

Dead Law and Living Spirit

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 18*, May 3, 2015

Romans 6:20 – 7:6 (ESV adapted)

6:²⁰ For when you were **servants of sin**, you were free from any claim by God's righteousness. ²¹ But **what fruit were you getting** at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For **the end of those things is death**.

²² But now that you have been set **free from sin** and have been made **servants of God**, the **fruit** you get leads to being **made holy** (by Holy Spirit), and its end is **eternal life**. ²³ For the **wages of sin is death**, but **God's gift of grace is eternal life in Messiah Jesus our Lord**.

7:¹ Or do you not **know**, brothers and sisters – I am speaking to those who know law – that **the law is lord over a person only as long as the person is alive**?

² For the woman under a husband's authority has been bound by law to the living husband, but if the husband dies, she is released from the legal authority of the husband.

³ Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she is joined with another man while her husband is alive. But if the husband dies, she is free from that law, so that when she joins with another husband she is not an adulteress.

⁴ Likewise, my brothers and sisters, **you** also have **died to the law** through the **body of the Messiah**, so that you may be **joined with another**, with **him who has been raised from the dead**, in order that we may **bear fruit for God**.

⁵ For while we were in the flesh, the **passions of sins** that were (aroused) **through the law**, were at work in our members to **bear fruit for death**. ⁶ But now we have been **released from the law**, since we have **died** to that which held us captive. The result is for us to serve in **the new way of the Spirit** and **not** in the old way of the **written code/letter**.

Galatians 2:15-16, 19-21 Paul talking to Peter in Antioch

¹⁵ We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, ¹⁶ yet since we know that no one is declared right by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Messiah, even we believed/trusted in Messiah Jesus, in order that we may be declared right by the Messiah's faithfulness and not by the works of the law/Torah, because by the works of the law no creature will be declared right....

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with the Messiah. I live, but no longer I; the Messiah lives in me. So the life I now live in flesh, I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave up himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness comes through the law, then the Messiah died for nothing.

Romans 5:20-21a

²⁰ Now law came in to fill up the trespass, but where sin was filled up, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ in order that, as sin reigned in death, grace also may reign through God's faithful righteousness

Romans 6:5-6

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be in a resurrection like his, ⁶ since we know that our old humanity was crucified with him in order that the body belonging to sin might be rendered powerless, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

2 Corinthians 3:6-7

⁶ (God) has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, ⁸ will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?.

Recognizing Life and Death

Paul is leading us readers/believers to reflect on a deep level what has happened to us in the event of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. We might say, 'Nothing happened to me personally. I wasn't there.' Paul responds, 'But you were!' Because of who Jesus is, as both God and us and Israel's Messiah, he calls into himself every person who trusts/believes in him to share in his death and resurrection/eternal life and in his Spirit.

But its hard to get our minds around this experience. We're still living very ordinary life. We are like Israel after the Exodus, idealizing Egypt compared with hardships faced in freedom. We romanticize the 'freedom' of the destructive life called 'sin.' Paul asks, 'How was that going?' Ah, shame, death! In Jesus a new freedom really opens because of God's gift of grace. When God gave himself in Jesus, he gave the gift of his own eternal life to all those 'in Messiah Jesus' – life now, life always. Sin pays out the wage of death – no hope or meaning. God gives the gift of himself – Jesus, the Spirit – his own life forever.

Recognizing A New Chapter in God's Story

But Paul knows that many in Rome (both Gentiles and Jews like himself) think of the law/Torah as God's great gift of salvation. Paul argues that Scripture itself show a much more ambiguous role. Law defines/clarifies general sin/brokenness as 'transgression,' but does not undo its power as lord in our lives. Law/Torah sets the problem but not the solution.

The Law did the work God intended for it, leading up to the Messiah's death. But that crucifixion and resurrection changed everything, including our relationship to that Law. Paul uses an illustration from Roman/Jewish marriage law – how death ends a set of binding obligations and opens the freedom for a new relationship. The Messiah's death and our death 'in him' ends one chapter in the story, in which the law made clear just how broken we are, and opens a new chapter, people united with the Messiah in Life. By doing its work, the Law showed the necessity for Jesus and led to this new life.

Recognizing A New Relationship and New Power of Life

Understanding the story of OT scripture and where its sense of expectation leads, however, is only the start. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are not only an end but must be the beginning for every believer. We are actively drawn into creating that new direction.

Paul challenges us to think deeply about Jesus, who he is, what his ministry and teaching revealed, how he gave himself, how we as disciples share in him. It is in his very body as one of us that we 'died to the law' and to sin's lordship in order to open a new future, united with him in resurrection, living lives transformed by Jesus, his teaching in action.

Jesus opens a real challenge for our everyday lives and decisions. Don't we really need the Torah? Certainly many Christian moralists through the ages have gone back to the Law to set basic moral guidelines (the Ten Commandments on the wall). But Paul warns that the commands of the law arouse the passions of the sins they define without empowering resistance. Ironically, we end up captive in our brokenness. A new way was needed!

God did what no one could have imagined. He intervened with his own life and death in Jesus, taking on himself our sin, suffering, death, giving new life that we share in his Spirit.

Paul says, don't be lured by the written code defining boundaries. In the Messiah we are invited into his life in the Spirit. Become servants there, trusting his gift of grace!