

Romans Study Part 6: The Struggle with Indwelling Sin (7)

Covenant Presbyterian Church

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*Do you mortify;
do you make it your daily work;
be always at it while you live;
cease not a day from this work;
be killing sin or it will be killing you.
-John Owen*

- I. Released from the captivity of the law, bound to Christ (7:1-6)
 - A. In this passage Paul develops an analogy from marriage to describe our changed relationship with the law by virtue of being united to Christ.
 - B. Marriage is a covenant bond as long as both parties are alive
 1. The covenant involves identity and obligations
 - a) The identity of being married to your spouse
 - b) Obligations to be faithful to your spouse
 2. Death annuls the covenant and, as such, the living person is free to marry another
 - C. We used to be bound to the law - we were “married” to the law
 1. We were required to be faithful to the obligations of the law
 - a) But we couldn’t keep the law perfectly (Rom 3:9-20) and so we were condemned by the law
 2. Our identity was defined by this “marriage” relationship to the law: we were covenant breakers
 - D. In Christ we died to the law, annulling our “marriage” to it and freeing us to marry another, namely, Christ.
 1. In Christ, our obligation to the law has changed
 - a) We are no longer obliged to keep the law in order to obtain righteousness
 2. In Christ, our identity is changed
 - a) As such, we are considered righteous (law-keepers)
 - E. “We ought carefully to remember that this is not a release from the righteousness which is taught in the law, but from its rigid requirements, and from the curse, which thence follows. The law, then, as a rule of life, is not abrogated; but what belongs to it as opposed to the liberty obtained through Christ, that is, as it requires absolute perfection: for as we render not this perfection, it binds us under the sentence of eternal death.”¹
 1. This is why Paul shifts the analogy in v.4. It is not the law that dies, but we who die with Christ (6:8).

¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 246.

2. The point is that the law was not the problem in this relationship. We were the problem. Our sinful nature put us at odds with the law. But that sinful nature has been put to death.
- F. “Our new marriage to Jesus Christ produces holiness by bringing us into a love that will never fade and a relationship that will never end. We died to our first fruitless marriage to the law when we died in Christ. That marriage ended. But now, having been joined to him, we are assured of a love that will last forever.”²
- II. The Christian struggle with indwelling sin (7:7-25)
- A. Verse 7 draws a tight relationship with verses 1-6
 1. In light of what Paul just said (Rom. 7:1-6), one might be tempted to think that the law is of no use today, or, even worse, that it is an evil
 2. Paul protects against this in Rom. 7:7-25
 - B. **Question:** Is the law sin? (7:7)
 1. Answer: By no means! The law is holy, righteous, and good (v.12)
 - a) The law is a reflection of the character of God, and so it is inherently holy. It cannot be otherwise
 2. The problem is with me, not the law.
 - C. **Question:** Did the law bring death? (7:13)
 1. Answer: By no means! Sin brings death.
 - a) Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:56
 - b) The law makes me aware that I am dead in my sins, but it is not the cause of death. Sin is the cause of death (James 1:15).
 - D. “Flesh” = the sin nature (e.g. Romans 7:14, 18)
 1. While I have been freed from the power of sin (Rom. 6) by virtue of being united with Christ (Rom. 5), I still retain a sin nature. As such, I am still capable of sin, and I do sin.
 - a) The power of sin does not control me any longer. I have a new power at work within me - the Holy Spirit. But the effects of sin are still present and active in my life.
 - b) One day the effects of sin will be removed entirely, but until then there is a real and continual battle that rages within me between the Spirit and the vestiges of my sin nature (Galatians 5:17-18).
 - (1) “We have a “body of death” (Rom. 7:24), from whence we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies (Phil. 3:20).”³
 - (2) “This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and

² James Montgomery Boice, *To the glory of God: A 40 day devotional on the book of Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 81.

³ Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor eds., *Overcoming sin and temptation: Three classic works by John Owen*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 51.

irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” WCF 13.2

(3) Q. 78. Whence ariseth the imperfection of sanctification in believers? A. The imperfection of sanctification in believers ariseth from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the spirit; whereby they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God. WLC

E. A distinctly Christian struggle (7:15-25)

1. Some people question whether Paul is speaking as a Christian here, or of his life prior to becoming a Christian.
 - a) It is a Christian struggle; it is Paul speaking as a Christian
 - b) Only a Christian can really and truly struggle with sin, because only the Christian has the Holy Spirit waging war against indwelling sin
 - c) We have work to do in this battle
 - d) “The contest is for our lives and souls. Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin is to neglect that excellent succor [assistance] which God has given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and trade with. Not to be daily mortifying sin is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has furnished us with a principle of doing it.”⁴
2. The Apostle Paul struggled with sin in the same way that we do. Ultimately, he prevailed. So shall we.

F. **Question:** Who will deliver me from this body of death? (7:24)

1. That is, how will this struggle with sin ever be resolved?
2. Answer: Only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ (7:25)
 - a) “In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, **through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome**; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” WCF 13.3
 - b) Romans 8 draws this idea out in further detail

⁴ Kopic and Taylor, 54.