

Bible Study

Release From The Law

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We are so easily deceived if we won't receive a love of the truth, but if we will, Jesus said:

"...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

Knowing the truth

The truth we are to receive and love is not some broad, general truth but the truth of who God has named each one of us to be. God is dealing with each of us in very specific ways, and if we don't accept and learn to love that, we are in big trouble.

When you or I have a problem with the specific dealings of God in our life and want to generalise everything, saying, 'I can be a Christian because anyone can be a Christian if they believe the things Christians believe', then we have a problem indeed.

This was the issue Jesus had with the Pharisees. They knew the word of God, but Jesus warned that doing what the Pharisees taught would not bring life because there was no life in them. They appeared good but they were dead. Jesus called them whitewashed sepulchres.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

(Matthew 23:27)

The time is short, and the Holy Spirit is bringing clarity to us so that we understand what we need to understand about the Gospel. God doesn't want us to be endlessly going on from week to week trying to be convinced of some minimal standard of Christianity. He wants us to know Him, to flourish and to multiply.

What's the problem?

In Romans chapter seven, Paul gives a most profound explanation of the Christian mind and what goes on inside us that gets us into trouble. If we want to do the will of God, why do things go wrong? If we believe His word and want to do His will, surely *doing* His will should follow? The problem is, immediately we agree with His word and set out to do it, we've already denied the truth. Let me explain what I mean. If God tells us we need to love with His love, and we hear and believe Him then do our utmost to love with His love, we are acting on the belief that we have the capacity within us to obey and

produce His love. The truth, however, is that there is *nothing* in us that can obey Him or love as He loves. Do you see the difficulty? We need to be delivered, daily, from the very idea that we have any innate capacity to obey God. Our self-righteous trust in ourselves is another law, a law other than God's, and is iniquitous.

If, as Christians, we don't have this self-righteous iniquity dealt with daily, we are going to become the worst nightmare possible. We can all put our hands up and admit that we've been that nightmare. But here, today, the water of the word is washing away our nightmarish delusion of self-righteousness. Blinking a bit, we see, and rightly wonder, 'What was I thinking?'

If we won't submit to His word to us about this, if we refuse this washing, we will have a serious issue, as Jesus warns:

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." (John 13:8)

Let's work our way through the statement of the problem of this other law in us, laid out by Paul in Romans chapter seven. When Paul says we were made to die to the law (Romans 7:4), he is not just referring to the law of Moses. He means we were made to die to the entire principle of law through the body of Christ, through His offering whereby His blood was shed and is effective towards us. But how does this death to the law through His body actually happen? Not when we hear it, believe it and then go and try and do it! That is a recipe for bad outcomes, because with all the goodwill in the world we will fail and keep failing. And when we fail often enough, we will become weary and start to say, 'This is too hard!'

The illumination we need is not *just* about the truth of the word, or of our name or our need to improve. Each of us also needs to see our own poverty of spirit, the truth that, 'No good

thing dwells in me and I don't have any capacity to obey God.' (Romans 7:18). The biggest danger for you and me is that we hear the word of God and, like the children of Israel, we say:

"All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Exodus 19:8)

Fully intending to obey His word, and believing the lie that we have the integrity to do so, is a fatal problem.

A perpetual cycle of trouble

This problem gives rise to religious movements, which anyone who has read church history knows is exactly what happens when people live by laws and the belief in their own rightness. Living this way perpetuates cycles and generations of argument, faction and church division. The only escape for us is to die to the law, through the literal body of Christ, by joining the fellowship of His offering.

Trying to do the will of God in our own flesh creates so much trouble and angst for us! Being very keen to see the word of God fulfilled in our lives, we keep hearing the word, trying to do it, failing and then feeling terrible and completely trapped. But the trap has an escape!

"[we] were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that [we] might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God." (Romans 7:4)

God is delivering us from the trap so we can bear fruit. Jesus warned His disciples that the measure of those who are His is the fruit of their lives:

"You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20).

He didn't say we'd know them by their ability to quote the Scriptures. The Pharisees could do that from dawn to dusk, yet Jesus called them

whitewashed sepulchres; hypocrites who were full of corruption and nothing but evil, training others and turning them into twice the sons of hell that they were (Matthew 23:15). That's pretty strong language!

The only way we can know who belongs to Jesus is by the fruit of His life in them, because the proof of eternal life is not in the seed of the word we receive, it's in the fruit we bear. That's the parable of the sower: the same seed produces different outcomes, and in only one case produces fruit leading to eternal life (Matthew 13:1-23). The measure of the Christian life is not the quality of the seed that's been sown - it's the fruit that's produced from the planted seed.

From Christ's offering comes fruit of life

Paul knew that to bear fruit, the seed of the Lord's word has to go into the ground and die; that we are supposed to join the fellowship of Christ's offering and die with Him so that we are also raised with Him and can bear fruit of His life. Paul's whole desire was:

"...that I may know [Christ] and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;"

(Philippians 3:10)

God's love is a jealous love (Exodus 34:14). He is jealous over each one, over who He made us to be. His jealousy over you is not some general desire that you know you're loved by an eternal being. He is jealous for you to inherit the name that He has for you. He sent the Holy Spirit to sanctify each one of us to our particular name and He doesn't accept *anything* that is outside that sanctification. Therefore, the fruit that we are to bear is not general either. We come to know and believe the love that God has for us in the specific name the Father has for us and as we bear the fruit of that name He has

prepared for us. Even in the comparatively paltry love we parents have for our children we know them each by name; we know who they really are. When they behave and produce fruit that is contrary to their name, we admonish them: 'This is not you!' Our love for them is not some broad thing - it's specific to each one. How much greater is the love of God than ours! How much deeper, more profound and how much more real than our love is the love of God for His children.

The alternative to joining Christ's death and producing fruit of His life is remaining in our flesh and producing different fruit altogether:

"For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." (Romans 7:5)

From our flesh comes fruit for death

The fruit produced by our flesh is horrendous:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these"

(Galatians 5:19-21)

When you see this kind of fruit cropping up in your life, it's fruit for death. The fruit we're *meant* to bear is fruit for life!

"[but] the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

And we can bear that fruit of the Spirit because, although in our flesh we were bound to bear fruit for death:

"...we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that

we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6)

This is what Jesus has done. This is what His cross effected. And this is what Paul tried to teach the Corinthians who believed they'd been saved from their sins, had been filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore, had everything they needed in order to live as Christians. Yet they were tolerating all kinds of corruption and immorality among themselves. Paul warned them, 'You're being completely carnal. Mere men. You don't even know what being Christian looks like.' (1 Corinthians 3:3). To show them, he pointed to his own participation in the cross of Christ:

“I sought to know nothing while I was among you, except Christ and Him crucified,” (1 Corinthians 2:2)

Paul said that he died daily among them so that they would bear fruit (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 4:12), and that he and Apollos had applied these things to themselves so that the Corinthians would learn not to go beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The other law within us is woven into the fabric of the way we think. Our deliverance is in the way of God, which is the way of weakness. Our victory is in Him. You can't beat God!

We've been released from the law, having died with Christ and by now dying daily to that by which we were bound (Luke 9:23; Romans 7:6; 1 Corinthians 15:31). Christ died once, but we have to die daily with Him. There's a discipline on our lives. Our judgment has been commuted to suffering in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings so that, having died to the law which once bound us, we can now serve God in the newness of the Spirit of Life, not in the oldness of the letter of the law (Romans 7:6).

To truly serve God, we have to be released from our bonds, otherwise we'll still be enslaved to

the things that have held us; we'll still be producing the deadly fruit of our flesh. When you see outbursts of anger, complaints, gossip and malice in people, you're seeing them in the grip of something they can't defeat. It's bigger than they are.

Sin takes opportunity through the word

“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” (Romans 7:7)

Paul is not merely saying that the law is teaching him that sin is wrong. The law is teaching him *the way sin works*. This is the illumination we need. We can read these Scriptures as if his point is the realisation that coveting is wrong. It *is* wrong, but Paul is telling us a lot more than that. He's showing us how sin works; how it takes occasion, uses opportunity, and kills us. Having said he would not have known sin, or about coveting, without the law, Paul tells us:

“But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment [not to covet], produced in me coveting of every kind;” (Romans 7:8)

Paul is showing us that sin works by taking opportunity, through the good command of God, to disobey the command. We can understand what he's saying. When we are truly convicted by the word, we begin to see the sin that is so widespread in ourselves. But the moment we lay hold of the word to be obedient to it in our own virtue and integrity, we're on our way to becoming the embodiment of everything we don't want to be and we'll see our failure everywhere in us.

This is why there are so many religious nuts! They are tormented by trying harder and

harder and constantly failing, and are becoming crazier by the day. For just as Paul describes, what we *want* to do we can't do; what we're trying *not* to do we do. Though we fill our minds with commandments and Scriptures, though we so desperately want to obey, we can't. We believe; we have a wonderfully well-formulated Christian world view, but we're not able to live up to it and we're miserable.

The answer is to join Christ's death

At the beginning of Paul's statement of our dilemma, he writes that we are released from the law by death (Romans 7:4). Furthermore,

"...apart from the law, sin is dead." (Romans 7:8)

The answer to sin taking opportunity through the law is death, so that, being dead, we are dead to the law and sin dies. This is why Christ died, and why we've got to join His death - the death He died to sin (Romans 6:10). The question is, how *can* we join His death?

When the word of the Lord comes and we believe, the danger that immediately begins stirring in us, right beside our new belief, right alongside our conviction and forming testimony, is the fallen belief that within ourselves, we can do what the word is calling us to do; that because we've seen and believed the word, it is already in us. This delusion sets in very quickly, and God knows that, so He intervenes: 'Now, hang on. I know this is not yet you, and I know you can't make it you. So, I'm going to hand you over to a process of suffering until it becomes you.'

When we accept the necessity of this, we can walk without reaction or complaint through our lives and the sufferings the Father brings us. If we *don't* accept this necessity, then we will end up living under time and chance with random things going wrong or right, ascribing the right things to ourselves and the wrong things to

other people. We'll be 'victims' of our own or others' behaviour and we'll be unreachable, even in the body of Christ.

Christ is the scapegoat who bore *all* sin (1 John 2:2). If we're not walking with Him so that He bears not only our sin but also the sin that comes at us from other people, we can only, and we will, place that sin and all its pain, grief and upset somewhere else, on someone other than Jesus. We'll either condemn ourselves, and be utterly miserable, or we'll condemn other people and make them miserable, accusing them of being the cause of all the trouble.

Then His life can flow to us in His blood

Be wise! Place your sin, and sin against you, in the right place - in Christ's offering, where His blood is shed and can flow towards you; where He can transfer to you His life, bringing you back from the death of your sin, and can take from you and bear your sin and the sin that is against you. Even when someone is dealing unjustly with you, *you* are being recovered from *your* sin. Hallelujah! This is the Gospel as Jesus demonstrated. His enemies *couldn't* destroy His everlasting work, so don't try to end your troubles by taking control, by getting angry or by going into some sort of sophisticated response!

"I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died..." (Romans 7:9)

When the word of God comes to us, and on account of the word, difficulty, we can so easily default to, 'I was doing a lot better before this word came. Now I can't do it; it's too hard. The trouble is this word!' But, as Paul tells us, the trouble is not the word at all - it's the law of self-righteousness that's in us. And we haven't seen or understood how big or all-pervasive the problem really is. It's part of our very thought

process, even in believing the word we're hearing.

How are we ever going to escape this dilemma? We can't save ourselves, and we'll go mad trying. Instead, bring it straight to Christ, who will lead us in this way: 'You've received the seed of My word. Now, you're going to go into the ground and die with Me so that as you endure through the proving time, this seed can come up and bear fruit. Trust Me, and let it happen.'

A wealthy farmer is not one who's got barns of seed he never plants. His wealth only comes after he prepares the soil, sows the seed into the ground he's prepared, fertilises the plants, waits for the rain then harvests his ripened crop. At the end of that whole process he gains his testimony, 'Look! My silos are full. That seed really produced.'

A farmer who points at the bags of good seed he has laid up and thinks they are his riches is like the wicked and lazy servant in Jesus' parable (Matthew 25:24-25). 'I heard You were a hard taskmaster. I knew it was going to be a rough trot so I hung on to the seed You gave me. I've got the Bible and I know what it says, but I'm not going to suffer relationally with anyone. I refuse.' Such a servant is given a place among the wicked.

We don't want to go that way! We've got to take the risk and be exposed in the way that Christ was exposed. That's the only way that this other law within us can be dealt with.

Sin deceives us

Paul tells us that as well as taking opportunity through the commandment of God, sin also deceives us:

"[so] this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the

commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." (Romans 7:11)

Sin deceives through the commandment firstly by making us believe we can obey it. We believe the commandment, but sin is right there with us, bringing condemnation or delusion, accusing or excusing, convincing us we can do it if we really try (delusion and excuse), or, we can *never* do it so stop trying and give up (accusation and condemnation).

Have you ever felt like giving up because it's all too hard? But what is it about laying your life down that you think should be easy to do? If dying with Christ is too hard, what is it that you will do? You'll give up, and then you'll be giving up on yourself as well as on God. You'll be denying that God can use you, but I'm telling you, God *wants* to use you! He wants you and me to bear much fruit and to be a light in the community. We're not preaching this word so we can have some kind of love-in among ourselves but so that the saving word of the Lord can go out.

Can we stop going over things all the time and condemning ourselves as though that's what God is all about? We're not playing a game. God has a purpose for us; a participation in what is coming as the seventh world kingdom forms up, as God is sovereignly allowing, and at the end of the age.

Concerning the law of God, we know:

"...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful." (Romans 7:11-13)

Sin takes what is good and sins with it

Our problem is not caused by the word of God. Rather, sin is so bad that it takes that which is good and makes us sin with it. That's how sinful sin is, and the other law within us lies at the heart of it.

“For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:14-15)

Jesus knows that in the grip of sin, we do not understand what we are doing. As He was being crucified, He prayed, ‘Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. They don't understand.’ (Luke 23:34).

We need understanding! In all our acquiring of wisdom we're going to be miles from wisdom's understanding (Proverbs 4:7) until we understand the workings of the other law that is within us. We'll only blunder around thinking we know what we're doing when, as Jesus said, we won't have any idea. We'll be in the state Paul was describing and urging us not to stay in:

“But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” (Romans 7:16-17)

Having agreed that the law is right and confessing it good, we can't then blame the law for our sin. In this wretched condition, sin dwelling in us has taken control. But how does sin get occasion to do that in a born again son of God in whom the Holy Spirit dwells? Illustrating the question, how does sin get into our cars and start driving? How does it oust us from the driver's seat and take over the wheel? Why do we give it control to drive as hard and fast as it likes? How does this happen, time and time again? We don't understand.

“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh;” (Romans 7:18)

Casting himself in our dilemma, Paul knows that nothing good dwells in him. We may think that recognising and knowing that fact means we're therefore free to live a different way. But we're not!

“...for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.” (Romans 7:18)

Let me ask, just whose willing is it that is present in me? It's *my* willing that *I* will do it. This is starting to touch the issue for us. We will, but we can't. Someone preaches on the love of God and not gossiping, and we set our will to love and not gossip. The next thing we know, we're gossiping about people, our resolve is blown and if we recognise we're gossiping, we wonder how we got there. Worse, we may not even be aware we *are* gossiping; we don't know what we're doing. Against our best intentions, how easily we sin!

“But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.”(Romans 7:20-21)

We've got to be alive to this! The word of God comes, and our iniquitous self-righteousness is right there in us. We don't have to be paranoid about this, but we've just got to understand how easily deluded we are. Two thousand years of Christian history illustrate the problem. There is no body of agreed Christian practice. Christians know and want to do what is good but have been guilty of worse sin than anybody.

“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man...” (Romans 7:22)

We see that the law of God is wise, good and a better way to live. We definitely don't want to be sinful, and we joyfully agree with God's law, thinking God must be delighted that we agree with him. We feel we're already virtuous just because we're in mental agreement with His word.

"...but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind..." (Romans 7:23)

Our own law wages war within us

A collision of laws is in play here: the law of God, the law of my mind, the law of sin and a different or other law in my body that is waging war against the law of my mind. When this conflict is raging, we will be uneasy, troubled and bound. Those who live this way for long enough are likely to conclude, 'I'm a hypocrite, and I don't want to be a hypocrite anymore. It would be more virtuous to live as a non-Christian, so that's what I'll do.' But taking *that* path of self-destruction is nothing like virtue. It simply demonstrates that such a person hasn't got past the wretched condition Paul is describing.

All of us who've ever tried to obey God have found ourselves in this condition at times, and no doubt will again while ever our own law is still alive in us. Hopefully, when we do find ourselves here, we'll recognise our condition for what it is and not be fooled into thinking our own law is speaking the truth to us.

This other law that Paul tells us is waging war in our members is a serious enemy. It's not just having a little tiff with us. It's not an annoying tickle. 'The law of me' wages war and continually issues declarations of rebellion and refusal to surrender: 'No! I will not accept your terms. If I obey at all, it will be *my* choice and on *my* terms.' Our internal battle rages at

hyper-speed and we won't even perceive it unless, like Paul, we've been illuminated by the Holy Spirit to see and recognise what's actually going on as we're caught powerless between hostile forces.

No wonder Paul cries out from this battleground, 'Who will deliver me from the body of this death?!' (Romans 7:24). If you or I are stuck in this condition, we will not be delivered by trying harder to free ourselves. The Gospel does not work by our efforts.

This thing that wages war in our members can only be dealt with when it is cut away from us by the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11). We *need* that cutting away of our flesh's fight to use the word of God to establish our own righteousness and prove our own virtue.

Most people have a problem accepting full accountability for the way their lives have turned out, but the truth is that what has gone wrong for us begins and ends with us, with the choices we've made. How we love to take responsibility and accolades for things that go well while denying responsibility for things that do not! But the people and circumstances we hold responsible for our problems are not responsible, for no one frog-marched us through life. We made choices all along the way.

The beginning of illumination and delivery is to understand what's in us: our own law, seeking to establish its own righteousness and causing all the trouble. Under pressure, our other law is the architect of how we think, and at those pressure points, we think God is against us; we think He's unreasonable; and we think His word can't possibly mean what His messengers are declaring. In this state, we are not only at war within ourselves, we begin to war against other people, disputing and producing fruit unto death. God is completely and jealously against

the other law that is in you and in me. He *hates* it!

But when we join the fellowship of Christ's offering, God steadily removes this other law from our lives, cutting it out like a careful surgeon. In this fellowship, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

The deception we have to avoid

When we hear and receive the word of the Lord, the deception we have to avoid is thinking that because we've heard and believe, His word is already established and true in us. The truth is that because the word of the Lord is true, and we believe Him, His word will become true in us as, in the hands of our Heavenly Father, we suffer with Christ. If we abide with Him in that process without drawing back, without reacting or becoming a victim, without complaining and so corrupting ourselves, the Lord will complete His work in us (Philippians 1:6).

However, if we complain, what comes out of our mouths is corruption (Matthew 15:11). Every time you or I complain about or speak against somebody, every time we make a judgement about something that is not our accountability and about which we therefore should have nothing to say, we are corrupting ourselves and are unaware just how badly we are doing so. All our pronouncements and judgements are fruit of the other law within us, and to this law we have to die. We may *think* we know what the issues are in the matters we're so proudly commentating on, but I guarantee, we *don't* know.

If we touch things we shouldn't touch, if we're puffed up and think we can fix things that are not ours to touch or fix, we will get burned. We may justify our meddling with excuses like, 'I only wanted to help with that because I'm a kind person who wants to help people. I wasn't

being self-righteous, just helpful', but do you see the problem? This *is* self-righteousness, and it only produces death.

This work of our own law in our members wages war against the law of our minds and makes us prisoners of the law of sin which is in our members. Our other law takes us back again to the law of sin and makes us prisoners of it so that we become more trapped and more obsessed than ever about the problems we perceive. God doesn't want us to live that way!

When we hear the word of the Lord, the seed of His word comes to us, but to bear fruit it has to go into the ground and die. This begins in the fellowship of prayer with Christ, in joining the fellowship of His offering in which we're already participating and which doesn't cease just because we leave our prayer closet. God is at work in relation to the word He has spoken to us, measuring us to it and giving us the grace and capacity to fulfil His word by the Spirit, not by the strength of our own desire to do His will by our own flesh.

The machinery of our own law in our flesh produces death. Let's stay with the cross and die with Christ so that we can leave that mode of death behind, so that by the work of the Spirit in us, we abide in Christ and in His offering, and His word abides in us, bear much fruit.