

## **Romans Chapter 7 (Paul's retelling)**

1-6

Once you die, no legal system can lay a hand on you. Married couples, for example, are legally bound together for life. But if your spouse dies, you're free to marry someone else.

What I'm saying is that, as far as the Law is concerned, you've joined Jesus in death; so it has no more claim on you. And because Jesus rose from the dead, you've now got a new life in which you're free to take a new partner – Jesus himself! Have you ever seen a tree wrapped in barbed wire? Stunted, unable to thrive, its fruit tastes of poison. Our old lives were like that, wrapped in sin, stunted, poisonous. But we're dead to all that now, and it's like being a new tree. The barbed wire has been ripped off, and we're free to live and grow as God's Holy Spirit leads us, bursting with fruit that makes life taste better for everyone.

7-11

So am I saying that the Law and sin are one and the same? No! But the Law introduced us to sin. If there were no law against greed, for example, I'd never have known that greed was wrong. However, as soon as the Law told me greed was wrong, sin seized its chance, filling me with more greed than I'd ever have thought possible. So the Law proved incapable of fulfilling its purpose; designed to bring life, it in fact caused death, because it opened the door for sin to enter our lives. Sin saw its chance, grabbed me by the heels and held me down.

12-20

But don't make the mistake of thinking that the law itself is evil. On the contrary, the Law was God's gracious gift. We can't say its standards aren't noble! Nor can we accuse it of harm, because in fact, it showed up sin for the terrible thing it really is.

You have to understand the power that sin exercises over human nature. It drives us to do the very things we long to be free of, and does everything it can to prevent us doing the things we know to be good. It muddles our thinking, so that we can't distinguish right from wrong. We long to do good, but can't; instead, we find ourselves doing the very things we'd love not to do. Do you see the power it has? We desire one thing; sin makes us do the opposite.

21-25

It's futile trying to live God's way in our own strength, even with his Law to guide us. Our human nature simply isn't strong enough to win. It's like living in a war zone. The enemy's always there, ready to attack, invading us, setting our bodies against our minds. The real me might long to live God's way, but try telling my body that! Sin makes us prisoners of war, forcing us to fight against the very things we long for. What a mess! Can anyone rescue us? Yes, yes, yes! God can, and has, through Jesus.

The bottom line is this – without Jesus we're casualties in a losing war, torn limb from limb by our desire to live God's way on the one hand, and the power of sin on the other. So sin drags us bleeding from the battlefield, captives to its own evil ends.

## **What's Romans 7 all about?**

One of the most hotly debated chapters written by Paul – why did he write it?

- to explain why the LAW was given
- to explain that the LAW could not give the life it promised

The 'Big Picture' of all Paul's theology is that human beings are not individuals, but part of a greater whole – so, God's plan of salvation is not just about the rescue of individuals, but the restoration of an entire cosmos.

Spiritually, humans are united, either with Adam (the old nature) or with Jesus (the new creation); and that faith in the death & resurrection of Jesus is the mechanism by which a transition from one to the other is effected.

Hence all the language of dying to the old and rising to the new.

The irony of the LAW was that it simply underlined the fact that Israel was 'in Adam.' The LAW didn't lift Israel out of the mess; but revealed it was in the same mess as everyone else (the same argument as 2:17-24).

The LAW is like a security system – good in itself, but open to misuse.

Paul's description of moral wrestling between godliness and evil is talking about the futility of Israel's in particular and humanity's in general attempts to live morally without the power of Jesus aiding them – it is based on a long tradition of pagan moralists puzzling over why they could never achieve in practice the moral standards they conjured up philosophically. Paul uses 'I' to show this is his story too – and it will be familiar to most listeners today!

### **The seriousness of sin**

- there was nothing wrong with the LAW, nor with Israel wanting to keep it; the real problem was Sin
- the LAW was good, but introduced us to sin
- we must not underestimate the reality & power of sin – it ruins lives

**So what's the solution to sin?** (8:3 gives the answer)

- sin must be allowed to grow to full height – where? In Israel, so that it could be focused on one spot and destroyed once and for all (Hence 8:1)
- knowing that the LAW would fail in its purpose, God purposed to send his Son and his Spirit to achieve what the LAW could not.

### **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT**

- 1 Can you explain in your own words why the Law was given – and why it failed?
- 2 How would you explain to a friend the need to move from being 'in Adam' to being 'in Jesus'?
- 3 In what ways do we downplay the seriousness of sin?
- 4 Spend some time meditating on the cross – the place where sin reached its full height, was focused on one place, and dealt with once and for all ...