law?

No mistake to be made here. Anxious to show limitations and inadequacy of Law. Yet nothing wrong with it as such. Within its limits, the Law is a very great and noble thing. Not wrong. Not sin at all. **God forbid** (7:7). It is **holy and just and good** (7:12). It reflects God's purity in being **holy**, and demands same purity from us. It is **righteous** i.e. God's fair dealings with us. It demands the same from us, a right and equitable relationship between God and man. It is **good**, it promotes our highest welfare and expresses God's goodness. God expects similar goodness from us.

The Law gives the divine standard of right. Given by God. Covers every area of life. Perfection is photographed here. Holiness is mapped out. It reflects God's character. Sum of all moral virtues. Full compass of our accountability to God and relationships to fellows. Not one command which is harsh or unnecessary. Best law which could be conceived. Very voice of God. If we were perfect in holiness and infinitely wise and had to write a law, we should have written just the Law which God has given us. Honouring to God, just to fellows, and beneficial to ourselves. Kind of spiritual policeman to keep us out of harm's way. Those who offend are injuring themselves.

There is nothing wrong with the Law. The trouble is with us who are supposed to keep it. The Ten Commandments are the most magnificent principles that world has seen (as man of world will admit). Ought to thank God for them. If kept, what a happy place Britain would be. Worship God, His name and His day honoured, obedient children, no theft, no murder, no broken marriages, no lying, no coveting. No need for police force. Be in paradise.

The Law and the Commandments are holy, just and good. The Law of God is wonderful. It can do many things. But one thing it cannot do – it cannot save. Because of the kind of people we are, it cannot save, it can only curse us if we try to use it as means of salvation.

Effects of the Law

What does the Law do to men in light of what they are with sinful nature?

(a) Law reveals sin to be sin. **I had not known sin but by the Law.... (7:7), For without the Law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died (7:8-9).** Not recognise sin in true colours until Law defines it as such. How blind and ignorant we are to fact and extent of sin. Sin like deadly frost of northern regions, benumbs its victim before it slays him. So diseased, we imagine our disease to be health. We love enemy who destroys us. Passionate man imagines he is rightly indignant. Greedy man is proud of prudence. Unbeliever rejoices in independence of mind. We hate, not realising it is murder. We lust, not realising it is adultery. Then Law comes. God says “Let there be light”. Light shines, the plumb-line is applied. Lives are brought to exacting standard of Ten Commandments – we see in its true light. We thought there was little which was wrong with us until the Law came to define sin.

Once upon a time Paul had no consciousness of sin. Lived carefree life. “I was alive”. Then - possibly at Barmitzwhah ceremony when Jewish boy of 13 becomes son of commandment i.e. responsibility to keep law – Paul suddenly became aware of real demands of Law. Came home to conscience. Sin sprang to life. “I died”. Found self alienated and doomed. Law is like a mirror shows truth about self. “Every time I read that book it kicks me” . It shows where and what we are in the sight of God.

(b) Law provokes sin. It not only exposes, but it stimulates and rouses sin. **Sin, taking occasion** (military base or springboard for attack) **wrought in me all manner of concupiscence** (desire)(7:8). The moment we know something is forbidden, we want to do it. Attraction of forbidden fruit. We want to do what is prohibited. Door marked “private” – we want to go through it. “Reduce speed now” – why should I? “Let us pray” – let us not. Augustine’s Confessions – stealing from pear tree – not want them to eat because there were plenty better at home, he picked them simply to become a thief. Desire to steal was awakened simply by prohibition of stealing. The story goes of an old lady who objected to Ten Commandments being printed up on boards in churches – “it only gives people ideas”. So the Law becomes bridgehead to sin, signal to revolt.

(c) Law condemns sin. **The commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. (7:10). Sin deceived me (7:11). Sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (7:13).** What could have brought him life (if there were perfect obedience) actually sentenced him to death. Sin is condemned and our failures are condemned. Folly of trying to earn salvation. Merely brings condemnation. Law cannot save us, only curse us. Looking glass can show up our dirty face, but it cannot make it clean. Law reveals sin, provokes it and condemns.

Shows no mercy. What great enormity sin is! How exceeding sinful it is. Deliberate choice of evil and defiance – not mere defect or folly – against God, who loves us, blesses us, warns and pleads with us. What ingratitude and sheer wickedness.

Thomas Brooks said “Sin is the only thing which God abhors, it brought Christ to the Cross, it damns souls, it shuts heaven and laid foundations of hell”. Study backcloth of sin and condemnation before see glory of Gospel. In evangelistic preaching we cast pearl of Gospel before swine, and people not appreciate beauty of pearl because they don’t realize the filth of the pigsty.

By nature we are all inclined to thank God that we are not as other men are. Not until we have learned stern and unbending demands of Gospel and sinfulness of sin and extreme danger we are in, that we begin to cry “God be merciful to me, a sinner”. Only in very inky blackness of night sky do stars reveal full brightness. Only when bruised by Law do we see need of Gospel to bind us up. Not until imprisoned by Law do we long for Christ to set us free. Not till Law humbles to hell do we turn to Gospel to raise us to heaven. Not till Law has driven us to despair shall we ever fly to Christ. Law not to save us but to show us how much we need to be saved. Our schoolmaster, παιδαγωγος, our disciplinarian “to lead us to Christ”.

How is Christ the answer to situation in which we are involved because of Law?

Purpose of Paul’s teaching here and in whole epistle – to show us that there is only one answer to this situation. We are in desperate plight. Our case before God is desperate. We ourselves are helpless. Resolutions, outward ordinances etc. are useless to clear our guilt and snap chains that bind. The one answer – the grace of God in Christ. At Calvary, He was burdened with sin, took the curse. Propitiation – He not only covered our sins but averted the wrath of God. In the person of His Son, God has borne penalty of his own Law. Luther said “There is a common proverb that hunger is the best cook... the Law maketh troubled souls to look after Christ. To such Christ savoureth sweetly, to them he is nothing else but joy, consolation and life”.

Our substitute has borne penalty and exhausted claims of Law in our place, turned away wrath of God. We are free from its curse, sentence and claims. In Christ we have died. Death has broken relationship to Law. Died with Christ in order to be united with him in a new life.

The fruit of this new union is fruit unto God. Begin a new life that we might obey Law in newness of spirit. Law says “Do this and you will live”; Gospel says “Live and so you will be able to do this”. No longer keeping Law to be saved. But having been saved we can keep Law in power of Spirit. No longer external code which reluctantly we obey, but by surrender to indwelling Spirit we keep Law willingly and effectively. Walk in newness of life. Serve in newness of Spirit. Forgiveness, life and healing when we look at Christ. Salvation from guilt and power of sin. A look at Christ takes away sin, heals disease, brings Holy Spirit with renewing and transforming grace, overthrows strongholds of sin and deals with traitor within. Sin has been made to appear sin. Holy Spirit makes grace appear grace. **Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.** (Romans 5:20).