

Paul's Letter to the ROMANS

UNIT SIX

The Christian and God's Law

Freedom from the Law (7:1-6)

- Most Gentile Christians had some knowledge of the law of God given to Israel through Moses.
- They would have known that 'the law is binding on a person only during his life (7:1).
- The law no longer exercises dominion over Christians as they have 'died' and this involved a death 'to the law'.
- Paul uses the analogy of marriage –the death of a spouse frees a person to remarry.
- In the same way those who have died to the law may belong to another – to him who has been raised from the dead.
- The new relationship with God in Christ is for the purpose of bearing 'fruit' – a sanctified life.
- The Christian's former life was 'in the flesh' – determined and controlled by a fallen human nature.
- "Our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (7:5).
- Sin was actually provoked by a knowledge of the law.

- Paul says that Christians have now been 'discharged from the law' – in what sense?
- This seems to focus on the law's condemnation of sinners – the penalty has been paid by Jesus Christ.
- This does not mean that the law is irrelevant to Christian living, but its application will be different.
- Our relationship to God is now through Jesus and not based on the law (Romans 6).
- We are said to serve "not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit".
- Paul looks at this in greater detail in chapter 8.

The Law and Sin (7:7-25)

- Sin exploits the law (7:7-12)
 - As in 6:1, Paul recognises that a false inference could be drawn from what he says – could the law be evil and responsible for sin?
 - Again Paul denies this – continuing in the first person, he may be using himself to represent first mankind, then Christians.
 - Although people sin where there is no law, they do not fully recognise their sin until explicit commandments forbid it.
 - Paul uses the example of the tenth commandment – only in the light of that do people see covetousness as a sin.
 - God's law is felt by people to be a restriction of their liberty and so becomes an occasion for covetousness and rebellion.
 - We all know the experience of being provoked by some prohibition to do precisely what the law forbids.
 - Paul says "apart from the law sin lies dead" – it was completely inactive before the prohibition of Genesis 2:17 was given.

- Although the purpose of God's commands is always gracious, promising life, they actually bring death.
 - Verse 11 recalls Genesis 3:13, personifying sin as a force which distorts our view of the law and provokes us to disobey.
- Sin's power is revealed by the law (7:13-14)
 - Paul emphatically denies that the law is responsible for the reign of death - the law provokes and exposes sin but can't be blamed.
 - Paul describes himself as "sold under sin" - this suggests something that is still true of his experience as a Christian.
 - The present tense suggests present experience, not Paul speaking as a representative of unregenerate humanity.
 - How can Paul describe himself as 'sold under sin' in view of his statements about liberation from sin?
 - This is different from the unregenerate life in the flesh mentioned earlier – the Christian is no longer controlled by a fallen human nature.
 - The flesh is still a powerful force in human experience – the conflict with sin does not diminish when a person becomes a Christian.
- Flesh and Spirit and the law (7:15-23)
 - The conflict between right and wrong described by Paul has a special intensity.
 - As a Christian he has been released from slavery to the law but recognises the law as spiritual and good.
 - The Holy Spirit enables him to want to obey God, but the more he seeks to do so the more he experiences the overwhelming power of sin.
 - He does not seek to excuse his behaviour, but rather make his readers as realistic as he is about the continuing power of indwelling sin.
 - Although the Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the flesh remains as an opposing force.

- The Christian can 'will what is right', but can not always carry that desire into action.
 - Paul speaks of this inward conflict in terms of two different laws.
 - On one hand, he has experienced a law that when he wants to do right, 'evil lies close at hand' - on the other, he delights in God's law as far as 'my inmost self' is concerned.
 - Paul can speak of God's law as 'the law of my mind' – the conflict is between renewed mind and unrenewed flesh.
- A double servitude (7:24-25)
 - We have seen how Paul describes the Christian's struggle in terms of conflicting laws or ways of viewing or relating to the law.
 - The law of God in which I delight – the law of my mind (my mind renewed by the Holy Spirit, seeking to obey God from the heart).
 - Another law – the law of sin which dwells in my members – law of sin which I serve with my flesh.
 - Paul's cry for help is not one of despair but the cry of a godly man who longs to please God but is hindered by his own sinfulness.
 - He wants to be rescued from 'this body of death' but at the same time utters a cry of victory.
 - There is to be a redemption of our bodies, but in the meantime the believer is controlled by the Spirit.
 - Before he spells out in detail the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, Paul wants his readers to be convinced of the seriousness of the conflict in which they are engaged.
 - Christians must acknowledge their slavery to sin because of their fallen nature.
 - There is no ultimate escape from the conflict described in 7:25 until the new creation arrives.