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“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”

The Epistle to the Romans has been appropriately referred to as the “citadel of the Christian faith.” In the first eight chapters Paul constructs an inspired and compelling defence of the gospel of Christ, nobly dismantling the ideas of law over grace and salvation through works. He begins with the solemn truth of man’s universal condemnation under sin. And then, in ascending delight he unfolds the blessed doctrine of man’s justification through faith, his sanctification, predestination and his glorification in Christ.

Our present concern is the subject of sanctification, in so far as it is presented in verses 14–25 of chapter 7 and within the framework of this chapter and the one preceding it. Before we continue we need to note certain preliminary matters.

Romans chapters 6 and 7

In these chapters we have the vital sequel relating to the person who has been justified by faith in Christ – their sanctified life unto God. In chapter 6 we have the exhortation to “walk in newness of life,” grounded on the truth that we are “dead to sin” (Rom 6:6), illustrated and entreated by the new life symbolized in believers baptism. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). In chapter 7 the exhortation is to “serve in newness of spirit” – as opposed to the oldness of the letter (the law). Here the appeal is grounded on the truth that we are “dead to the law,” illustrated by the termination of the marriage bond upon death. (Rom 7:4).

There is an order here to be observed and grasped. In chapter 6 the believer is dead to *sin*. Then, in chapter 7 he is dead to the *law*. The latter is predicated upon the former. Our freedom from the law is *because* we have died to sin. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). With our sin gone in Christ, the law has no claim upon us – we need not live in fear of sin and the law. Sadly we sometimes fail to enter into this truth practically, which is the subject of chapter 7.

Sanctification

It is clear then, that sanctification – being set apart unto God, as presented in these chapters involves walking in newness of life and serving in newness of spirit. The latter is taken up in chapter 7. It is set square against the law. For what purpose? We have touched on it already. To dispel all fears regarding the claims of the law upon the believer, which would deny the blessedness of his new marriage and mar his service unto God.

The death of the old husband *and* marriage to the new husband

Chapter 7 is circumscribed by the truth that the believer is “become dead to the law by the body of Christ.” When a husband dies the marriage bond ceases. It has no claim upon the wife and all obligations under it are rendered null and void. For the believer in Christ the law is dead. It has no claim upon him and he is no longer under its obligations in regard to righteousness and justification before God. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). And so Paul declares to the Romans: “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” The first husband, the law died – or better, was put to death.

We are not free however to do whatsoever we will now that we are no long under the law. Neither are believers to be repining widows.¹ What is often forgotten when looking into this chapter, is that marriage to Christ is *as vital* to our sanctification as our deliverance from the bondage of the law. We are married to another – Christ, and come under the joy and obligations of this new bond. In life and service we are required to reflect the sanctity and integrity of this new union, which is *apart* from the law (Heb 13:13). Its sanctity is maligned if we seek to be married to another by putting ourselves under the law – that is spiritual adultery. Its integrity is marred if we seek to reflect the virtues of another, claiming holiness by doing the works of the law – that is spiritual mockery. The union with the former husband was “in the flesh” and the believer is no longer “in the flesh” (Rom 8:9).² The union with our new husband is “in Christ.”³ Our new husband is not dead; He is risen and alive, hence the vital reference to the resurrection of Christ in verse 4.

Verses 14–25

In this portion we have a change in direction – but it is not unrelated to what has gone before. The injunctions of the law brought sin into view, and this in turn stirred the sinful desires within man. This is the meaning of verse 5, “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins [sinful inclinations], which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” In verse 6 we have

¹ Scripture never speaks of a believer married to the law and to Christ at the one time. Neither does it speak of a believer as a widow. He must be and is married to another – Christ!

² We see here the terrible error of believers seeking to come under the law.

³ Believers are no longer “in the flesh.” This was our standing before God in Adam. We now stand before God “in Christ” – how glorious!

our deliverance from it. "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." Verses 14–25 relate to the conflict that arises when a believer fails to enter into that deliverance. He brings himself under the law – as *if* he was still "in the flesh" rather than "in the Spirit" in Christ (Rom 8:9). What then does this do? The law stirs up the old and carnal man of Adam within which wars against the new man in Christ. Accordingly, this conflict brings a number of matters before us: the two natures within the believer, the natural man, the carnal man and the spiritual man.

The two natures – the old man and the new man

We have then two exhortations regarding our sanctification. We are to "walk in newness of life" and to "serve in newness of spirit." How are we to respond? The clear thrust of chapter 7 is that the law is of no help at all! The reason lies in the existence of the *old man* – the flesh within. The law is weak through the flesh. The believer will never meet these two exhortations through the law. Try as he may he will eventually be brought to the point where he cries, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

What then of this old man? He has in fact an opposite being, the new man. The believer has two natures. One is divine, the new man which cannot sin. The other is the old man of Adam, the fallen and corrupt flesh which can sin. Though saved in Christ I still have the old nature – the flesh within which can and does sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8). These two natures are in conflict. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do [may not do] the things that ye would" (Gal 5:17).

The old and the new man, the natural, carnal and the spiritual man

Our understanding of verses 14–25 will be greatly assisted when we view the two natures in the light of three other men found in Scripture. The conflict and its cry of wretchedness does not refer to the *natural* man under sin being convicted by the gospel of Christ. By the natural man we mean the man who is unconverted. He stands condemned before God in Adam and knows nothing of the conflict or cry of the passage. Neither is the conflict to do with the *spiritual* man. He is the man who has been converted; who has been delivered from living unto himself and from living under the law. The cry of wretchedness will not fall from his lips! He has entered into the truth that he *has* been delivered from self and the law, in that the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1–3). He is living and serving in the joy and blessing of his new Husband.

The carnal man and his conflict

When Paul rebukes the believers at Corinth, he does not say "ye are yet natural," but "ye are yet carnal." "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1). Our passage calls into view the *carnal* man; who is the converted man, but he is not walking in newness of life. It is he who cries, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It is a cry of deep despair, born of helplessness to keep the law due to the old man within, and that helplessness becomes hopelessness as seen in the bitter moral struggle

between the old man of Adam and the new man in Christ. He is married to Christ positionally, but has yet to enter practically into the joy and blessings of that union. His old man is alive to the law which brings him into a compromising conflict. We come now to verses 14–25, which convey the wretchedness of that conflict.⁴

Verses 14–25 paraphrased

14. “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I [as the old man] am carnal, sold under sin.” The law was given by God and it cannot be reprovèd as the cause of sin. It brings man’s inability to keep it and his sin into view. By this it proves the existence of the carnal old man in the believer. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom 7:7).

15. “For that which I do [as the carnal old man] I allow not [as the new and spiritual man]: for what I would [do], [as the new and spiritual man], that do I not [because of the old and carnal man]; but what I hate [as the new and spiritual man], that do I [as the carnal old man].” The better translation is: “For that which I do [i.e., sin, as the carnal old man] I do not understand [i.e., from the point of view of the new and spiritual man].”

16. “If then I do [as the carnal old man] that which I would not [do] [as the new and spiritual man], I consent unto the law that it is good.” That is, I am identifying the conflict between the old and the new man and so I acknowledge that the law is good, because it reprovèd what I do as the carnal old man. “My wanting (thelô) to do the opposite of what I do proves my acceptance of God’s law as good (kalos).”⁵

17. “Now then it is no more I [as the new and spiritual man] that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me [as the carnal old man].” It is improper to construe this as an excuse for committing sin. Indeed, the exhortation is to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). The ground upon which this is done is in knowing “that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6).⁶

18. “For I know that in me [in the old man] (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me [i.e., to do good, as the new and spiritual man]; but how to perform that which is

⁴ There is no warrant nor gain to insist that Paul is identifying his own experience in this passage. His employment of the personal pronoun “I” is for the purpose of argument – as he does for instance in 1 Corinthians 13. “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor 13:2–3).

⁵ “I consent unto the law.” A T Robertson, NT Word Pictures, Romans.

⁶ J W de Silva, 2010, “The Old and the New Man.” www.ribbandofblue.net/articles . See also Appendix 3.

good I find not [in the old man].” The words “how” and “find” are insertions. The text should read, “but to perform that which is good, not.” My desire to do good is present, but to perform it is not found in the old man because in him – the flesh, there is nothing good.

19. “For the good that I [as the new and spiritual man] would [do] I do not [because of the old man]; but the evil which I would not [do], [as the new and spiritual man], that I do [as the carnal old man].” The conflict between the old and new man is pressed.

20. “Now if I do [as the carnal old man] that I would not [do] [as the new and spiritual man], it is no more I [as the new and spiritual man] that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me [as the carnal old man].” Here too we must acknowledge that it is wholly improper to use this as an excuse for committing sin. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1).

21. “I find then a law, that, when I would do good [as the new and spiritual man], evil is present with me [as the carnal old man].” The old man in Paul is governed by a law, which is better rendered as a rule of behaviour - the “law of sin.” This law stands opposed to another law or rule of behaviour – “the law of God” (vv 22, 23 etc).

22. “For I [as the new and spiritual man] delight in the law of God after the inward man.” The “inward man” is not the same as the new and spiritual man. It is the inner spirit that is cultivated by the regenerated and new man. It is “renewed day by day” (1 Cor 4.16).

23. “But I [as the new and spiritual man] see another law in my members [the carnal old man], warring against the law of my mind [as the new and spiritual man], and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members [as the carnal old man].” Again, this other law is not “the law” but the rule of behaviour - the “law of sin.” It resides in the old man – its members, the flesh.

24. “O wretched man that I am [as the carnal old man]! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death [the physical body that serves the old man]?”⁷ Paul declares that the carnal believer is powerless to deliver himself from the conflict. Because of Adam he is still connected to the body of sin and death. The lament is twofold. The flesh cannot be *removed* and neither can it be *reformed* – even under the law – the thrust of the section preceding verses 14–25. So Paul looks to another for deliverance – “Who shall deliver me?” The question is rhetorical and opens the way for the answer in chapter 8.⁸

25. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind [as the new and spiritual man] I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh [as the carnal old man] the law of sin.” The conflict is again noted but now the person in whom deliverance is found is identified – Christ. It is no longer how can I help myself and have victory over sin, but who can help me do it! The man has come to an end in himself and, when he does, his wretchedness is overtaken by thanksgiving; no longer “O

⁷ “The body of this death” refers to the physical body linked to Adam’s fallen nature and serves sin.

⁸ The matter here does not call for forgiveness but deliverance. The former is in regard to a confession of sin and reverts to 1 John 2; the latter is in regard to a conflict because of the two natures within.

wretched man,” but “O blessed man.” Like Israel of old, he must possess the ground he has been brought into. *Christ*, his new Husband has brought him there, the place of no condemnation and freedom from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-3). So then, there is thanks given to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, *because* - :

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1-3).

Here then, is our guarantee and power to live in the light of Romans 6 and 7 – “no condemnation” and “life in Christ.” “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” We look to Calvary, for it was there that sin and the strength of sin (i.e., the law, 1 Cor 15:56) was met by Christ’s death. The *entire* matter of condemnation regarding our old man – judicially and practically – what we *are* and what we *do*, has been settled forever.⁹ We are dead to sin (Rom 6:6), dead to the law by the body of Christ (Rom 7:4) and quickened, once dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1)! May the Spirit of God give us the discernment and strength to live in the knowledge of it!

Verse 25 clarified

The statement “who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit” has apparently caused difficulty. Some have responded by rejecting its genuineness, regarding it as an interpolation based on Romans 8:4.¹⁰ Others have let it stand using it to assert that believers who are walking according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit are under condemnation. Such a notion is utterly at odds with the truth of the believer’s eternal security, proven here by the term “in Christ.” To admit to condemnation would contradict the indisputable deliverance declared in verse 2. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath [delivered] made me free from the law of sin and death.” Our passage reveals a deep moral contest and the possibility of the believer doing that which he would not do – *yet*, throughout it all he is assured of his deliverance from the law of sin and death. What we have in Romans 8:1 is a *normative* statement relating to the standard of behaviour that should mark all those in Christ. To paraphrase:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who [\[as properly and normally marked by the new man\]](#) walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

⁹ As believers “in Christ” our past, present and future sins are therefore dealt with. There is no sin in Christ and God sees me “in Christ;” I am “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). There is a vital corollary to this truth. If we fail to live in the light of the fact that we are “in Christ” and that our sins and inequities will be remembered no more (Heb 10:17), then we will fail to judge ourselves. Why do so if there is a prevailing condemnation by God?

¹⁰ This appears to be so and there the matter ends. However, if we let it stand then we are bound to deduce its proper meaning from the biblical context and grammar.

Concluding remarks

Paul began his treatise on the Gospel by declaring the reality of man's condemnation under sin, encapsulated in Romans 3:23. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." In his closing address he meets this dread with a statement redolent of divine grace. [However], "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The "now" of Romans 8:1 reverts to his opening indictment of universal condemnation. It brings the cross into view as God's answer to man's condemnation under sin – salvation in Christ. However, Romans 8:1 also reverts to the wretched man of verse 24. It is the ground upon which he can be practically delivered from the law and from the conflict between the old and new man, and so live and serve according to the joy and blessing of his union with Christ, the new Husband. He is to enter into the truth that in Christ he is "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" (Rom 6:11) and "become dead to the law" (Rom 7:4). This will deliver him from the burden of the law and defeat the old man within, delivering him from the conflict between the old and the new man.

Appendix 1: A useful illustration of the conflict

A useful (though not perfect) illustration may help us to understand Romans chapters 6 and 7 in regard to being "dead to sin," "dead to the law" and the practical aspects associated with them. We begin with a man who has an incurable physical disease and is under medication designed to retard its progress. A remedy is found. He avails himself of it in good faith and is completely cured. In the terminology of Romans 6, he has "died to the disease." He *has* newness of life. His medication is no longer needed. He can discard it

Spiritually, this is the case of the man in Romans 6 who had a terminal disease called sin. He availed himself of the certain cure – faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. By doing this he "died to sin" and can walk in newness of life. He is "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He can discard that which could never cure his sin – the law.

Sometime later, we visit that man who was cured from his physical disease and, alas, we find him still taking his medication. He *has* been cured, but has failed to enter into the good of it – still living as it were, under its curse. He is altogether miserable, needlessly enduring the burden of medication rather than enjoying newness of life. We see in him a bitter conflict between life as it was under the old sick man and life under the new cured man.

The spiritual similarity to Romans 7 and the wretched man is clear. He *has* "died to sin;" it has no claim on him. Yet, he seeks to be delivered from sin by trying keep the law. He needs to grasp that he *is* delivered from sin and the law, and so serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. We see a bitter conflict within; here between the lingering and resident old man of sin associated with Adam and the new man of life in Christ. This too is a needless conflict. If only if he would enter into the truth that he is no longer under the law – he is dead to it and alive to God in Christ.

Appendix 2: The Arminian and Calvinist

As far as the Arminian is concerned, Romans 7:14–15 refers to the unsaved natural man – which is quite wrong. The context and course of Romans chapters one to eight is wholly against it. Equally wrong are the Calvinists when they seek support for their doctrine of "perseverance" from the passage. They regard the conflict between the old and new man to be a continual *norm* for the believer – so that there must be a perseverance in faith to the end.

The conflict in the passage is *not* the foreseen standard for the believer, which the Word of God takes to be the new and spiritual man who lives and serves according to the “rule of God.” This is why we get the normative statement in Romans 8:1; “Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” So we have in John’s first epistle, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn 2:1). It is not “when” any man sin, but “if” any man sin (i.e., sin is not the norm for a child of God). The conflict in Romans 7 is to do with an abnormality connected with the old man in his carnality. It is the experience of a believer who has yet to possess the ground of Romans 8:1; who has yet to appreciate that in Christ he is dead to sin (chapter 6) and thus dead to the law (chapter 7)! How wretchedly miserable then, are the Calvinist and Arminian doctrines that have little appreciation of the place into which Christ has brought His redeemed. There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *has* made us free from the law of sin and death. *We have* been delivered! Praise God! This is the true and approved ground for the believer, upon which he is seen walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, bringing fruit unto God.

Appendix 3: A few matters of distinction

When reading the Epistle to the Romans, particularly chapters 6 and 7, we need to be aware of some common mistakes made by those who have little understanding of the believer’s position and practice – or, what may be stated as the difference between the believer’s standing and state. The following are some examples.

1. There are two truths that at first seem contradictory. In the first case we are told our old man died. In the second we have it that he did *not* die. The first truth is positional and judicial. The old man died judicially in that he was crucified with Christ. We can therefore reckon it dead and no longer under judgment. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him” (Rom 6:6). Yet, he still lives within – practically as seen in Romans 7. So we have in the second part of our verse, “that the body of sin might be destroyed [i.e., rendered null and void] that henceforth we should not serve sin.” The believer is no longer “in the flesh” but the flesh is still in him.
2. Sin is not dead! But we are to know that in Christ we are dead *to* sin, which is not the same thing. We are dead to “sin” in that the condemnation of sin is no longer upon us. This is the positional truth. Here too we have a practical truth. “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:2). “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). In 1 Peter 2:24 we are dead to “sins.” Because Christ bore our sins on the tree, we have done away with sins practically.
3. Similarly, the law is not dead; but we are dead *to* the law meaning that the law has no claim upon us. The law still exists as we are told in Romans 7. And, it has its use – to bring sin into view. “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom 7:7). But because we are in Christ the law and its judgement and curse is not upon us. Again, there is the associated practical truth. “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).
4. There is also the broad positional and a practical distinction to be noted and grasped in regard to Christ and God. Note the following instances.
 - Rom 6:11. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

- Rom 6:13: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”
- Rom 7:4: “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”

It is unto *God*, because we are seen as in Romans, to be “in Christ.” And so, “For in that He [Christ] died, He died unto sin once: but in that He [Christ] liveth, He [Christ] liveth unto God” (Rom 6:10). Our life in Christ has the same object as Christ in His life – which is unto God! So we have in Romans 12:1; “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Those who are not “in Christ” can never therefore live a life sanctified unto God.

