

Free From the Law! Are You Serious?

The Gospel According to Paul (Part of)

Teaching # 5 in Our Series on Romans

Romans 7

Up Wexford

- 2 weeks ago I sat on my couch glued to the TV as the Wexford senior camogie team took on Cork in the All-Ireland Final.
- They were going for 3 in a row and they had previously stopped Cork's attempt at 3-in-a-row! Earlier in the year Cork had beaten them in the league final. This match had all the ingredients of thriller in the making.
- And it was And

We Won!

We Won!

- I wasn't on the field. I'm too old and the wrong gender for a start. **BUT**
 **WE WON!**
- There's not a person in the 145,320 or so population of County Wexford that doesn't believe that **WE WON!**
- There were only 15 players and a handful of subs that made up the team. Throw in the coach, the manager and the selectors and you've still only got a few people at the centre of that victory.
- **BUT**, there's not a person among those 145,320 people who claim to be Wexford men, women and children that doesn't see him/herself as in some way identified with, or in solidarity with that team and that win. **We Won!**

Solidarity: A Key to Understanding Paul's Good News

- ✦ Running through the letter to Romans so far you may have noticed this theme of solidarity.
 - ▣ In Adam all sinned /died [Romans 5]
 - ▣ In Christ all were made alive [Romans 5]
- ✦ Paul in developing the solidarity argument talks of the “first Adam” and the “last Adam”, i.e. Christ
 - ▣ Died with Christ [Romans 6]
 - ▣ Buried w/ Christ [Romans 6]
 - ▣ Raised w/ Christ [Romans 6]
 - ▣ United w/ Christ in his death and united w/ Him in His resurrection
- ✦ Through that unity w/ Christ in His death and resurrection the believer has died to the power of sin and the power of death.
- ✦ Now in Chapter 7 Paul continues his argument by insisting that the believer has died to the Law.

Solidarity, cont'd,

- ✦ Solidarity is a consistent biblical motif.
 - ▣ David & Goliath
 - ▣ The argument developed in Hebrews to prove that the priesthood of Christ is superior to that of the Levites.
 - ▣ Christ our forerunner [*archigos* = champion], in Hebrews.

The essence of solidarity:

What happens to the representative figure is deemed to have happened to all those whom he represents!

Solidarity, cont'd,

- Christ's death is your death!
 - Christ's burial is your burial!
 - Christ's resurrection is your resurrection
 - Christ's ascension is your ascension
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- ▣ Christ died to sin so too have you died to sin
 - ▣ Christ rose to a new life; so too have you risen to a new life freed from the power of sin and death
 - ▣ Christ ascended to heaven; so too have you ascended so that the source of your life here proceeds from Heaven.
 - ▣ Christ is our "team," our representative, our champion!

We Won! We Won! We Won! We Won! We Won!

Solidarity, cont'd,

- It's a judicial position. That is, it has to do with our standing before God as part of God's judgement of the matter. Because of our sin
- If I may borrow from John's way of expressing this reality we have ***"passed from death into life."***
- But it is also more than a judicial position. A real change has been effected in the believer that is so significant that it can be spoken of both in terms of resurrection [Paul], and being ***born again*** [John]
- Paul will go on in chapter 8 to explain it in terms of the Spirit's work within us.
- So it is both a ***judicial position*** and a ***lived experience*** to ever increasing degrees.

Solidarity, cont'd,

- Here in the first part of chapter 7 Paul continues the argument of chapter 6. There we died to sin. Here we died to the Law!
- The analogy Paul uses to get his point across is of a wife whose husband dies. The law binding her to her husband no longer applies because he is dead. It's an inverted argument because Paul is insisting that we, *[corresponding to the wife]*, have died to the Law. The point that Paul is making is that death ends the power of the Law over a person!

Romans 7:1-6

7 Do you not know, brothers and sisters - for I am speaking to those who know the law - that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?

2 For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. **3** So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

Romans 7:1-6, cont'd,...

- ⁴ So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, ***in order that we might bear fruit for God.*** ⁵ For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.
- ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law ***so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.***

[and were set free to give yourselves to another. REB],

The New International Version. 2011 (Ro 7:16). Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI

Comment

- Paul continues to elaborate on the “death” of Christians that he began in chapter 6. There the primary point was that the Christian believer died to sin.
- Here he asserts that the believer has died to the Law!
 - It is not a new subject.
 - It is not another death.
 - It is simply a continuation of the argument, and
 - It is another dimension of the believer’s death with Christ.
- What is surprising – may be surprising to us – and was horrifically surprising to Christian Jews, and Gentiles converted from among the “God-fearers” in the synagogues is that Paul places the Law on the sin/death side of his “balance sheet” – sin increased because of the Law - and together with sin, the flesh and death is a power from which people must be set free. *[More on this later]*

Comment, cont'd....

- In order to understand Romans and Paul's argument here we need to take a step back and look at the big picture from Paul's perspective. Commentaries frequently miss this, possibly because they are so focussed on the text - a case of being *unable to see the forest because one is standing too close to a tree.*
- There is a very significant clause in chapter 6 – v. 14 – that I believe is key
 - “.....*for you are no longer under Law but under grace*”
- If we grasp the significance of this we will have little difficulty in rightly interpreting chapters 7 and 8. Indeed, we will begin to understand why Paul is so strongly insistent in the things he says in regard to the Law.

Comment, cont'd....

- Paul's framework is utterly *eschatological*, i.e. his framework is utterly an “*end-time*” or “*last-times*” framework. The end-time has arrived and God's end-time promises have been inaugurated. Among other things, the end-time is characterised by two essential realities
 1. The resurrection from the dead
 2. The gift of the Holy Spirit
- The resurrection from the dead has already happened in Christ. His resurrection is paradigmatic for ours and guarantees ours
- The gift of the Holy Spirit has been given and is the essential identifying mark of the people of God
- He, i.e. the Holy Spirit is, in a way of speaking, the New Covenant in the sense that He is in large measure the substance of it and His indwelling presence effects in God's people what the Old Covenant could not. *“The Spirit serves for Paul as the essential element of the new covenant.”*
[Gordon Fee, God's Empowering Presence, p. 508.
- Some of the language in chapter 7 shows clearly that Paul is referring to New Covenant realities

Comment, cont'd....

- ✦ He may be hinting at it in his analogy of the married woman. Marriage is a covenant until death. Being dead to the old covenant we are now free to enter into the new one – “...so that we might bear fruit for God.” [v. 4]. Judaism itself recognised that the first covenant failed to do that, which is why they hoped for the promised new one which would make fruitful living possible. They didn’t recognise that God was establishing this in Christ, because Jesus wasn’t doing things the way they thought He should.
- ✦ **V. 5** “*When we were in the flesh*” I.e. “... before we were in Christ, before we were in this covenant ...!” “*While we lived on the level of mere human nature!*” [REB]. Gordon Fee comments that the phrase means our “*former way of life that was in opposition to God and therefore full of sin.*” [God’s Empowering Presence, p. 506]
- ✦ “*But now,, we are released from the Law to serve God in a new way, the way of the Spirit in contrast to the old way of a written code!*” v. 6 [REB]. [Lit. “*in newness of the Spirit*” = “*in the new covenant ratified by Christ and characterised by the life of the Spirit*” [Fee, p. 507]

Comment, cont'd....

- ✦ This is all New Covenant stuff, the background of which is Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36

Jeremiah 31:31 *“Indeed, a time is coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.³² It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them,” says the LORD. ³³ “But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,” says the LORD. **“I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds.** I will be their God and they will be my people.*

34 *“People will no longer need to teach their neighbours and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me,” says the LORD. “For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done.”*

Comment, cont'd....

■ Ezekiel 36:25 – 28

25 *I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols.*

26 *I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh. **27** I will put my Spirit within you; I will take the initiative and you will obey my statutes and carefully observe my regulations. **28** Then you will live in the land I gave to your fathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.*

Biblical Studies Press. 2006. The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Eze 36:25–28). Biblical Studies Press

Comment, cont'd....

- Under the New Covenant the Law would no longer be an external code but God would effect such an internal change in the lives of His people that it could be described in the poetic language of the prophets as **“writing His law on their hearts.”**
- Paul’s essential argument through this section of the letter may be summarised like this:
 - ▣ *“History and experience show that all the Law can do is to **inform us** regarding God’s standards of holiness and righteousness, but it has **no power to transform us**. However, under the New Covenant we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, God’s own presence within us, to effect in us the kind of character transformation that God requires and which the Law would approve. Consequently, it is through walking in the Spirit that the righteous character revealed in the Law is now made possible. The Law couldn’t do it and to attempt personal transformation through the Law will only result in failure! Furthermore, the Law is an external code and belongs to the Old Covenant which has now been superseded by a more effective one where the power for righteous living is internal and part of the DNA of every Christian believer!”*

Comment, cont'd....

- It will be helpful to recognise the structure of Paul's argument here in chapters 7 & 8 as I think it will help you understand what he is getting at! Verses 5 & 6 are parallel to each other

7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful desires, aroused by the law, were active in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

7:6 But now we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code.

Biblical Studies Press. 2006. The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Ro 7:5-6). Biblical Studies Press

- These verses are before and after Christ, before and after the New Covenant and together virtually form a thesis statement for what follows. **v.5** relates to 7:7-25 and **v.6** relates to 8:1-17. That is, the rest of chapter 7 works out **v.5** and is a description of life without Christ, while the “but now” reality of **v.6** is described in 8:1-17

Romans 7:7:25

7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! Certainly, I would not have known sin except through the law. For indeed I would not have known what it means to desire something belonging to someone else if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” **8** But sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of wrong desires. For apart from the law, sin is dead. **9** And I was once alive apart from the law, but with the coming of the commandment sin became alive **10** and I died. So I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life brought death! **11** For sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it I died. **12** So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. **13** Did that which is good, then, become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin, so that it would be shown to be sin, produced death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Romans 7:7:25

14 For we know that the law is spiritual - but I am unspiritual, sold into slavery to sin. **15** For I don't understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want - instead, I do what I hate. **16** But if I do what I don't want, I agree that the law is good. **17** But now it is no longer me doing it, but sin that lives in me. **18** For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it. **19** For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want! **20** Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me. **21** So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me. **22** For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. **23** But I see a different law in my members waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members. **24** Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? **25** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Comments on 7:7-25

- ✦ More than a little ink has been spilled, and hot air vented on arguing whether Paul is describing the life of a believer before or after conversion in this passage. If you came here expecting me to add to that debate you will, in one way, be disappointed because I'm not getting involved in a debate that is wrong-minded! Paul is simply not addressing that issue. The context in which the passage occurs is the larger discussion of the good news that Christ has liberated the believer from **Torah**, [Law], **flesh**, **sin** and **death**. These verses are a digression the sole purpose of which is *“to defend Torah as a good thing, despite its failure to secure righteousness and effectively deal with sin.”* [Fee, p. 508]

Comments on 7:7-25

- As an explication of being *“in the flesh”* [v. 5] the question about whether this is the believer’s experience before or after conversion is clearly answered – it is a description of life outside of Christ before the gift of the Spirit.
- What Paul says of believers here in v. 6 and in 8:1-17 *“makes it certain that for Paul believers are not ‘in the flesh’ in the sense of living in keeping with the values and from the perspective of the former age, which is now passing away.”* [Fee, p. 506].

Comments on 7:7-25

- ✦ I'm not going into a detailed exposition here. The structural framework I've given will enable you to understand what Paul is saying. But hear Gordon Fee before moving on;
 - ▣ The essential thing to note in these verses is that they "conjoin[s] several things in a new way that calls for some explanation, i.e. the sequence: **Torah** -> **flesh** -> **sin** -> **death**. Torah arouses the passions of sin that are resident in one's flesh, which when yielded to, lead to death. As Paul will state with utmost confidence in 8:2-4, Christ's death and the Spirit's presence have effectively brought an end to all four of the offending particulars (**Law**, **flesh**, **sin**, **death**), while at the same time ushering in the life of the future, lived in the power of the Spirit, in which the goal of Torah is fulfilled." (Fee, p.506).
 - ▣ How does the Law work to increase sin? [My jacket illustration]

Comments on 7:7-25

- ✦ It is not easy, even in the best of commentaries to find a satisfactory explanation of the personification of sin within the person. *“It’s not me but sin living in me!”* How are we to understand this *“sin living in me”*?
- ✦ I think that going back to the very beginning of sin as recorded in the Bible will give us a satisfactory explanation. In the Garden of Eden the essence of sin was attempting to live independently of God.
- ✦ When we attempt to do that God becomes our antagonist. His Law becomes our obstacle, and so on.
- ✦ Who will deliver us? Wrong question!
- ✦ Who has delivered (released) us? **v. 6** [*aorist, passive, indicative denoting past completed action with continuing effect*]. Thanks be to God, it is Jesus Christ our Lord. All of this is for one particular purpose expressed in v. 4

“..... so that we may bear fruit for God!”