

## IT'S ALL ABOUT VICTORY

Romans 7:01-25

Most of us are familiar with the popular hymn *Victory in Jesus*. We can probably recite the verses from memory: “*I heard an old, old story; how a Savior came from glory, how he gave His life on calvary to save a wretch like me. I heard about His groaning, of His precious blood's atoning, then I repented of my sin and won the victory.*”

I would think that a legitimate question would be “victory over what?” In Chapter 6 of Romans we saw that, because we are in Christ, we have victory over sin. There is no more bondage (slavery) to sin since the “old man” died and we have been removed from the dominion of the rule of sin. The penalty of sin (wages of sin is death) and the power of sin exerting demands upon our thinking and actions have no legitimate claim upon the new life we have in Christ. A consequence of freedom from sin's power is that we have freedom to serve righteousness which results in experiencing the joy and benefits of eternal life.

The full impact of the work of the Cross is that, in Christ, we are to die completely so that we may be fully alive in Christ. The general theme of Romans chapter six is that, in Christ's death on the Cross, we died to sin. In Romans 6:6-7 we see

*For we know that our old self was crucified with him (Christ) so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

Our relationship to sin as a result of the cross keeps appearing throughout the 6th Chapter. Verse 11 (count yourself dead to sin), verse 12 (do not let sin reign in your mortal body), verse 13 (do not offer your body to sin), verse 14 (sin shall not be your master), verses 18 and 22 (we have been set free from sin). It would seem that this is all we need. Freedom from both the penalty and the power of sin would appear to be sufficient. But something is missing. Something else remains with which we must deal. We glimpse a hint of that “something” in the 14th verse. “For sin shall not be your master because you are not under law but under grace.”

While chapter 6 teaches us about deliverance from sin, Chapter 7 tells us that we need to have freedom from the law. If we are not freed from the law, then we will never be fully freed from the influence of sin. It is very clear to each of us why we need deliverance from the penalty and power of sin. After all, the **penalty** of sin is death. This comes directly from the “law of sin and death.” The soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Eze 18:4/20). Paul summed it up in Roman 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” Also, we realize that the **power** of sin is such that it can control us so that we are enslaved to certain practices. But, do we realize why we need deliverance from the Law? We may even question if there is a real need to be delivered from the law. Let's admit it, many of us are more comfortable having a set of rules to follow than walking by faith.

Here is what happens to many of us. I'm referring to Christians. We come to Christ and trust Him to pay the penalty for our sins and we define this as salvation. However, we find that we still have certain things (sins) that bind us. It is not that we are living under the power of sin all the time, but some particular sins continue to hamper us in our Christian walk. Some where along the way, we discover that not only were our sins dealt with when Christ died, but when He died he included US (as sinners by nature) in His death – we ourselves are dead. We can't stop there, we are also risen with Christ and therefore we are alive to God. Paul used the analogy of a slave escaping the condition of slavery by dying (Romans 6:16). Discovering and walking in this truth really does set us free. Many Christians do not get past the first step – Christ paid the penalty for my sin – they don't find the victory of being dead to self.

The next thing that happens is a sense of obligation to do something for Christ since He

has done so much for us. We want to please Him and do His will. We try to discover the will of God. "What is it that God wants me to do?" We search the Scripture and find things to do and we consecrate ourselves to carry them out. We often hear Christians say, "I'm going to do that because the Bible says that I should." Parents may say, "We need to go to Church because the Bible says 'Don't forsake the assembling together of yourselves' and we are supposed to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." A youth may say "I'm going to obey my parents because the Bible says 'Children obey your parents' and the Ten Commandments tells me to honor my father and mother." A husband will forego doing something he wants to do to please his wife because Paul wrote "Husbands are to love their wife even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." A wife may say, "I'm going to submit myself to my husband and go along with his plans because Eph 5:22 says that I should." Everyone of these things are pleasing to God and are according to His will. Then we find out that we just thought we could do the will of God.

Sometimes we may even find that we don't always **like** to do it. We start becoming very legalistic in our approach to these things. Parents may say, we will go to church at least once each week unless someone is sick or we are on vacation. They then do a mental check off on the "Am I doing God's will list." The youth will also get legalistic in obeying his or her parents. The parent may want you home at a reasonable hour when you go out with your friends. "Reasonable" is not what you want to hear -- "tell me an exact time." Then you ask "Does this apply to weekends and holidays?" The husband who gives up his fishing trip or golf game to help out with a project his wife has may put limits on how often this sacrificing will occur. "We'll do it one weekend a month." Wives may get legalistic in their submission to their husbands. "If you want me to do this or that, then tell me specifically exactly what you want me to do and I will do it." This should and does bother us. In moments of introspection when we examine our spiritual condition, we question our commitment, we question our love for God, and maybe we even question our salvation experience. We repent and promise to never disobey again. We rededicate and recommit and bring all our will power to bear. What do we find? We mess up in a bigger way the next time we do something. Paul put it this way in Romans 7:19

*For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.* We find ourselves right in the middle of it and wonder why. Romans 7 is given to explain and make real the statement in Romans 6:14 -- "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under law, but under grace." The problem is that we have not yet discovered deliverance from the law.

In Chapter 6, Paul used a picture of a slave and his master to show us the way of deliverance from sin. In Chapter 7, he used the picture of a wife and two husbands. The relation between the Law and the sinner is that of husband to wife.

#### The Influence of the Law – 7:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup>For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. <sup>3</sup>So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. Romans 7:1-4 (NASB95)

The first husband in this example is "the law." The second husband is Christ. We have a dilemma if the only way out is for the first husband to die: The law is NOT going to die. Matt 5:18 tells us "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away

from the law, till all things be accomplished.” So how can I ever dissolve this relationship (this marriage) and be united to Christ? If the law will not die, then the only other alternative is for me to die. That will dissolve the relationship and I will be delivered from the Law. This IS God’s plan. We see it in verse four. When we are married to the Law, we find that we are in an incompatible relationship. The Law as the husband is very demanding, wants everything just right, definite and precise. He is exacting and is always making demands on us. We, as the wife, find that the demands are right, we just can’t carry them out. We are not capable of doing it. It seems that everything we say and do is wrong! What a mess.

Is there any hope? If she were only married to the other Man, everything would be great. He is no less exacting than her present husband – in fact, the other Man is more exacting, BUT He helps carry out what He requires. The law requires much (do not commit murder, do not commit adultery), but offers NO help in carrying out its requirements. The Lord Jesus requires even more (don’t hate, don’t lust), but what He requires from us He Himself carries out in us.

### The Dividing Line – 7:5-6

<sup>5</sup> For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. <sup>6</sup> But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. Romans 7:5-6 (NASB95)

The dividing line between “what was” and “what is” is the Cross of Christ. This is where we died to what once bound us. But you say, “What do you mean ‘once bound us?’ I still have the problem.” All of us do to one extent or another. We’ll see more on this a little later.

As we continue our study of Paul’s letter to the Romans, we see (starting in chapter 7) that we also have victory over the law. In other words, just as “sin had dominion over us” the Law has dominion over all those who are still alive. We escaped the dominion of sin by dying in Christ and we escape the dominion of the Law by dying in Christ. The bottom line is that we are freed from the “rule” or dominion of sin and the Law because the “old man” has died. Some, apparently, were taking Paul’s arguments and trying to equate the Law with sin.

### We Know What Sin Is - 7:7-12

<sup>7</sup> What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” <sup>8</sup> But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. <sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; <sup>10</sup> and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; <sup>11</sup> for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. <sup>12</sup> So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Romans 7:7-12 (NASB95)

The relationship between the Law and sin is not an equivalence but is simply that of one thing (the Law) revealing or manifesting the other (sin). The purpose of the Law is to inform us of (cause us to know) what attitudes and actions are sinful. This is somewhat like the role of a parent in rearing children. A small child may hit another child or take a toy away from another child and not realize that is “bad behavior.” The responsibility of the parent is to instruct the child that such behavior is not appropriate and will not be allowed. A few children will adjust their behavior and stop hitting and taking toys from others. Most will have to have repeated instruction and some will increase the bad behavior simply because they are told to NOT do it. This tendency to desire to do what is forbidden is symptomatic of the “sinful nature.” This is exactly what the tenth commandment addressed.

The clearest manifestation of our old nature is rebellion against what we know to be what God wants. We see this even in small children with regard to those in positions of authority.

They are defiant. An example, from one of James Dobson's books: A family with a young child is at a basketball game. The child, in all innocence, is playing near the edge of the court. The parent sees the danger and instructs the child to not cross the line that defines the court. Up to this point there was no intention in the child's mind to go onto the basketball court. But as soon as you tell him or her NOT to cross the line, there will be an unbearable urge to cross that line. The child will walk out to the edge, look up to where the parents are in the stands and then stick his or her toe across the line. That is rebellion. Was the rule to not cross the line bad? Absolutely not. It was for the good of the child and everybody else.

If we did **not** know it was wrong to take someone's property, it would still be wrong to take it. The commandment that says, "Thou shalt not steal" simple lets us know that "wrong is wrong." If I operate from the basis of my sinful nature, then the rebellious nature produces defiance and I violate the commandment. In other words, I sin. And the wages of sin is death.

### We Struggle with Sin - 7:13-20

<sup>13</sup> Therefore did that which is good become a *cause of death* for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. <sup>14</sup> For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. <sup>15</sup> For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. <sup>17</sup> So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. <sup>20</sup> But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. Romans 7:13-20 (NASB95)

It is obvious to most that, up to this point, Paul was writing about a person who had not been delivered from the dominion of sin and the dominion of the law. The method of deliverance that he discussed in chapter six and the initial verses of chapter seven was by dying. On the other hand, if a person remains under the dominion of sin and the law, then the outcome is death. It would appear that the choices available to us are what kind of death do you want to experience. If a person does nothing, then he dies as a consequence of being in sin and under the law. The other alternative is that the person can choose to die as a result of being immersed in Christ and as such he died because Christ died. The benefit of the alternative is that by dying in Christ, then the person is also raised to new life because Christ was resurrected from death.

Starting in verse 14 and continuing through the end of this chapter, we find two different trains of thought among Bible scholars. The difference is mainly centered around whether we have one or two natures. All agree that before the coming of Christ and His death on the cross that a person had just one nature. The disagreement revolves around those who are believers. Does a believer have one nature or two natures? The "two nature" advocates point to the fact that in going from verse 13 to verse 14 Paul changed from past tense to present tense and so the conclusion is that Paul was writing about his own experience as a believer. Those who argue that we have only one nature have concluded that Paul is describing the pre-conversion experience of those people who want to do the right thing but do not have the ability to do so because of the weakness of the fleshy nature they have.

If we make the argument that an unsaved person would actually want to do what is morally right, then we run into a conflict with the Calvinist doctrine that a lost person cannot possibly want to do what is right or be pleasing to God since that would imply the operation of a person's free will and since "there is no good thing" present in an unsaved person, that would not be possible. On the other hand if we make the argument that Paul is writing about his post-salvation experience, then we find some rather strange statements such as "I am of flesh, sold

into bondage to sin” that is found in verse 14. This seems to be saying exactly the opposite of what he had written in Chapter 6. Was the old nature crucified with Christ on the cross or did it survive the cross and is still around? These are fundamentally basic questions that will influence how you live and how you interpret what is going on in and around your life.

There are many well-respected “experts” such as Scofield, Bancroft, Cambron, Walvoord, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others who ascribe to the “two natures” idea. In fact, in the NASB translation, the subheading before verse 14 is *The Conflict of Two Natures* which tells us that there are “interpretations” as well as “translations” going on in the NASB. There are a few writers who argue for the one nature case, but they are in the minority. I have taught the two natures idea and was always uncomfortable with what seemed to be conflicts with Romans Chapter six. I am especially uncomfortable with the two-nature argument when considering Paul’s declaration of victory at the very end of Romans seven and the beginning of Romans eight.

At the risk of getting ahead of ourselves a little, we see that the remedy to the problem of a person who want to do what is right but cannot because of the weakness of the inherited fleshly nature is the cross of Christ. What did we discover in Chapter six regarding the work of the cross for the believer? The old man is crucified with Christ and that sin and the law no longer have power over those who are born again (resurrected with Christ).

If we were to view verses 14 through 20 as being applicable to an unsaved person, then we could (probably) agree that many people who would consider themselves to be law-abiding and basically good people (but not a Christian) could identify with what Paul has written in these verses. Sometimes it is easier to see such behavior (and discuss it objectively) in children who are growing up in family that has high moral values and where the child has been taught the basics of right and wrong. The child has been told what he or she is to do and yet there will be times that the child will do something contrary to what the “rules” say he or she should do. When confronted with “Did you do that?” What is the likely answer? “Oh, no. I would not do that.” When all the facts finally come out, the inevitable question from the parent will be “Did you not know that was wrong?” The answer will usually be “Yes, I knew.” So, the next question is typically, “If you knew it was wrong, then why did you do it?” You can guess what the response is. “I don’t know.”

In the case of the child, **he** may not know why he did it, but the reason he lied about it was probably connected to the idea of self-preservation – avoiding punishment. If the denial was linked to self-preservation, then we could likely conclude that the commission of the misdeed was related to self-gratification. In both cases, the original misdeed and the denial are linked to self. It is in the “self” that the sin principle has its ability to work. If we put away the self, then we eliminate the drive toward self-gratification and self-preservation.

### We Have Victory Over Sin - 7:21-25

<sup>21</sup> I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. <sup>22</sup> For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, <sup>23</sup> but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. Romans 7:21-25 (NASB95)

Again, we find Paul claiming that all he has been describing applies to a person “who wants to do good.” A Calvinist might argue that this then proves that Paul cannot be referring to himself prior to salvation or even (as some have suggested) to the Jews in general who were not

believers. That argument seems to contradict what Paul wrote about “Israel” in Roman 10:2 where we see “for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” In Barnes’ commentary on this verse he wrote “Zeal for God here means passionate ardor in the things pertaining to God, or in the things of religion.” The problem was that they were hindered in actually carrying out their good intentions because they were working in their own strength.

We don’t have to go much farther into this passage to find another term that we should address and that is the concept of the “inner man.” In general, we would think of the soul and/or spirit as opposed to the body of a person. Does an unsaved person have an inner man or is this only for a saved person? Clearly, all living people have a soul. We could also argue that all humans have a spirit. The unsaved person has a spirit that is dead to the things of God and the saved person has a brand-new spirit whose origin is from God. This is what the new birth is about. Since this is true, then the “inner man” to which Paul refers in verse 22 could be the soul (probably mind or conscience) of any person (saved or unsaved).

We keep finding additional terms that we need to understand. What did Paul mean by “members” in which another principle is at work that is in opposition to the Godly principles that are at work in the inner man (conscience)? Some translations go as far as saying “members of my body.” Can we then conclude that the sin principle that is inborn has a direct influence on the parts of our physical bodies? That is a tough question. It is difficult to make an argument for this since we think of the body as acting according to the directions and prompting of our brains. However, I have read that studies have been done that conclude that some reflex actions of the body have built in responses that by pass the brain since the responses are so rapid. Whether there are any “spiritual” implications that are comparable to this reflex action is uncertain.

We talk about the fact that we have a body, soul and spirit. In an idealized picture of what happens, the body is under the control of the soul (mind, emotion and the will) and responds in obedience to what is signaled from the soul. The soul will take initiative or react to various stimuli. According to Watchman Nee in the book *Spiritual Man*, the soul should be getting the general direction of life and even some specifics from the spirit in man. The problem is that in unregenerate man, the spirit is dead or ineffective and, consequently, the general direction for the soul is set by the influences of the world and these can have both positive and negative impacts.

If we take these considerations into account, then we could conclude that the “members” to which Paul referred are a collection of physical and nonphysical parts of our “make up” or human nature. The outcome of all this is that unregenerate man finds himself to be a prisoner or slave to these principles that are operating in his human nature. This produces a sense of “wretchedness” and a desire to be freed from the situation where you know what you should do but you can’t break free from the inborn human nature. Such a condition cannot in any sense be considered victorious living. So where is the victory? We see the answer in the first part of verse 25. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” we are set free from this “wretched” condition.

Does all this mean that since the old man is dead and buried with Christ and the new man is resurrected with Christ that we have arrived and “have it made?” This is one of those questions that we can answer with “yes” and “no.” The “yes” part is related to the finality of the outcome in God’s perspective that He see us in Christ. This is the reality of what we have “by faith.” This is the “justification” idea of our salvation. The “sanctification” part of our salvation

is a process in which we are being transformed by the “renewing” of our minds (Romans 12:2). This transformation has an objective of our conforming to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Our minds, emotions, and our wills have been influenced and dominated by the philosophies of the world and the principle of sin that was at work in our human nature. So now that we are delivered from the dominion of sin and the law, we are in a position of deciding how we think, what we say and what we do based on input that comes from the spirit of the law (the love of God) that is implanted (shed abroad) in our hearts. So what keeps us from falling victim to doing things the way we had always done them? Paul tells us that we “reckon ourselves to be dead” (Romans 6:11). In other words, we go back to the fundamental truth that the old man has been crucified in Christ and it has been buried with Christ and that we are a new creation in Christ. Therefore, we are free to follow and do what we know to be the right thing that would be pleasing to God. Reckoning ourselves to be dead (crucified with Christ) is likely to be the same thing that Jesus told His followers, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” The “denial of self” is to agree with the truth that the old man died on the cross and is out of the picture (buried) with regard to any influence from the principle of sin that was at work in the human nature. The unregenerate person cannot escape the demands of the dominion of sin at work in himself because self-gratification and self-preservation overwhelm any thoughts he might have of wanting to do what he knows (in his “inner man”) to be the right thing to do. The Good News is that in the cross of Christ we have victory in that we are able to make the right choices because of the presence and power of God’s Spirit dwelling in us.