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Class Notes

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The Law Cannot Sanctify

Romans 7:1-12

Romans 7: The Law Cannot Sanctify

The topic of the whole chapter: the Christian's relationship with the Law

It is as impossible to be sanctified by Law as it was to be justified by Law.

Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight

Romans 7 says, "By works of the law, no human being will be sanctified in his sight!"

Three-Part Outline of Romans 7

- 1) Romans 7:1-6 Dead to the Law, Married to Christ, Bearing Fruit for God

Romans 7:4 Likewise, my brothers, you also 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.

- 2) Romans 7:7-12 Vindication of the Law

[There is nothing wrong with the Law; that's not why we do not bear fruit for God. The problem is with US]

- 3) Romans 7:13-25 Paul's Experience With Indwelling Sin: Proof That Law Cannot Sanctify a Christian

A. Romans 7:1-6 Dead to the Law, Fruitful for God

Romans 7:1-6 Do you not know, brothers-- for I am speaking to men who know the law-- that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? ² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³ So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries

another man. ⁴ So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. ⁵ For when we were controlled by the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

1. The Marriage Analogy, Part I: Death Releases Us

- a. Paul's basic point: a covenant is binding only as long as we live; once we die, the covenant is no longer binding
- b. Illustration: the marriage covenant... "Till death do you part"
- c. We cannot break the authority of the Law over us while we live; Law is AUTHORITATIVE and has rights to make its demands
- d. But through our spiritual union with Christ, we died once for all to the binding nature of the Law

2. The Marriage Analogy, Part 2: A New Marriage with New Fruit

- a. Marriage also is a picture of fruitfulness; a healthy marriage results in "fruit" i.e. children

Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply ..."

- b. Our spiritual union with Christ is like a new marriage... the old one is done, the new one has begun
- c. The old marriage (the Law) could never bear good fruit for God, because of our "flesh" ... our sin nature
- d. But through spiritual union with Christ, we have been set free from the old "marriage" so that we can now bear fruit for God in the "new way of the Spirit"

B. Focus: Romans 7:4-6

Romans 7:4-6 So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. ⁵ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

1. Verse 4 the key to the chapter

- a. Backdrop: UNION WITH CHRIST through faith (Romans 6:1-4)
- b. Marriage analogy... only by death can the covenant be fulfilled and the individual released
- c. The whole point of the marriage analogy: WHAT FRUIT comes from the union? Married to the Law produced fruit for death; married to Christ produces fruit for God. Through faith in Christ we died once for all to the Law and are now free to be married to Christ to bear fruit for God

Q: How does this “marriage analogy” help you understand the Christian life?

Q: What “fruit for God” do you think Paul has in mind here?

2. Verses 5-6 taken as a unit

*ESV Romans 7:5-6 For 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. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

- a. Key term: “in the flesh” WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? [This is the first use of the word “flesh” in this spiritual sense in the Book of Romans]

Word study on “flesh”:

- 1) “Flesh” = all humanity taken together

*Isaiah 40:5-8 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and **all flesh** shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. ⁶ The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? **All flesh** is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: ⁷ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. ⁸ The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

- 2) “Flesh” = the physical body made up of living cells

*John 1:14 And the Word was made **flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

*Ezekiel 37:7-8 So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. ⁸ And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the **flesh** came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.*

*Luke 24:39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not **flesh** and bones, as ye see me have.*

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

3) "Flesh" = the sensual drives of the body, generally called the "lusts of the flesh"

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

NAU 2 Peter 2:18 For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error

4) "Flesh" = a spiritual realm inhabited by all unregenerate people, directly contrasted with being "in the Spirit"

Paul will more fully develop this concept in the next chapter, Romans 8

Everyone in the world is either "in the flesh" or "in the Spirit" ... unregenerate or regenerate; dead in sin or alive in Christ; under the Law or under grace

Romans 8:1-14 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Q: What does this passage teach you about those "in the flesh" vs. those "in the Spirit"?

Q: How is "the flesh" displayed both in the mind and in the actions of the body?

Q: How does Romans 8:1-14 give insight into Romans 7:5-6?

- b. Paul says when someone is “in the flesh,” all the Law does is stimulate sinful passions resulting in sinful actions

Romans 7:5 For 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.

Q: What are “sinful passions”? How are they aroused by the Law?

Q: What is the significance of the phrase “at work” ... how do the sinful passions WORK in the members of the body bearing fruit for death?

Note: “work” is a key concept... it is an energetic, effectual process

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The “prince of the power of the air” is Satan... and Satan controls a “spirit” that is active, energetic in the world, working disobedience in those who are spiritual dead. This “working” combines with the internal “passions of the flesh” resulting in desires of the body and the mind which are then carried out in specific evil actions.

Amazingly, in Romans 7:5, Paul says the Law of God actually stirs up the sinful passions and fans them into a flame, resulting in actual sins... similar, amazingly, to the work of Satan in Ephesians 2:1-3.

[Romans 7:7-11 is a picture of this exact process, as we shall see!]

Q: Someone once said the Law produces either the white devil of spiritual pride in the generally compliant or the black devil of rebellion among the generally immoral. Why are each of these responses so deadly?

Paul then says this process causes someone “in the flesh” to “bear fruit for death”...

Q: What does it mean to “bear fruit for death?” How does it relate to the spiritual death of Ephesians 2:1-3 and Romans 7:9? How does it relate to the eternal death or the second death (Revelation 20:6) of hell?

3. By contrast, Romans 7:6 speaks of the “new way” of the Spirit

Romans 7:6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Q: What is the significance of the phrase, “BUT NOW...” in verse 6?

Q: What does it mean to be released from the law? How did it hold us captive? How does that connect with the marriage analogy in Romans 7:1-3?

Q: How does the resultant phrase, “we serve in the new way of the Spirit” connect with Romans 7:4b, “in order that we might bear fruit for God.”

Example of a “new way of obedience” to the Law

Ten Commandments, “You shall not steal.”

New covenant is not, “You may now steal anytime you like!”

No, the commandment is repeated in the New Testament:

Ephesians 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Q: How do those “in the flesh” approach the prohibition: “You shall not steal?”

Q: How do those “in the Spirit” approach the same prohibition?

[Hint: the “new way of the Spirit” involves an inner transformation of the heart, new thoughts toward God, self, possessions, others. Remember all the Law can be summed up in “Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.” These laws are now written on our hearts and in our minds. This results in transformed thinking and transformed affections. Instead of thinking carnally about God, self, possessions, and others, the Christian thinks in the new way of the Spirit...

Everything is God-centered... the Christian sees possessions, both his own and those of others as ultimately belonging to God and wisely distributed according to his purposes. Any possession should be used to serve the purposes of God and to bless others. Stealing is abhorrent and repulsive. Serving is what possessions are for. So now, the former thief thinks “How can I work hard with my hands and use what I gain to bless others?”]

Old way of the written code: external regulations that are seen to be annoying and a burden; only motivation for obedience is fear of punishment.

New way of the Spirit: internally written law, engraved on the heart, seen to be delightful and wise; motivation to obey is love for God and others.

Psalms 119:97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Psalms 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

Final insight on that test case: the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Mentality of each of the actors

- 1) The highway robbers: "What's yours is mine if I can take it from you."
- 2) The priest and the Levite: "What's yours is yours and what's mine is mine; your situation is none of my concern." [Pride that they would never steal!]
- 3) The innkeeper: "What's mine is yours... for a price."
- 4) The Good Samaritan: "What's mine is yours if you need it."

C. Romans 7:7-12: The Holy, Perfect, Spiritual Law Actually Kills Us

Romans 7:7-12 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin is dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Q: Why do you think Paul feels the need to vindicate the Law of God here?

Q: Why would someone think Paul is saying the Law is actually evil? [See verse 5 again... what does verse 5 say the Law does in an unregenerate person's life?]

Q: How would you characterize Paul's answer to the question, "Is the Law sin?"

Q: What helpful, essential thing does Paul say the Law does in verse 7? Why is that necessary in order for us to be saved?

Q: What do we learn about sin in verses 8-11? Why do you think Paul personified sin here, as though it is an intelligent being?

Q: Since Romans 6-8 is all about sanctification, why is it vital for us to know how devious and powerful sin really is?

Q: Why do you think Paul seizes on the command "you shall not covet?" Why is that particular command such a strategic choice for his purposes?

Q: What does Paul mean by "apart from the law, sin is dead"?

Q: How was the commandment given by God “toward life” or “for the purpose of life”? How does Leviticus 18:5/Romans 10:5 help us understand the connection between Law and life?

Romans 10:5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."

Q: How did the commandment actually produce death?

Q: What is the significance of verse 9? What does Paul mean by “sin came alive and I died”? What does this teach about children and the possibility of an “age of accountability”?

Q: Is the death Paul experienced in Romans 7:9 the same or different to the death he describes in Romans 7:4, 6? How does it relate to Ephesians 2:1, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you once lived...”?

Q: Again, how does Paul personify sin in verse 11? How is sin portrayed in verse 11? How does sin deceive us and kill us?

Q: What is the significance of Paul’s final summary about the Law in verse 12? What words does he use there?

1. Paul (it is charged) has been negative toward the Law in this epistle
2. So here, Paul vindicates the Law. Since the Law has such a devastating effect on unregenerate persons, he has to defend that it is in itself a good thing
3. He also says the Law plays a key role in the unregenerate person’s life teaching him what sin is... defining it, diagnosing it
4. The example: COVETING; the Law taught him what it was, why it was evil
5. BUT not only did it not have the power to make him obey, it actually PRODUCED in him the very thing it FORBIDS!!
6. Sin used the command to learn what coveting was, and then made coveting spring up within him
7. **Sin is then revealed as energetic, clever, devious, relentless, powerful, deceptive**
8. If sin could use something as good as the Law, which Paul calls “holy, righteous, and good” to produce sin in him and then kill him, how evil must sin be?!!