

## Sanctification : Freedom from the Law of Condemnation

Carolyn Frame - CJ's City - Romans Chapter 7 - Time: 20 mins

What is law? Odd question for a lawyer to ask. I looked it up in the Oxford Dictionary and it is defined as:

*"The system of rules which a particular country or community recognises as regulating the actions of its members and which it may enforce by the imposition of penalties"*

In the New Testament context, however, what did the "law" mean - well - usually a reference to the 10 Commandments. The law laid down in the Old Testament, given to Moses which God's people were to follow.

St Paul starts Chapter 7 with a profound statement - something that - well, I don't know about you, but it really made me stop and think when I read it.

What am I talking about - let me read it to you again:

*"Do you not know brothers - for I am speaking to men who know the law - that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?"*

This is not the first time in this section of the book of Romans that Paul has raised a question like this. There are 3 times:

Firstly in Romans 6 verse 3 he says:

*"...don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?"*

Essentially Paul is telling us here that the old life we inherited in Adam (a life lived independent from God) ended when we believed in Christ's death - so we cannot go on unchanged. As we read at the beginning of Chapter 6:

*"What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*

We should be living transformed lives - a profession of faith cannot be accompanied by an unchanged life - otherwise we are simply kidding ourselves! We can kid ourselves, and others but not God.

Quoting from the lyrics of one of Truce's songs:-

*"Take a deep breath, Understand your position,*

*Without Christ you are officially missing,*

*Take a deep breath,*

***You can't fool the throne,***

***God the father recognises His own!"***

Changed because of our union with Christ in His death.

Again in Chapter 6 verse 16 Paul asks a similar question:

*"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness?"*

Changed because we serve a new master.

We then move to the question that greets us at the start of Chapter 7:-

*"Do you not know brothers - for I am speaking to men who know the law - that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?"*

As I said earlier - profound - what is St Paul saying here - in essence is that we are no longer under the law but under grace (God's free gift - something we do not deserve).

Not that the 10 Commandments are completely defunct (see Jesus teaching in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount - where Jesus Himself said that He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it) - no - what St Paul is saying is that - we are free from the law of condemnation - because of God's grace in sending His son to take our place and take the punishment that we deserved in dying for us - and then rising again in victory over death.

Paul's teaching here shows us how the law condemns in that it highlights our sin - it sets a measure we cannot hope to fulfil in our own strength - ok so you haven't killed anyone "Thou shalt not commit murder" - one out of 10 is not bad - but when we see how the law was actually unpacked by Jesus we see how high the bar is raised if you like and how we cannot hope to keep the law - if it was entirely dependent upon us - Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 - 22 say:

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ' Do not murder, and anyone who murders must be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca', is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."*

But in Jesus' death and resurrection we find freedom from the law of condemnation.

Let's look:-

1. verses 1-6: set free from the law by Jesus' death;
2. verses 7-13: God's law is good: sin is evil; and
3. verses 14-25: our every day struggle with sin as Christians.

Set free by Jesus' death.

In verses 1-3 we have the illustration that clarifies:- Simple picture of a woman who is married twice. Paul points out that in her first marriage, she was bound to her husband as long as he lived: now being bound by the law in this sense is probably difficult to understand in a day and age when marriage is not always seen as a "for life" commitment - [Pitt/Aniston] BUT - unquestionably in God's sight - marriage is intended to be for life.

However, this is not a teaching on marriage it is just used as an illustration here: that the woman is helpless to change her situation until her husband dies - she is bound to him in law - any attempt on her part to change that - violates the law and makes matters worse, becoming an adulterous if she lives with someone else when her husband is still alive.

In the illustration - we, who believe in Christ are the woman. But who is the first husband? (Debate - who 1<sup>st</sup> husband - some think

the law) Ray Stedman in his studies on Romans believes he is not the law (it is the law that binds them together as man and wife) but rather that the first husband is the "old self" the sinful nature - the life we all inherited in Adam. And just like the woman is helpless to change her situation as long as her husband lives - so we are - well lets face it we are stuck with ourselves - we can't run and hide from ourselves like we can hide from others. So whatever we are like, good, bad, nice or ugly - tough! Without God's work in our lives we are helpless to change.

And there is the root of the problem for us all - OURself - we are all self centred and everything is about me!

You know - the "old self" which is referred to in Romans is something we accept because we have lived with it so long - it forms part of our identity - but the truth is that the "old self" is really an alien invasion. It is not what God intended.

All of us at some time have felt the pull and hunger for righteousness - to live better lives to live lives that are "good". That pull comes from the outside - is there anyone here who can honestly say there has never been a time when they have said **"I wish I was not what I am, I wish I was different."**

The Reebok advert we see around on the buses/billboards "I am what I am" - no! What we are is not what God intended for us - He wants us to be different - He made us to be different.

People are attracted to righteous people. People were attracted to Christ! Unfortunately when we try to live righteous lives/good lives in our own strength we are nothing more than hypocrites - and adulterous. Although we try to do good - we are still bound by the law to the old self - to the sinful nature - to self centredness and selfishness. Although we try to do good - we are never far from the thought - "What's in it for me blood?"

But as I said earlier the wonderful truth is that Jesus took our "old self" upon Him on the cross - all our self centredness - all our hypocrisy - he took it for us and took our place (verse 4a): 2 Corinthians 5:21

*"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

Wow - have you fully grasped the truth of that in your life? That your "old self" that sinful nature we so easily accept as part of us - that old self died with Christ - and we have been/can be set free from that when we receive Christ as Lord of our lives. We should have been punished under law = death BUT Christ took the punishment in our place.

We are free from the first husband (as Stedman says) - and able to accept our new husband - Christ - today - here - right now! He takes the place that He deserves at the centre of our lives - He

claims back that which is His own - from the alien invasion - you and me!

That's exciting isn't it - BUT - we all know that we cannot escape from sin altogether in this life - it is still there on the outside - influencing us - its presence is still very real.

As we move to (verses 4-6) we see how that law exposes just how far we fall short - we are still, despite everything - self centred in our approach.

With Jesus Christ living in us - what do we produce by our lives - (verse 4) the fruit of God: we live truly fruitful lives. John 15:5 reminds us:

*"[Jesus] is the vine; [we] are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

It's amazing how busy we can be doing nothing. If we are not living our lives with Christ at the centre and allowing Him to live through us - brothers and sisters what will we achieve - John said it right there - "NOTHING". Our lives are fruitless without Christ - in fact what do we do - Romans 7:5 - we produce the fruit of death. (Barrenness, emptiness, nothing).

We died to the law through Christ's physical death in our place - why - so that we might belong to another - to Christ - And if that is true in our lives as Christians we do not need the 10 commandments or the Sermon on the Mount as a written code/law to guide us - rather we need to allow Christ to live and love through us - He will be our guide - and you know what - we wont need to be told : love your neighbour - because we will do that automatically in God's love - we then don't need to be told "Thou shalt not steal" or "Thou shalt not covet" because if God is living in us we automatically wont do those things.

So - what am I saying - do we not need the law, the 10 Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount - well - lets look at Jesus - what did He do. He lived a perfect life - and would have kept the law even if it did not exist - but what did He do - remember what I said earlier: He did not come to abolish the law - no - on the contrary - He honoured the law - He highly regarded the law.

Living in God's Spirit - obedience to the law is automatic. Desire within us - should want to live CHANGED lives.

Verse 6 Romans - do it because we want to - comes naturally - do it because we LOVE Christ - not because we HAVE to.

As we look at verses 7-13 we see the purpose of the law. You see - we all have an odd view of sin - we know that sin exists but what do we think it is - those little mistakes, those things we do wrong from time to time - we make a few mistakes but our heart is right -

isn't it? After all each and every one of us - well, we are all right in our own eyes. I've got to ask myself - and you've got to ask yourself - how many times just this week - no indeed - how many times just this morning have you thought/ have I thought - I am right and they/he/she is wrong!

What Paul is saying here (verse 7-13) - is he thought he could do it - he thought he could keep that law - like we all do - but then the realisation dawns - the problem is within ourselves - OURselves - our sinful nature. God's law highlights the sin deep within our own lives: verse 7 (its not the law that's bad - the law is good)

*"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not!*

*Indeed I would not have known what sin was except for the*

*law..."* our sin highlighted by the law.

Sin uses the law to provoke evil (verse 8).

Sin uses the law to sentence people to death (verse 9).

But look at verse 13:

*"Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."*

You know - God did not give men the 10 Commandments to keep men from sinning - no turn back to chapter 5 verse 20:

*"The law was added so that trespass might increase."*

What the law does is show us we cannot please God by self effort. (Coveting illustration) But if it wasn't for the law highlighting the true fact of sin in our lives - we would be tempted to see sin as mere blemishes on our charter. We would not realise the seriousness of it - we wouldn't realise the need to do something about it. (Shining torch) Until we realise that sin is "utterly sinful"

or as the RSV translation says in verse 13: sin becomes **"sinful beyond measure"**

We do not understand the need to throw ourselves entirely on Christ. When we appreciate the depth of sin in our lives - that our sin causes pain not only to ourselves but to others, that we see others as loveless towards us because we have been loveless towards them - until we see that - we do not realise how desperately we need Him, we need Christ to live through us - we need to allow Christ to be Himself in us! Freedom from the law of condemnation - see rest Ch 5 verse 20.

Read again Romans 7 v 12 and 13.

That is the purpose of the law - but of course God through His Holy Spirit also uses the law to show us when we have fallen short and to help bring us to our senses - we therefore need the law - even as Christians to help rebuke us and correct us when we have the tendency we do to push Jesus off the throne in our lives and

sit right back down there ourselves.

It's a struggle! So - how do we do it right - how do we allow Christ to be Himself in us - how do we walk with the Holy Spirit day by day? How do we get free from the condemnation and move forward being sanctified (purified) day by day. (verses 14-25)

Well - that's just it - it's a journey - a walk. How do we keep walking... When babies learn to walk (and we've all been there) they know what to do - they automatically put one foot in front of the other - the problem is they get distracted or they get so caught up in the process (scared) they lose their focus and then of course - fall down!

And it's the same for us in our Christian walk. There have I'm sure been times for all of us not matter how short lived when we have seen God work through us or experienced His touch in our lives/ His power but like Peter who boldly set out walking on the water - something happens which takes out focus off God and we start to

sink.

Paul in verses 14-20 (again debate whether Paul is talking about his Christian life or life before) talks about the behaviour he sees in his own life and I'm sure as you read it - you thought yeah - that's me - hang on that's my experience right there - not doing what I want to do but doing what I do not want to do - I know that!

Paul sets out the struggle he faces when he tries to live life as Christian as he struggles to obey the law and do good. And I don't think he's alone in that - is he?

When I was in Hong Kong there was a sign on a tram which caught my attention: it said "No spitting" and I thought that's funny and then you know what - I didn't do it - but I had an overwhelming desire to spit - something that had not even come into my mind before I read the sign! Its always the way - nothing makes you want to do something more than someone telling you that you can't

do it!

That's a silly illustration but what Paul is saying here in this second part of Chapter 7 is that we all face this struggle - we know what we want to do but there is something that stops us from doing it and in fact we do the opposite. Desire to do good v's desire to do evil. The desire remains. We get in this baffling cycle - this battle. All of us - no one is excluded. Paul is not talking about those Christians who have backslidden - or fallen in some major way - we are all with Paul in verse 14 - unspiritual - sold as a slave to sin. Not understand - something takes over - verses 17 and 20. We are still subject to the law of sin and death (flesh). See verses 21-25. (Note good in struggle if Christian - if not and accept doing wrong - not good).

Firstly Paul knows the power of temptation - he wants to do good but guess what - evil is right there with him. We are not spared temptation as Christians - even Jesus faced temptation - no in

temptation we have an opportunity to learn how to refuse evil and choose good. It is not a sin to be tempted - but we do sin when we give in to temptation. We need to take hold of those things that tempt us - we need to avoid certain situations - we need to realise the seriousness of it - take hold of it - and say NO! Not to give in to it - this will be a battle and will require us to take one step at a time! Think about what you find tempting - don't excuse it - don't allow it - fight it - not in your strength but in His!

Keep short accounts with God.

Death to each one when it arises.

Nick Cruz - get up when fall - insults God if we stay down.

Secondly Paul learnt that the flesh could not respond to the demands made upon it. On our own we are sinful and helpless - unable to please God by our own effort.

We all make a mistake - we all think sin is not doing something right

(which of course is true on one level) but let me put it to you this way - its more than that - sin is trying to do right in our own effort. And Jesus knew this - he warned his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane the night he was betrayed to "Watch and pray" - but what happened - the flesh was weak - they fell asleep instead of praying and we see Peter only a matter of hours later completely devastated at his denial of Christ, his friend, his Lord and Saviour. We can all, I'm sure along with Peter and Paul echo the words of verse 24 "What a wretched man/woman I am!".

In our own strength we all make plans, come up with programmes and expect God to bless them but nothing seems to happen. Jacob was doing that - he struggled with God for God's blessing and in the end God put Jacob's hip out of joint so he would appreciate his weakness and his utter need for God. When we find ourselves in that situation making plans - knowing what we want to do - we need to stop - actually stop and hand those over to God - allow Him to have His way in us - not expect Him to bless what we want - just

because - well I want it to be this way!

In the end - baffled by the endless cycle of our behaviour, defeated by trying to do good in our own strength and realising what the law highlights in each of our lives - the hold which sin has upon us - where do we come to - verse 25:

Desperate cry - reassurance certainty of victory in Christ.

*"Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

The power belongs to God. Psalm 62 verse 11 in the King James Version says: *"Power belongeth unto God"* He alone has the power to break sin and death - through Him we are FREE from the condemnation of the law.

In verse 25 Paul sums it up that we know there is deliverance in Christ - and thanks be to God for that - but as we know - as we serve the law of God with our redeemed minds - with a will set free from condemnation by the grace of God - inevitably we all still

struggle with our old self, our sinful nature and find ourselves slaves to the law of sin. [not free without God - either serve Him (complete freedom) or not].

But the glorious news is: at the beginning of Chapter 8 which we can get a sneak preview into today - but must leave to next week to explore - but its important to read now:

Verses 1-4 of Chapter 8:

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.....*

In Him we are free from the condemnation our actions deserve. We need to surrender ourselves fully to Him trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection - He took the punishment in our place (what we deserved). We are free - Thanks be to God through our Lord

Jesus Christ.

So in response let us go from here changed to live transformed lives. Changed lives. With God at the centre - allowing Jesus to live in us - be Himself through us. We need to do it in His strength. Because one thing is certain - no matter how hard we try we will always fail. We will be in a battle as Christians as I have said but in Him we have the victory. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us - Philippians 4:13.