

The Meaning and Value of Romans Seven

by Watchman Nee

Romans 7 teaches that deliverance from the Law is necessary for true freedom from sin, and that this deliverance is made possible through union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Scripture: Matthew 5:17, John 19:30, Romans 6:14, Romans 7:5, Romans 7:14, Romans 7:18, Romans 7:24-25, Romans 8:8, Galatians 3:24, Philippians 2:12-13

Topics: "Dependence on Christ", "Deliverance from the Law"

Description

Watchman Nee explores the significance of Romans 7, emphasizing that while Romans 6 teaches freedom from sin, Romans 7 reveals the necessity of being liberated from the Law. He explains that many Christians struggle with sin because they attempt to fulfill God's demands through their own efforts, leading to frustration and failure. The chapter illustrates that true deliverance comes not from trying harder but from recognizing our utter weakness and relying on Christ's power. Ultimately, Nee highlights that through Christ's death and resurrection, believers are freed from the Law's demands and empowered to live a fruitful life in God.

Transcript

We must return now to our study of Romans. We broke off at the end of chapter 6 in order to consider two related subjects, namely, God's eternal purpose, which is the motive and goal of our walk with Him, and the Holy Spirit, who supplies the power and resource to bring us to that goal. We come now to Romans 7, a chapter which many have felt to be almost superfluous. Perhaps indeed it would be so if Christians really saw that the old creation has been ruled out by the Cross of Christ, and an entirely new creation brought in by His resurrection. If we have come to the point where we really 'know' that, and 'reckon' on that, and 'present ourselves' on the basis of that, then perhaps we have no need of Romans 7.

Others have felt that the chapter is in the wrong place. They would have put it between the fifth and sixth chapters. After chapter 6 all is so perfect, so straightforward; and then comes breakdown and the cry, "O wretched man that I am!" Could anything be more of an anticlimax? And so some have argued that Paul is speaking here of his unregenerate experience. Well, we must admit that some of what he describes here is not a Christian experience, but none the less many Christians do experience it. What then is the teaching of this chapter? Romans 6 deals with freedom from sin. Romans 7 deals with freedom from the Law. In chapter 6 Paul has told us how we could be delivered from sin, and we concluded that this was all that was required. Chapter 7 now teaches that deliverance from sin is not enough, but that we also need

to know deliverance from the Law. If we are not fully emancipated from the Law we can never know full emancipation from sin. But what is the difference between deliverance from sin and deliverance from the Law? We all see the value of the former, but where is the need for the latter? Well, to appreciate this we must first understand what the Law is and what it does.

THE FLESH AND MAN'S BREAKDOWN

Romans 7 has a new lesson to teach us. It is found in the discovery that I am " in the flesh " (Rom. 7. 5), that " I am carnal " (7. 14), and that " in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (7. 18). This goes beyond the question of sin, for it relates also to the matter of pleasing God. We are dealing here not with sin in its forms but with man in his carnal state. The latter includes the former but it takes us a stage further, for it leads to the discovery that in this realm too we are totally impotent, and that " they that are in the flesh cannot please God " (Rom. 8. 8). How then is this discovery made? It is made with the help of the Law.

Now let us retrace our steps for a minute and attempt to describe what is probably the experience of many. Many a Christian is truly saved and yet bound by sin. It is not that he is necessarily living under the power of sin all the time, but that there are certain particular sins hampering him continually so that he commits them over and over again. One day he hears the full Gospel message, that the Lord Jesus not only died to cleanse away our sins, but that when He died He included us sinners in His death ; so that not only were our sins dealt with, but we ourselves were dealt with too. The man's eyes are opened and he knows he has been crucified with Christ. Two things follow that revelation. In the first place he reckons that he has died and risen with the Lord, and in the second place, recognizing the Lord's claim upon him, he presents himself to God as alive from the dead. He sees that he has no more right over himself. This is the commencement of a beautiful Christian life, full of praise to the Lord.

But then he begins to reason as follows: 'I have died with Christ and am raised with Him, and I have given myself over to Him for ever ; now I must do something for Him, since He has done so much for me. I want to please Him and do His will.' So, after the step of consecration, he seeks to discover the will of God, and sets out to obey Him. Then he makes a strange discovery. He thought he could do the will of God and he thought he loved it, but gradually he finds he does not always like it. At times he even finds a distinct reluctance to do it, and often when he tries to do it he finds he cannot. Then he begins to question his experience. He asks himself : 'Did I really know? Yes! Did I really reckon? Yes! Did I really give myself to Him? Yes! Have I taken back my consecration? No! Then whatever is the matter now?' The more this man tries to do the will of God the more he fails. Ultimately he comes to the conclusion that he never really loved God's will at all, so he prays for the desire and the power to do it. He confesses his disobedience and promises never to disobey again. But he has barely got up from his knees before he has fallen once more ; before he reaches the point of victory he is conscious of defeat. Then he says to himself : ' Perhaps my last decision was not definite enough. This time I will be absolutely definite.' So he brings all his will-power to bear on the situation, only to find greater defeat than ever awaiting him the next time a choice has to be made. Then at last he echoes the words of Paul: " For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me: but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practice " (Rom. 7. 18,19).

WHAT THE LAW TEACHES

Many Christians are suddenly launched into the experience of Romans 7 and they do not know why. They fancy Romans 6 is quite enough. Having grasped that, they think there can be no more question of failure, and then to their utmost surprise they suddenly find themselves in Romans 7. What is the explanation?

First let us be quite clear that the death with Christ described in Romans 6 is fully adequate to cover all our need. It is the explanation of that death, with all that follows from it, that is incomplete in chapter 6. We are as yet still in ignorance of the truth set forth in chapter 7. Romans 7 is given to us to explain and make real the statement in Romans 6.14, that: " Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace." The trouble is that we do not yet know deliverance from law. What, then, is the meaning of law?

Grace means that God does something for me; law means that I do something for God. God has certain holy and righteous demands which He places upon me: that is law. Now if law means that God requires something of me for their fulfilment, then deliverance from law means that He no longer requires that from me, but Himself provides it. Law implies that God requires me to do something for Him; deliverance from law implies that He exempts me from doing it, and that in grace He does it Himself. I (where 'I' is the 'carnal' man of ch. 7. 14) need do nothing for God: that is deliverance from law. The trouble in Romans 7 is that man in the flesh tried to do something for God. As soon as you try to please God in that way, then you place yourself under law, and the experience of Romans 7 begins to be yours.

As we seek to understand this, let it be settled at the outset that the fault does not lie with the Law. Paul says, " the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good " (Rom. 7.12). No, there is nothing wrong with the Law, but there is something decidedly wrong with me. The demands of the Law are righteous, but the person upon whom the demands are made is unrighteous. The trouble is not that the Law's demands are unjust, but that I am unable to meet them. It may be all right for the Government to require payment of ?100 but it will be all wrong if I have only ten shillings with which to meet the demand!

I am a man " sold under sin " (Rom. 7. 14). Sin has dominion over me. As long as you leave me alone I seem to be rather a fine type of man. It is when you ask me to do something that my sinfulness comes to light..

If you have a very clumsy servant and he just sits still and does nothing, then his clumsiness does not appear. If he does nothing all day he will be of little use to you, it is true, but at least he will do no damage that way. But if you say to him: 'Now come along, don't idle away your time; get up and do something', then immediately the trouble begins. He knocks the chair over as he gets up, stumbles over a footstool a few paces further on, then smashes some precious dish as soon as he handles it. If you make no demands upon him his clumsiness is never noticed, but as soon as you ask him to do anything his awkwardness is seen at once. The demands were all right, but the man was all wrong. He was as clumsy a man when he was sitting still as when he was working, but it was your demands that made manifest the clumsiness that was all the time in his make-up, whether he was active or inactive.

We are all sinners by nature. If God asks nothing of us, all seems to go well, but as soon as He demands something of us the occasion is provided for a grand display of our sinfulness. The Law makes our weakness manifest. While you let me sit still I appear to be all right, but when you ask me to do anything I am sure to spoil that thing, and if you trust me with a second thing I will as surely spoil it too. When a holy law is applied to a sinful man, then his sinfulness comes out in full display.

God knows who I am; He knows that from head to foot I am full of sin ; He knows that I am weakness incarnate; that I can do nothing. The trouble is that I do not know it. I admit that all men are sinners and that therefore I am a sinner ; but I imagine that I am not such a hopeless sinner as some. God must bring us all to the place where we see that we are utterly weak and helpless. While we say so, we do not wholly believe it, and God has to do something to convince us of the fact. Had it not been for the Law we should never have known how weak we are. Paul had reached that point. He makes this clear when he says in Romans 7. 7: " I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet ". Whatever might be his experience with the rest of the Law, it was the tenth commandment, which literally translated is: " Thou shalt not desire . . ." that found him out. There his total failure and incapacity stared him in the face!

The more we try to keep the Law the more our weakness is manifest and the deeper we get into Romans 7, until it is clearly demonstrated to us that we are hopelessly weak. God knew it all along but we did not, and so God had to bring us through painful experiences to a recognition of the fact. We need to have our weakness proved to ourselves beyond dispute. That is why God gave us the Law.

So we can say, reverently, that God never gave us the Law to keep; He gave us the Law to break! He well knew that we could not keep it. We are so bad that He asks no favour and makes no demands. Never has any man succeeded in making himself acceptable to God by means of the Law. Nowhere in the New Testament are men of faith told that they are to keep the Law; but it does say that the Law was given so that there should be transgression. The law came in ... that the trespass might abound (Rom. 5. 20). The Law was given to make us lawbreakers! No doubt I am a sinner in Adam; " Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: ... for apart from the law sin is dead . . . but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died " (Rom. 7. 7 - 9). The Law is that which exposes our true nature. Alas, we are so conceited, and think ourselves so strong, that God has to give us something to test us and prove how weak we are. At last we see it and confess: 'I am a sinner through and through, and I can of myself do nothing whatever to please God.'

No, the Law was not given in the expectation that we would keep it. It was given in the full knowledge that we would break it; and when we have broken it so completely that we are convinced of our utter need, then the Law has served its purpose. It has been our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that He Himself may fulfil it in us (Gal. 3. 24).

CHRIST THE END OF THE LAW

In Romans 6 we saw how God delivered us from sin; in Romans 7 we see how He delivers us from the Law. In chapter 6 we were shown the way of deliverance from sin in the picture of a master and his slave ; in chapter 7 we are shown the way of deliverance from the Law in the picture of two husbands and a wife. The relation between sin and the sinner is that of master to slave; the relation between the Law and the sinner is that of husband to wife.

Notice first that in the picture in Romans 7. 1 - 4 by which Paul illustrates our deliverance from the Law there is only one woman, while there are two husbands. The woman is in a very difficult position, for she can only be wife of one of the two, and unfortunately she is married to the less desirable one. Let us make no mistake, the man to whom she is married is a good man; but the trouble lies here, that the husband and wife are totally unsuited to one another. He is a most particular man, accurate to a degree ; she on the other hand is decidedly easy-going. With him all is definite and precise; with her all is vague and

haphazard. He wants everything just so, while she accepts things as they come. How could there be happiness in such a home?

And then that husband is so exacting! He is always making demands on his wife. And yet one cannot find fault with him, for as a husband he has a right to expect something of her; and besides, all his demands are perfectly legitimate. There is nothing wrong with the man and nothing wrong with his demands; the trouble is that he has the wrong kind of wife to carry them out. The two cannot get on at all; theirs are utterly incompatible natures. Thus the poor woman is in great distress. She is fully aware that she often makes mistakes, but living with such a husband it seems as though every thing she says and does is wrong! What hope is there for her? If only she were married to that other Man all would be well. He is no less exacting than her husband, but He also helps much. She would fain marry Him, but her husband is still alive. What can she do? She is "bound by law to the husband" and unless he dies she cannot legitimately marry that other Man.

This picture is not drawn by me but by the apostle Paul. The first husband is the Law; the second husband is Christ; and you are the woman. The Law requires much, but offers no help in the carrying out of its requirements. The Lord Jesus requires just as much, yea more (Matt. 5. 21-48) but what He requires from us He Himself carries out in us. The Law makes demands and leaves us helpless to fulfil them; Christ makes demands, but He Himself fulfils in us the very demands He makes. Little wonder that the woman desires to be freed from the first husband that she may marry that other Man! But her only hope of release is through the death of her first husband, and he holds on to life most tenaciously. Indeed there is not the least prospect of his passing away. "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" (Matt. 5. 18).

The Law is going to continue for all eternity. If the Law will never pass away, then how can I ever be united to Christ? How can I marry a second husband if my first husband simply refuses to die? There is one way out. If he will not die, I can die, and if I die the marriage relationship is dissolved. And that is exactly God's way of deliverance from the Law. The most important point to note in this section of Romans 7 is the transition from verse 3 to verse 4. Verses 1 to 3 show that the husband should die, but in verse 4 we see that in fact it is the woman who dies. The Law does not pass away, but I pass away, and by death I am freed from the Law. Let us realise clearly that the Law can never pass away. God's righteous demands remain for ever, and if I live I must meet those demands; but if I die the Law has lost its claim upon me. It cannot follow me beyond the grave.

Exactly the same principle operates in our deliverance from the Law as in our deliverance from sin. When I have died my old master, Sin, still continues to live, but his power over his slave extends as far as the grave and no further. He could ask me to do a hundred and one things when I was alive, but when I am dead he calls on me in vain. I am for ever freed from his tyranny. So it is with regard to the Law. While the woman lives she is bound to her husband, but with her death the marriage bond is dissolved and she is "discharged from the law of her husband". The Law may still make demands, but for me its power to enforce them is ended.

Now the vital question arises: 'How do I die?' And the preciousness of our Lord's work comes in just here: "Ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ" (Rom. 7. 4). When Christ died His body was broken, and since God placed me in Him (1 Cor. 1. 30), I have been broken too. When He was crucified, I was crucified with Him.

An Old Testament illustration may help to make this clear. It was the veil of testimony that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, and upon it were embroidered cherubim (Exod. 26.31 ; 2 Chron. 3.14) whose faces, by analogy from Ezekiel 1. 10 and 10. 14, included that of a man as representing the human head of the whole natural creation (Psalm 8. 4 - 8). In Old Testament days God dwelt within the veil and man without. Man could look upon the veil, but not within it. That veil symbolised our Lord's flesh, His body (Heb'. 10. 20). So in the Gospels men could only look upon the outward form of our Lord; they could not, save by Divine revelation (Matt. 16. 16,17), see the God who dwelt within. But when the Lord Jesus died, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27. 51) as by the hand of God, so that man could gaze right into the Most Holy Place. Since the death of the Lord Jesus, God is no longer veiled but seeks to reveal Himself (I Cor. 2. 7 - 10).

But when the veil was rent asunder, what happened to the cherubim? God rent only the veil, it is true, but the cherubim were there in the veil and were one with it, for they were embroidered upon it. It was impossible to rend the veil and preserve them whole. When the veil was rent the cherubim were rent with it. And, in the sight of God, when the Lord Jesus died the whole living creation died too.

" Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ." That woman's husband may be very well and strong, but if she dies he may make as many demands upon her as he likes; it will not affect her in the slightest. Death has set her free from all her husband's claims. We were in the Lord Jesus when He died, and that inclusive death of His has for ever freed us from the Law. But our Lord did not remain in the grave. On the third day He rose again ; and since we are still in Him we are risen too. The body of the Lord Jesus speaks not only of His death but of His resurrection, for His resurrection was a bodily resurrection. Thus " through the body of Christ " we are not only " dead to the law"--but alive unto God.

God's purpose in uniting us to Christ was not merely negative; it was gloriously positive-" that ye should be joined to another " (Rom. 7. 4). Death has dissolved the old marriage relationship, so that the woman, driven to despair by the constant demands of her former husband, who never lifted a little finger to help her carry them out, is now set free to marry the other Man, who with every demand He makes becomes in her the power for its fulfilment.

And what is the issue of this new union? " That we might bring forth fruit unto God " (Rom. 7. 4). By the body of Christ that foolish, sinful woman has died, but being united to Him in death she is united to Him in resurrection also, and in the power of resurrection life she brings forth fruit unto God. The risen life of the Lord in her empowers her for all the demands God's holiness makes upon her. The Law of God is not annulled; it is perfectly, fulfilled, for the risen Lord now lives out His life in her, and His life is always wellpleasing to the Father.

What happens when a woman marries? She no longer bears her own name but that of her husband; and she shares not his name only but his possessions too. So it is when we are joined to Christ. When we belong to Him, all that is His becomes ours, and with His infinite resources at our disposal we are well able to meet all His demands.

OUR END IS GOD'S BEGINNING

Now that we have settled the doctrinal side of the question we must come down to practical issues, staying a little longer with the negative aspect and keeping the positive for our next chapter. What does it mean in everyday life to be delivered from the Law? It means that from henceforth I am going to do

nothing whatever for God; I am never again going to try to please Him. 'What a doctrine!' you exclaim. 'What awful heresy! You cannot possibly mean that!'

But remember, if I try to please God 'in the flesh', then immediately I place myself under the Law. I broke the Law; the Law pronounced the death sentence; the sentence was executed, and now by death I-the carnal 'I' (Rom. 7. 14)-have been set free from all its claims. There is still a Law of God, and now there is in fact a " new commandment " that is infinitely more exacting than the old, but, Praise God! its demands are being met, for it is Christ who now fulfils them ; it is Christ who works in me what is well-pleasing to God. "I came ... to fulfil [the law]" were His words (Matt. 5. 17). Thus Paul, from the ground of resurrection, can say: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2. 12, 13).

It is God that worketh in you, Deliverance from law does not mean that we are free from doing the will of God. It certainly does not mean that we are going to be lawless. Very much the reverse! What it does mean however is that we are free from doing that will as of ourselves. Being fully persuaded that we cannot do it, we cease trying to please God from the ground of the old man. Having at last reached the point of utter despair in ourselves so that we cease even to try, we put our trust in the Lord to manifest His resurrection life in us.

Let me illustrate by what I have seen in my own country. In China some bearers can carry a load of salt weighing 120 kilos, some even 250 kilos. Now along comes a man who can carry only 120 kilos, and here is a load of 250 kilos. He knows perfectly well he cannot carry it, and if he is wise he will say: 'I won't touch it!' But the temptation to try is ingrained in human nature, so although he cannot possibly carry it he still tries. As a youngster I used to amuse myself watching ten or twenty of these fellows come along and try, though every one of them knew he could not possibly manage it. In the end he must give up and make way for the man who could.

The sooner we too give up trying the better, for if we monopolize the task, then there is no room for the Holy Spirit. But if we say: 'I'll not do it; I'll trust Thee to do it for me', then we shall find that a Power stronger than ourselves is carrying us through.

In 1923 I met a famous Canadian evangelist. I had said in an address something along the above lines, and as we walked back to his home afterwards he remarked: 'The note of Romans 7 is seldom sounded nowadays; it is good to hear it again. The day I was delivered from the Law was a day of Heaven on earth. After being a Christian for years I was still trying my best to please God, but the more I tried the more I failed. I regarded God as the greatest Demander in the universe, but I found myself impotent to fulfil the least of His demands. Suddenly one day, as I read Romans 7, light dawned and I saw that I had not only been delivered from sin but from the Law as well. In my amazement I jumped up and said: " Lord, are you really making no demands on me? Then I need do nothing more for You! "'

God's requirements have not altered, but we are not the ones to meet them. Praise God, He is the Lawgiver on the Throne, and He is the Lawkeeper in my heart. He who gave the Law, Himself keeps it. He makes the demands, but He also meets them. My friend could well jump up and shout when he found he had nothing to do, and all who make a like discovery can do the same. As long as we are trying to do anything, He can do nothing. It is because of our trying that we fail and fail and fail. God wants to demonstrate to us that we can do nothing at all, and until that is fully recognized our disappointments and disillusionments will never cease.

A brother who was trying to struggle into victory remarked to me, 'I do not know why I am so weak.' 'The trouble with you', I said, 'is that you are weak enough not to do the will of God, but you are not weak enough to keep out of things altogether. You are still not weak enough. When you are reduced to utter weakness and are persuaded that you can do nothing whatever, then God will do everything.' 'We all need to come to the point where we say: 'Lord. I am unable to do anything for Thee, but I trust Thee to do everything in me.'

I was once staying in a place in China with some twenty other brothers. There was inadequate provision for bathing in the home where we stayed, so we went for a daily plunge in the river. On one occasion a brother had cramp in one leg, and I suddenly saw he was sinking fast, so I motioned to another brother, who was an expert swimmer, to hasten to his rescue. But to my astonishment he made no move. So I grew desperate and called out: 'Don't you see the man is drowning?' and the other brothers, about as agitated as I was, shouted vigorously too. But our good swimmer still did not move. Calm and collected, he remained just where he was, apparently postponing the unwelcome task. Meantime the voice of the poor drowning brother grew fainter and his efforts feeble. In my heart I said: 'I hate that man! Think of his letting a brother drown before his very eyes and not going to the rescue !'

But when the man was actually sinking, with a few swift strokes the swimmer was at his side, and both were safely ashore. When I got an opportunity I aired my views. 'I have never seen any Christian who loved his life quite as much as you do', I said. 'Think of the distress you would have saved that brother if you had considered yourself a little less and him a little more.' But the swimmer knew his business better than I did. 'Had I gone earlier', he said, 'he would have clutched me so fast that both of us would have gone under. A drowning man cannot be saved until he is utterly exhausted and ceases to make the slightest effort to save himself.'

Do you see it? When we give up the case, then God will take it up. He is waiting until we are at an end of our resources and can do nothing more for ourselves. God has condemned all that is of the old creation and consigned it to the Cross. The flesh profiteth nothing! If we try to do anything in the flesh we are virtually repudiating the Cross of Christ. God has declared us to be fit only for death. When we truly believe that, then we confirm God's verdict by giving up all our fleshly efforts to please Him. Our every effort to do His will is a denial of His declaration in the Cross of our utter worthlessness. Our continued efforts are a misunderstanding on the one hand of God's demands and on the other hand of the source of supply.

We see the Law and we think that we must meet its demands, but we need to remember that, though the Law in itself is all right, it will be all wrong if it is applied to the wrong person. The "wretched man" of Romans 7 tried to meet the demands of God's law himself, and that was the cause of his trouble. The repeated use of the little word 'I' in this chapter gives the clue to the failure. "The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise" (Rom. 7. 19). There was a fundamental misconception in this man's mind. He thought God was asking him to keep the Law, so of course he was trying to keep it. But God was requiring no such thing of him. What was the result? Far from doing what pleased God, he found himself doing what displeased Him. In his very efforts to do the will of God he did exactly the opposite of what he knew to be His will.

I THANK GOD

Romans 6 deals with " the body of sin ", Romans 7 with " the body of this death " (6. 6 ; 7. 24). In chapter 6 the whole question before us is sin; in chapter 7 the whole question before us is death. What is the difference between the body of sin and the body of death? In regard to sin (that is, to whatever displeases God) I have a body of sin-a body, that is to say, which is actively engaged in sin. But in regard to the Law of God (that is, to that which expresses the will of God) I have a body of death. My activity in regard to sin makes my body a body of sin; my failure in regard to God's will makes my body a body of death. In regard to all that is wicked, worldly and Satanic I am, in my nature, wholly positive; but in regard to all that pertains to holiness and Heaven and God I am wholly negative.

Have you discovered the truth of that in your life? It is no good merely to discover it in Romans 6 and 7. Have you discovered that you carry the encumbrance of a lifeless body in regard to God's will? You have no difficulty in speaking about worldly matters, but when you try to speak for the Lord you are tongue-tied; when you try to pray you feel sleepy when you try to do something for the Lord you feel unwell. You can do anything but that which is related to God's will. There is something in this body that does not harmonize with the will of God.

What does death mean? We may illustrate from a wellknown verse in the first letter to the Corinthians: " For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep" (1 Corinthians 11 - 3 0). Death is weakness produced to its extremity-weakness, sickness, death. Death means utter weakness; it means you are weak to such a point that you can become no weaker. That I have a body of death in relation to God's will means that I am so weak in regard to serving God, so utterly weak, that I am reduced to a point of dire helplessness. " O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" cried Paul, and it is good when anyone cries out as he did. There is nothing more musical in the ears of the Lord. This cry is the most spiritual and the most scriptural cry a man can utter. He only utters it when he knows he can do nothing, and gives up making any further resolutions. Up to this point, every time he failed he made a new resolution and doubled and redoubled his will-power. At last he discovers there is no use in his making up his mind any more, and he cries out in desperation: " O wretched man that I am!" Like a man who suddenly awakes to find himself in a burning building, his cry is now for help, for he has come to the point where he despairs of himself.

Have you despaired of yourself, or do you hope that if you read and pray more you will be a better Christian? Biblereading and prayer are not wrong, and God forbid that we should suggest that they are, but it is wrong to trust even in them for victory. Our help is in Him who is the object of that reading and prayer. Our trust must be in Christ alone. Happily the " wretched man " does not merely deplore his wretchedness; he asks a fine question, namely: " Who shall deliver me?" " Who?" Hitherto he has looked for some thing ; now his hope is in a Person. Hitherto he has looked within for a solution to his problem; now he looks beyond himself for a Saviour. He no longer puts forth self-effort ; all his expectation is now in Another.

How did we obtain forgiveness of sins? Was it by reading, praying, almsgiving, and so on? No, we looked to the Cross, believing in what the Lord Jesus had done; and deliverance from sin becomes ours on exactly the same principle, nor is it otherwise with the question of pleasing God. In the matter of forgiveness we look to Him on the Cross; in the matter of deliverance from sin and of doing the will of God we look to Him in our hearts. For the one we depend on what He has done; for the other we depend on what He will do in us; but in regard to both, our dependence is on Him alone. He is the One who does it all.

At the time when the Epistle to the Romans was written a murderer was punished in a peculiar and terrible manner. The dead body of the one murdered was tied to the living body of the murderer, head to head, hand to hand, foot to foot, and the living one was bound to the dead one till death. The murderer could go where he pleased, but wherever he went he had to carry the corpse of that murdered man with him. Could punishment be more appalling? Yet this is the illustration Paul now uses. It is as though he were bound to a dead body and unable to get free. Wherever he goes he is hampered by this terrible burden. At last he can bear it no longer and cries: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me ...?" And then, in a flash of illumination, his cry of despair changes to a song of praise. He has found the answer to his question. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7. 25).

We know that justification is ours through the Lord Jesus and requires no work on our part, but we think sanctification is dependent on our own efforts. We know we can receive forgiveness only by entire reliance on the Lord; yet we believe we can obtain deliverance by doing something ourselves. We fear that if we do nothing, nothing will happen. After salvation the old habit of 'doing' reasserts itself and we begin our old self-efforts again. Then God's word comes afresh to us: "It is finished" (John 19. 30). He has done everything on the Cross for our forgiveness and He will do everything in us for our deliverance. In both cases He is the doer. "It is God that worketh in you."

The first words of the delivered man are very precious - "I thank God". If someone gives you a cup of water you thank the person who gave it, not someone else. Why did Paul say "Thank God"? Because God was the One who did everything. Had it been Paul who did it, he would have said, "Thank Paul". But he saw that Paul was a "wretched man" and that God alone could meet his need; so he said, "Thank God". God wants to do all, for He must have all the glory. If we do some of the work, then we will get some of the glory; but God must have it all Himself, so He does all the work from beginning to end.

What we have said in this chapter might seem negative and unpractical if we were to stop at this point, as though the Christian life were a matter of sitting still and waiting for something to happen. Of course it is very far from being so. All who truly live it know it to be a matter of very positive and active faith in Christ and in an altogether new principle of life- the law of the Spirit of life. We are now going to look at the effects in us of this new life principle.

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