

The Character of the Law

Romans 7: 14-16

Intro:

This morning we come to one of the most controversial parts of this book.

Romans 7: 14-25

This morning we will concentrate on verses 14-16.

Recap:

In this chapter we have dealt with the Christians relationship to the Law of God.

In verses 1-6 we saw that we are:

“Dead to the Law” see verses 4 and 6.

Then in verses 7-13;

“The Purpose of the Law”

To show us the Sinfulness of Sin!

See verses 7 and 13

This morning we shall consider God willing;

“The Character of the Law”

In verses 14-16.

Now,

The Main point of controversy is this;

Q. Is Paul speaking of himself as an unconverted man or a converted man in these verses?

Let us give some of the arguments now why we believe Paul is speaking of himself as a converted man in these verses.

1} The contrast between the past tense in verses 7-13 with the present tense used in verses 14-23.

Also we have the future tense used in verses 24 back to present in 25.

2} The Contrast of what we are as unconverted men with what Paul describes in these verses.

Romans 3: 9-18

Read Romans 7: 22

3} The Overall context of where we are in the flow of the book.

In chapters 1-3 he dealt with man as unconverted.

Then in chapter 4 Justification by faith alone.

Then in chapters 5-8;

The Benefits of Justification.

5 = Peace

6 = Holiness

7 = Liberty

8 = Adoption

4} The experience of every true Christian.

We know by painful experience the truth of what Paul says in verses 14-23.

Psalm 119: 4-6

5} This interpretation is supported by other scriptures.

See Galatians 5: 16-18

Also Phil 3: 12-16

6} Probably the best argument of all is his conclusion in verse 25.

Note,

At the same time he is serving God and the Law of Sin!

John Owen of Thrussington writes:

Various fictions have been resorted to by critics on this point. The Apostle has been supposed by some to speak of himself as under the law, or as Stuart terms it, "in a law state," and such is the scheme of Hammond Others have imagined, that he personates a Jew living during the time between Abraham and the giving of the law; and this was Locke's idea.

A third party have entertained the notion, that the Apostle, speaking in his own person, represents, by a sort of fiction, as Vitringa and some others have imagined, the effects of the law in Jews and proselytes, as opposed to the effects of the gospel, as delineated in the next chapter. And a fourth party maintain, that the Apostle describes a man in a transition state, in whom God's Spirit works for his conversion, but who is as yet doubtful which way to turn, to sin or to God.

All these conjectures have arisen, because the language is not taken in its obvious meaning, and according to the Apostle's own explanation. As soon as we depart from the plain meaning of the text and the context, we open a door to endless conjectures and fictions. The Apostle says nothing here of himself, but what every real Christian finds to be true. Is not a Christian, yea, the best, in this world *carnal*, as well as spiritual? Is he not "sold under sin?" that is, subjected to a condition, in which he is continually annoyed, tempted, hindered, restrained, checked, and seduced by the depravity and corruption of his nature; and in which he is always kept far below what he aims at, seeks and longs for.

It was the saying of a good man, lately gone to his rest, whose extended pilgrimage was ninety-three years, that he must have been often swallowed up by despair, had it not been for the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The best interpreter of many things in Scripture is spiritual experience; without it no right judgment can be formed. Hence it is that the learned often stumble at what is quite plain and obvious to the illiterate when spiritually enlightened. Critics sometimes find great difficulties in what is fully understood by a simpler minded Christian, taught from above. "Wayfaring men" are far better divines than any of the learned, who possess nothing more than natural talents and natural acquirements. — *Ed.*

So let us consider verses 14-16 under the following headings:

1} What the Law is.

Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual

The emphasis is for the clause that follows by way of contrast.

The Law is what we are not!

See verses 7 and 12

Origen:

{spiritual because not to be understood literally?}

2} What we are

I am carnal, sold under sin.

This statement is appealed to by those who say he is speaking of himself in his unconverted state.

Compare:

1 Cor 3: 1-3

Q. So what is Paul saying?

See verse 18.

He is referring to what he is in himself!

Not what he is in Christ!

Robert Haldane notes:

"All men have been sold under sin by the fall, and as long as any of the evil of their nature, introduced by the fall, remains in them, so long do they remain sold under sin, to whatever extent and in what ever respect it exists. The Christian, it is true, receives a new nature, and the old nature is mortified ; but it still lives, and, so far as it lives, the individual is properly said to be sold under sin. The old nature is not made holy, but a new nature is communicated. As far, then, as the old man manifests himself, and acts, so far even the Christian is sold under sin."

3} In verse 15 he explains what he stated in 14b.

Rom 7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

A} When we Sin as Christians

"For that which I do I allow not"

"Allow not"

Margin:

"Understand not"

Q. Do we not know this experience?

Haldane notes:

"That which I do, I allow not. Literally, I know not. The English word know, as well as the word in the original, is often used as implying recognition or acknowledgment. We are said not to know a person whom we do not choose to recognise. Paul committed sin, but he did not recognise or approve it."

Contrast:

Romans 1: 32

B} Our Inability to do what we want:

“for what I would, that do I not”

Calvin:

“we must observe, that this conflict, of which the Apostle speaks, does not exist in man before he is renewed by the Spirit of God: for man, left to his own nature, is wholly borne along by his lusts without any resistance; for though the ungodly are tormented by the stings of conscience, and cannot take such delight in their vices, but that they have some taste of bitterness; yet you cannot hence conclude, either that evil is hated, or that good is loved by them; only the Lord permits them to be thus tormented, in order to show to them in a measure his judgment; but not to imbue them either with the love of righteousness or with the hatred of sin.”

Later he says:

“The godly, on the other hand, in whom the regeneration of God is begun, are so divided, that with the chief desire of the heart they aspire to God, seek celestial righteousness, hate sin, and yet they are drawn down to the earth by the relics of their flesh: and thus, while pulled in two ways, they fight against their own nature, and nature fights against them; and they condemn their sins, not only as being constrained by the judgment of reason, but because they really in their hearts abominate them, and on their account loathe themselves. This is the Christian conflict between the flesh and the spirit of which Paul speaks in Galatians 5:17”.

C} Our attitude to our Sin.

“but what I hate, that do I.”

Thus we are made like Christ at least in part. Compare Hebrews 1:9

4} Our Relationship to Sin vindicates the Law

Rom 7:16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good.

“Consent”

Margin:

“agree with”

This is the Character of the Law!!

In closing,

Barnes Notes:

“Perhaps nothing can be a more decisive test of piety than a long-continued and painful struggle against evil passions and desires in every form, and a panting of the soul to be delivered from the power and dominion of sin.”

May God bless his word to our souls.

Amen.