

Romans 7:1

1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

Romans 7:1 begins with the third *know ye not* statement in Paul's epistles. This rhetoric necessarily connects the question of 7:1 with the previous verses of chapter 6. And how did we end chapter 6? We saw that the wages of sin, the compensation due to us because of sin, is death, and we followed that train of thought to its logical conclusion that the wages of sin is death in a soteriological sense for those outside of Christ, as well as physical death for all men, in that all have sinned. For those *in* Christ, it also has the added dimensions of the death we died in our inner man when we trusted the gospel, and of *functional death*, that is, our ability to serve God.

Here in Romans 7:1, Paul says that as long as a man is alive, the law has dominion over him. The penalty for sin, we have learned by now, is death. And that is essentially what the gospel of Christ is—it is a death sentence for the old man. When we trusted Christ, our old man was crucified with Him. Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3)?

The wages of sin, Romans 6:23 says, is death, and that is how the chapter concludes, and we are immediately taken to Romans 7:1, where Paul begins to speak about the Law.

When we say "The Law," we are speaking about the Law that was given to Moses by God Himself. This Law is based upon 2 commandments—loving God and loving your neighbor. Jesus said these are the greatest of the commandments because upon them rest all the others:

Matthew 22:37-40

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 *This is the first and great commandment.*

39 *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

40 *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

From these two we get the ten commandments, and from the ten there are an estimated 613 more detailed in the Torah that are expansions of those ten, some of which detail instructions for temple service and worship in Jerusalem.

The Law given to Moses is the only objective rule of righteousness ever given to man in the form of commandments. Since it is God's Law, it necessarily reflects His character and righteousness, and thus the commandments contained therein are perfect. God's Law is perfect. The Covenant system which incorporated that Law however, though sufficient for the time, was not, in that the service performed by the priests—the sacrifices and offerings—had no power to actually fix the problem of sin.

We see in the Bible that the very phrase *The Law* can be used to refer to the Laws concerning the Covenant system of temple service itself:

Hebrews 7:11-16

11 *If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?*

12 *For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*

13 *For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.*

14 *For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.*

15 *And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,*

16 *Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.*

The Law contained commands concerning the priesthood. Therefore if the priesthood itself is to be changed, the Law itself must also change. The Old Testament Law, though an expression of

God's righteousness, was and is not a perpetual ordinance. How could it be, if it was to be changed? The standards and expressions of *God's righteousness* will *never* change, and yet the Old Testament prescription for righteousness *must*.

Paul is going to say later in **Romans 10:4**,

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

The Law, as prescribed by the Old Testament, has an end. *Christ* is that end. This is why Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3 that the glory that shone about Moses' face, after receiving the Law, was done away, and that veil he used to hide that vanishing glory is as the veil that lies over the hearts of the unbelieving Israelites, so that they could not discern the fleeting nature of that Old system.

2 Corinthians 3: 7, 12-14

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away...

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ.

That same chapter explains that the Old Testament was, in reality, a ministry of death and condemnation:

2 Corinthians 3:6-9

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

Now this brings us full circle: back in Romans 6:14, Paul makes the connection between *the dominion of sin* and the Law:

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

To be under the Old Testament Law was to be under the dominion of sin, because as we've said, the Law made the command, but in no way empowered man to keep it. It was a cold, hard command etched in stone that sentenced death without feeling, because its performance rested upon the power of man's faulty flesh.

Now Romans 7:1 says that *the Law* hath dominion over man *as long as he liveth*.

Romans 7:1

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?

And so we see an inherent connection between the Law and sin itself. If a man liveth, he is under the dominion of the Law. And if he is under the dominion of the Law, he is under the dominion of sin, because the Law *reveals* sin, and offering no solution to it, therefore empowers sin and condemnation.

Consider what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15:53-57

53 *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

54 *So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

55 *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

56 *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

57 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The reason I am going through this is because what Romans chapter 7 is going to be dealing with is the believer's relationship to the Law. What relationship *do* we have to the Law? Is the Law something we should be attempting to "keep?" Certainly, a man gets saved and wants to live for God, and so how does he go about doing this? The natural thought is to keep God's commandments. But we typically have a very myopic view of what that means, not discerning that man has thousands of years of documented history of abject and total failure in regards to keeping the Law, and that even the best are recorded as failures and are forever cemented in the pages of scripture for us to see.

In their zeal, they desire to keep the commandments, but they are often some man made version of the commandments that they've fashioned for themselves. If you are going to keep the commandments, the weekly sabbath is not optional. And neither are the seven feasts days. Nor are the types of clothes you wear or the fabrics they're made of. Neither is the way a man fashions the edges of his beard. Nor are the sacrifices and offerings for that matter. Perhaps now we see the problem here: God tore down that system *entirely*, He quite literally rent the veil into the Holiest of Holies and later allowed the temple to be destroyed, so how would one go about fulfilling righteousness according to the Law? There is no temple in Jerusalem, there are no priests, and even if there were, God still would not be operating through that system because He has instituted something different. He is not even operating through Israel whatsoever today.

And so in conclusion, to be made free from sin necessitates being made free from the law, as the strength of sin *is* the Law, and this requires being loosed from the flesh itself. What we are going to learn is there is a direct correlation between the Law and the flesh. As long as a man is alive in the flesh, he is under the dominion of the Law. Now we see why we had to be put to death in Christ, quite literally in the inner man, and judicially in the flesh. Our old "in-Adam" nature was put to death, and we were given a new nature in Christ, and our flesh itself was

judicially reckoned crucified with Christ, so that nothing we do in this body can affect our justified standing.