

St. Paul's Letter to the Romans

Collect for Trinity IX

Grant us Lord, we beseech thee, the right spirit to think and do always such things as are right; that we, who cannot do anything that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Romans 7:1-6

Do you not know, brethren -- for I am speaking to those who know the law -- that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

I. What Law?

- A. Paul addresses us as those who know the Law, what Law is he referring to?
- B. Is there a difference to Paul of Roman Law, Jewish Law etc?

II. Why are we back to the Law?

- A. This is the dominate theme of Romans – the Law kills, Faith gives life
- B. Righteousness is the first fruit of Faith and the Law
- C. The gift of Faith (Grace) has been given to all believers – Jew and Gentile

This is why Paul links to both Abraham and Adam in his arguments

- D. The task of the Believer is to live out the gift of righteousness which comes from Faith
- E. Hope exists because, Faith is now the dominate power not sin because of Jesus Christ

F. The issue of the root of sin is finally squarely in Paul sights

1. Sin is from the obedience to the Law as if the Law saves and thus does not allow for the freedom of Faith through Grace and the Spirit of God
2. The greatest threat to the inclusive promise of the Gospel is the imposition of the Law upon converts to faith in Christ Jesus

III. An Example - Marriage and death

A. Note the intimacy of the form of address – brothers and sister – Paul is talking to us not the imagery Jew

B. The laws of a society bind a person in that society when they are alive- death ends this obligation

1. The wife and husband are used as an example – adultery or remarriage
2. Paul expand the idea to include the death of Baptism, death in Christ so we are now free to give ourselves to another – the Christ and the freedom of Faith

C. The Body of Christ – an important image for Paul

1. The physical body of Christ that dies on the Cross
2. The Body of Christ that is the Church – from the Risen body of Christ

D. The Second analogy to Marriage – Be fruitful and multiply

1. We in this new state of relationship have given ourselves to Christ
2. Like in human marriage we are also to be fruitful and multiply
 - .a We are to be inviting other into this experience of new life (similar to courtship leading to marriage)
 - b. The Body of Christ that is the church is to be the place where nascent Christians are nourished and encourages (similar to the human family and children)

E. The Counter Point – The Past

1. To emphasize the demarcation between the old and the new Paul uses this passage to illustrate the differences between the Old life and the New
2. When we were in the flesh –before Baptismal death
3. Sin producing passions, provoked by the Law
 - a. This is an important thought – does the Law produce sin?
 - b. Paul is saying that the Law is an illustrated guide to sin, puts in our minds
 - c. He is also saying that having the Law leads the person to believe that they are morally superior so that they fall into the trap of sin

What is a contemporary issue that evokes just this set of arguments on both sides of the question?
Sex education in Schools

Romans 7:7-13

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

I. Sin and the Law Further Developed

A. The identify of (I) - "I should not have know sin"

1. Autobiographical – Paul himself

The problem with this analysis is the later statement the I says later "I was alive once apart from the law". How could one born as Jew say this?

2. Is (I) a generality – everyman and everywoman ?

- a. It is typical of moral writing of the time in both the Jewish tradition and the Greco-Roman world to address the general audience in this manner
- b. This is also consistent with the reference to Adam; (I) everyman did not live under the Law
- c. Paul may be trying to address both Adam and Israel – Abraham lived under the covenant, but not the Law

B. The Issue of the Law and Sin – Paul Argument

- 1. The Law provoking sin producing passions seems in light of Paul other statements to be reasonable

The question is what does Paul mean?

- 2. We can suggest that knowledge of the law is speaking of knowing right and wrong – the ability to make moral decisions
- 3. In the Jewish tradition knowledge come from experience – so to know the Law or to know sin would mean that one had experienced living under the Law or in the experience of sin
- 4. The Stoic Philosophy would suggest that desire is the root of all evil
- 5. Paul is says that the Law because it delineates wrong doing initiates desire in the human person which leads to sin – The human desire to do what is prohibited

It is from this passage (Chapter 7) that Augustine would develop the idea of concupiscence, that remnant of Original Sin which remains in the human nature after Baptism. – Read definition of Concupiscence

- 6. Paul has previously depicted desire and enslavement to something

Romans 7:14-25

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the

law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

I. Sin Then and Now – In the previous passage Paul wrote from the historical perspective what had happened to (I). Now we are moving into the reality of the present and future

A. We are now to consider what happens when we are sold into the slavery of sin

1. There are two issues to consider concerning this passage

a. Is Paul describing the condition of the human before faith in Jesus?

b. Is Paul describing the normal struggles of every human being?

2. The repetition of the passage is to reinforce the facts that are being presented

This famous passage is about the struggle between the body and the soul. It is the fleshly nature of man to desire what he cannot have which battles with the spiritual nature which desires only to be in harmony with the divine Will of God

B. The language of this passage is metaphorical – sin is the pattern of wrong actions

C. The battle is for unity of body, mind and spirit

D. The conclusion of that for us to find that balance is impossible, except by God's Grace which is only given fully when we are fully dependent upon it.

To conclude our interlude into theology – it is precisely this argument that the Pelagius made. It was the heresy that man could make the first fundamental steps towards salvation by him own will. This led to the destructive abuses of self denial and discipline that had marked the era of the Stoics.