

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Free From Sin-Aggravating Law

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But now 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 7:4-6

The topic for today’s study deals with one of the most important principles for living the victorious Christian life. So many of us get caught in the error that Paul himself experienced in Romans 7. We attempt to live our lives by keeping the law, either the actual Law revealed to the Jews in the OT, or some other external moral code. God never intended for us to try to do this, and such efforts always lead to failure. **No one could justify him or herself by keeping the Law, or by “being good”. Neither can we become more spiritually mature by trying to keep an external moral code.** We misunderstand what the Law of God was for, and we try to keep it by self-will and discipline. Unfortunately, when we do that we actually aggravate the sin problem in our lives. **Our attempt to keep the Law inevitably gives power to sin to deceive us and lead us to disobey.** Our initial intent might be good, but **the Law-keeping strategy is based upon a naïve understanding of the power of sin that remains in us, and it is doomed to failure.** Let’s do a brief survey to see what Paul has to say about the Law:

- (1.) **The Law is holy, righteous and good** (Rom. 7:12,16; I Tim.1:8). It is a revelation of God’s will, character and requirements for people in covenant with Him.
- (2.) **Law is not for a righteous person.** Rather, it was given to *expose, confront and punish evil* and *rebellious* people (I Tim. 1:9,10).
- (3.) **Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin** (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). This *knowledge* of sin is both *intellectual* (i.e., we find out what God’s standards are, which may be different than our culture’s) and *experiential* (i.e., we feel convicted and guilty when we realize we are breaking God’s Law).
- (4.) **The Law clearly reveals when we are violating or transgressing God’s will, and makes us liable to His wrath and judgment** (Rom. 4:15). Before Moses gave the Law, sin was still operating in people, bringing about the negative consequences of disobedience, but the sin was not counted as a *transgression*, since there were no clear moral standards that people could disobey (cf. Rom. 5:12-14). *The Law was given to clarify what God considered to be sin.* Then, if we choose to sin, it is a clear transgression (Rom. 5:20).
- (5.) **The Law was given to Israel to be a “child-conductor”, or temporary custodian, until the righteousness of God in Christ could be made available** (Gal. 3:19-25; 4:1-7). As a custodian, *the Law put limits on sin*, and kept people from running amok, much like a custodian or guardian would keep a child under protection, discipline and instruction until it would become an adult. Leaving a child to its own devices would be to invite harm. *The Law was to provide a measure of guidance and protection* from the destructive consequences of sin. It also prepares us for the gospel by showing us our need for a Savior.
- (6.) **No one can be justified, or made acceptable, before God by keeping the Law** (Rom. 3:20,28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; Eph. 2:8,9; Tit. 3:5-7). James tells us that if we stumble even in *one* point of the Law, we are considered as “a transgressor”. *It is like we were guilty of breaking the whole Law* (Jas. 2:10,11).
- (7.) **The Law actually gives the sin within us an opportunity to rise up. It arouses and empowers sin** (Rom. 7:5,8-11; I Cor. 15:56; II Cor. 3:5,6). It is not as though there is anything *wrong* with the Law. *Sin* is like a *principle of rebellion*. Exposure to the standard of the Law is like giving sin a fulcrum, a *fixed point*, from which to move us toward sin and against righteousness. The Greek philosopher and scientist, Archimedes, said, “Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world.” He said this because he discovered the power of levers. He knew that with a fixed point, and a long enough lever, he could move the heaviest objects with ease. The Law provides the rebellion principle within us that “fixed point” from which to move us into self-deception and actions that lead to separation from God. It is important that we understand this. *It is NOT that there is anything evil about the Law.* Rather, the *sin* within us *uses what is good* (the Law) to get us to fall, so that *it* (the sin within us) is exposed, and *shown to be as evil and deceptive as it really is.* Or, another way to think of it is that the Law is like a stick that we pass in front of an adder’s hole, and the snake suddenly strikes at it. There is nothing evil about the stick, but it reveals the

presence and violent nature of the serpent.

- (8.) **Since the Law aggravates the sin within our flesh, we cannot possibly succeed in being righteous by trying to keep the Law.** Paul puts it this way, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was *through the flesh...*” (Rom. 8:3). Again, the problem is NOT the Law, it is the fact that *sin* in our flesh *takes advantage and opportunity* when we try to live by the Law. Sin is *aroused and empowered* by our focus on the Law, and begins to motivate us to rebel. Paul writes, “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different principle in the members of my body, *waging war against* the law of my mind and *making me a prisoner* of the principle of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:21-23).
- (9.) **Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, or the Prophets, but to fulfill them** (Matt. 5:17-20). *We are not to think that the Law is irrelevant, or that it does not matter.* What is important is to recognize that our walk with Christ in the Spirit will fulfill all that the Law ever required, and more besides. This will *not* happen by *focusing on the Law*, but on *following the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 8:3,4; Gal. 5:13,14). The revelation of the Law *serves as a cross-check*, to make certain that it is, indeed, the Holy Spirit we are following. The fruit of the Spirit’s operation in our lives should not contradict the written revelation of God’s will.
- (10.) **The demands of the Law upon our sinful self were fulfilled by our death and resurrection with Jesus.** These are three-fold: (a.) *Jesus removed the curse of the Law*, by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:10-14); (b.) *Jesus paid for our sins*, by taking the punishment in our place (Isa. 53; I Pet. 2:24; 3:18); and, (c.) *Jesus fulfilled the Law’s demand for our death*, by putting us to death with Him (Gal. 2:19,20).
- (11.) **Our death with Christ, and spiritual rebirth, removes any further obligation to the Law and frees us to be joined to Jesus as our Master** (Rom. 7:1-4). We can now serve Him in the power of the Spirit, instead of focusing on the old letter of the Law. *Our freedom from Law follows the same rationale* as our freedom from the power of sin (Rom. 6:3-11), or the power of the flesh (Gal. 5:24). *We were united with Jesus in His death and resurrection* (Col. 2:9-15). This cut off our connection to our past, and established a new identity in Christ as a child of God. We are no longer under Law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).
- (12.) **The fulfillment of the Law, and victory over sin, come about naturally as we live by grace, walking by faith in the Spirit, not by focusing on Law** (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:1-6,14,16-18). Paul said that if we try to live by the Law, in effect we cut ourselves off from the benefits of Christ (Gal. 5:2-6). *To live by the Spirit, we must learn to live by trusting God for His righteousness*, rather than trying to establish our own righteousness by living in our own understanding and self-effort.

The difference between living by the Law, or by any external moral code, is that *we are in control*, whereas life in the Spirit requires us to respond to God as the initiator. In living by the Law, we live out of our own understanding of what is right and wrong. We operate out of our head, instead of our inner spirit. We are left to deal with temptation based upon our own vigilance, our understanding, and our self-will. Of course, as we have seen, **when we live by the Law, the sin principle within us is empowered to begin to deceive us. Self-deception will take away our firm vigilance and our ability to clearly recognize temptation.** Our determination to walk in righteousness begins to erode, and our fleshly desires begin to preoccupy our thinking. Since we are not relying on the Spirit, we are basically left with our own resources. **In living by the Law, we are forever having to restrain ourselves from fulfilling the fleshly desires from the power of sin within us.** Eventually, we give in to those desires. Therefore, we shouldn’t be surprised if we do not have much more success at being righteous than moral non-Christians do. This is *not* what God has made available to us in Christ, however. We are living a very sub-standard Christian life, *walking like mere men* (I Cor. 3:3). Our lives should be radically different.

Our Christian experience is supposed to be much more than this. **If we live by the Spirit, we are looking to God for our signals. We respond to His leadings**, even if they seem silly or inconvenient. We don’t have to understand everything about a situation in order to obey God’s leading. Often, He would direct us away from a temptation before we are even aware of it. Or, **because we are relying on Him, He imparts joy and life to us, which keep us from feeling empty and susceptible to temptation** (Jn. 6:63; II Cor. 3:6). **When living by the Spirit, we do what our heart wants to do.** We learn to put aside fleshly desires, but *our focus is on our relationship with God, not fighting with our inner lusts.* We learn to find our joy and life in God, and He lifts us above the “law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2; Neh. 8:10). As we abide in Christ, we are filled with *His* heart and mind, and we find ourselves prompted to *express the graciousness of His heart* in love and good deeds (Tit. 2:11-14). As we do *this*, others quickly notice our lives, because they see the *radiance of Christ* in us (Matt. 5:16).