

Tuesday's Touch #66

...from Pastor Ed ...April 27, 2010

Law & the New Covenant- Part 2

We have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that now we should serve in newness of Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Romans 7:6

In considering the New Testament believer's relationship to the law, we have seen that law as referring to the Mosaic Covenant has passed away and been replaced by a New Covenant through our union with Christ. The believer's main focus now is not in conforming himself to the all (or a subset of all) the imperatives of scripture, but, being complete in Christ, fully justified, and beloved by the Father, his focus must shift to the displaying of His beauty and glory as he lives in this present age, by the reality of Christ in him. This is not just semantics. There is a *new dynamic* at work in "the new and living way," which, as we have seen, is summarized in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *beholding Him we are being changed.*

The two contrasting dynamics of law and grace come clashing together in Romans chapter 7. I do not believe Paul intended this to be an autobiographical chronology. He was continuing to build the logical case for the gospel and its implications, begun in chapter 1, and which comes to a climax in chapter 8. In 7:6 he makes one of those pivotal statements of gospel truth which form a great divide between the old and the new. This verse has its roots back in chapter 5. Having unequivocally expounded the full justification of the sinner by the imputed righteousness of Christ, he then, in chapter 6, immediately tackles head-on the obvious question: *if we are fully justified by Christ alone through faith alone, then what motivation does the believer have to not live in sin?* In answering this, he insists that the Christian's union with Christ is much more than just a legal or intellectual concept. *How can we who have died to sin live any longer therein (6:2)?* Our union in Christ's death and resurrection was a real transaction with real effects. If we have been raised in union with Him to walk in newness of life, there must have been a change of *inner desire* that turns our hearts from sin to righteousness. That inner reality demands the *cognizant reckoning* of the same, and the *resultant application of the indicative* to one's life.

As Paul then transitions into chapter 7, the issue of sin must be inextricably connected with law, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin.* He starts first by demonstrating that death, by nature, severs one's obligation to the law. He then boldly proclaims the liberating truth of verse 6: *We have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that now we should serve in newness of Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.* But before he brings us to the full effusion of this victory in Christ (chapter 8), he pauses to make a very important observation regarding *the conflicting dynamics of law and grace.* In salvation the believer's "inner man" deems the law to be holy, just, and good (v12). In his heart he actually *delights* in the law of God (v22), not the testimony of an unregenerate heart. He genuinely desires to do right and does not want to sin, but in reality, remaining focused on law, he ends up doing the opposite of what he desires (vss15-21). The point is this: if we approach our new life in Christ with a law-centric mindset, though our desires be right, the law, because of the remaining corruption of the flesh, will cut us down every time and bring us to the exasperation of verse 24. Paul's anguished cry is no exaggeration - *O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* How many of us have felt this exact sentiment in our struggles with sin. And we cannot move much beyond that if we view our sanctification and righteousness as a black and white obedience to commands.

But out of Paul's anguished cry comes the proclamation of victory: *I thank God through Jesus Christ [I am delivered!]* With that, he picks up again the thread from verse 6 and moves into chapter 8. Christ has

not only delivered us completely from the condemnation of the law, but he does what the law could never do, in that it was weak through the flesh – He fulfills *in us* the righteousness demanded by the law. This is two-fold. First, He Himself, *dwelling in us* by the Spirit, *is* our perfect righteousness. But He also both commands and draws us to abide in Him; and as He engages us in intimate communion with Himself, the *fruit* of His righteousness is manifested in us as we walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (8:1-17). This righteousness, indeed, far exceeds that of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20).

So then, do we jettison the written Word, or any portion of it? Not at all. *All* scripture is profitable to us (2 Tim 3:16-17. et. al.). But a great transformation has occurred. The letter which kills, breathed upon by the Spirit, becomes to us the Word of Life! The written Word becomes the *assayer* of the rich vein of Gold within. There is then a Spirit-wrought synergy between the inspired scriptures and the *inscripturated Word of Christ* dwelling richly within us. The Word becomes to us the words of a loving Shepherd who loved us unto death; who carries us in His bosom and gently leads those who are with young (); who causes His sheep to rest in green pastures and beside still waters; and who leads (does not drive) them in paths of righteousness *for His name's sake* (Psalm 23). His commands are not harsh or burdensome (1 John 5:3); they are the rod and the staff which comfort, protect, guide, and restore.

Those who have no taste for the honey-laced Manna, who are not refreshed by living waters flowing from the smitten Rock, - they know nothing of these things. They cannot see or appreciate their richness. They can only place the words of the Savior into the mouth of Moses, who is yet their Lord. And the more austere and demanding they can make the imperatives sound to the sheep, the more highly they esteem their own perceived 'glorifying' of God's holiness. Yet, they do not keep them in truth.

O child of God! We must never turn the grace of God into a justification of sin (Jude 4). But we must also...

*stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ
has made us free, and do not be entangled again
with a yoke of bondage (Gal 5:1).*

*Lord, Perfector of Saints,
Forgive us our righteousnesses.
Amen*