

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Faith Triumphs, Law Falls**

October 2023

Fall Quarter

**October 7, 2023**

## **Lesson #1 – Old and New**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 7:1-12

### **ICE BREAKER** –

1. What does it mean to be a new person in Christ?
2. How can knowing that God loves you unconditionally change your behavior?

***Key Verse – Now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.—Romans 7:6***

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Paul addresses the above questions in Romans 7, a deep dive into the purpose and applicability of the Old Testament law to Christians. Tension between Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds is a context of the book of Romans—something that is no longer an issue in the church today. Even so, the question of the place of the Law of Moses as regulations for human behavior is still debated. Therefore, while understanding Paul’s ongoing argument in Romans can be challenging, diligent study of this book is essential for the practice of biblical Christianity. The book of Romans is the fullest expression of Paul’s teaching—what he calls “my gospel” (Romans 2:16; 16:25). Paul refers to his teaching this way as he draws frequently on his Jewish heritage. By one count, Romans features more than 50 direct quotes from the Old Testament. In Romans 5; 6, and 7, Paul identifies three great tyrants of humankind: sin, death, and the law. Each of these has had a role in oppressing men and women and robbing them of the possibility of a reconciled relationship with the Lord. Each of these three has had “dominion” (Romans 6:9, 14; 7:1), the language of tyranny. Death has reigned in terror since the sin of Adam (5:14). Sin has reigned in the lives of men and women (6:12), leading to the consequences of judgment. Law (whether Mosaic or secular) exists as the authority to define and punish wrong behavior (6:15–23). In Romans 7, Paul returned to a discussion of the rightful place of the law in God’s plan.

### **LESSON COMMENTARY**

7:1–4. In Rm 7, Paul develops the theme introduced in 6:14 (see the comments there). Law, whether Mosaic or any other, has jurisdiction only over the living (v. 1). But Paul wrote that the believer died with Christ in reference to sin (6:2, 6, 8, 11; see the comments there). That death was also a death with reference to the law (vv. 2–4). Sometimes these verses are cited in defense of the concept that Paul says only death dissolves the marital bond, and that all divorce, for

whatever reason, is wrong. It is possible that Rm 7:1–4 could be understood this way, but it is unlikely since Paul himself appears to allow for divorce (see the comments on 1Co 7:12–16), as does Jesus (see the comments on Mt 19:1–9). In addition, Paul was simply using marriage, the death of one's spouse, and divorce as an illustration of dying with Christ so that one is freed from sin. His intent was not to give binding instruction on divorce. To understand this text as representative of Paul's view of divorce is ill-advised. 7:5–6. These two verses forecast the rest of chaps. 7 and 8, and are crucial for the proper understanding of chap. 7 in particular. Flesh (v. 5) refers to a conglomeration of human traits that contribute to one's disposition to sin, also known as "the old sin nature." Flesh has this sense in its ensuing occurrences (7:14, 18, 25; 8:3 [first occurrence], 4, 5 [twice], 6, 7, 8, 9, probably 12 and 13), and in each of its uses in these verses refers to the unsaved, non-Christian state as suggested by its use in 7:5. Because 7:5–6 forecast the rest of chap. 7 and all of chap. 8, and because "flesh" in 7:5 refers to the unsaved condition, it is likely that "flesh" in the other occurrences of the word in chaps. 7 and 8 should be understood with a similar sense, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise (as noted below). Sinful passions ... aroused by the Law is the topic developed in vv. 7–12. Death is the theme developed in vv. 14–25. But now (v. 6) refers to the present state of the believer who is no longer "in the flesh" (i.e., no longer in the unsaved condition) nor under the law because of dying with Christ. Christians now serve (better, "are enslaved to"; see 6:18, 22) righteousness in the newness (see 6:4) of the Spirit. The mention of life in the Spirit forecasts the theme of Rm 8. 7:7–13. Verses 5 and 6 do not indicate that the law is evil. The law informs about what sin is (v. 7), and this is valuable (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20). Paul employs a rhetorical technique called "impersonation" (Gk. *prosopopoeia*) with which he steps into a role to make a point (similarly, cf. 1Co 13:1–3, 11–12). But identifying who Paul impersonates is a challenge, and there are several interpretive options. First, it is possible that Paul uses "I" to describe the experience of Adam, or, second, of Israel before receiving the law. Third, Paul may be saying that sin is so strong in the believer that Christians should expect moral failure and accept it as an inevitability. In this case Paul is remarkably pessimistic about the Christian life, and in light of Rm 6 and 8, this is an unlikely view. Fourth, Paul's "I" may refer to a believer who seeks to sanctify himself by keeping the law, an approach to the Christian life also doomed to fail. But sanctification is possible if the believer relies upon the power of the Spirit to defeat sin. Fifth, the preferable view adopted here and argued below is that Paul is describing the futile experience of an unbeliever who seeks to conquer the power of sin by keeping his moral standards in his own power. Paul's "I" is autobiographical, but represents the experience of all unsaved individuals who seek unsuccessfully to keep their moral code. For the Jewish people, that moral code is the law of Moses. For Gentiles, it is some other philosophy of life they or their culture adopts (e.g., the "rule of fair play"; the Golden Rule; "all things in moderation"). Paul wrote in 2:12–16 (see the comments there) that Gentiles have their own moral code but fail to live up to it. This failure reveals them as sinners for whom condemnation is appropriate. But in chap. 7 Paul discusses primarily the experience of the Jewish

unbeliever (7:1, I am speaking to those who know the law), but what he says is equally relevant for Gentile unbelievers who fail to keep their own moral standards. It is fashionable to maintain that Paul's "I" is not autobiographical since he kept the law competently enough that his conscience did not bother him (it was "robust"; cf. Php 3:2–6), contrary to the "I" in this chapter. However, Paul's law-keeping was sometimes motivated by impure intentions (Gl 1:10), and his pre-conversion conscience was not as robust as sometimes thought (Ti 3:3–6). The law is good (v. 7), but it is weak, and does not help one who is "in the flesh," i.e., an unbeliever (see the comments on 7:5) break the power of sin in this life (not the eternal state, in keeping with 6:14) (v. 8). Sin, here viewed as an anti-God force that dominates the unbeliever, leads one to rebel against God. Apart from the Law sin is dead does not mean that sin is non-existent. Rather, sin is always active, but it is hyperactive when the unregenerate human heart encounters God's law (sin became alive, v. 9; sin deceived me and killed me, v. 11). That sin was energized when the commandment came likely refers to a "moral awakening" when one begins to grasp fully the implications of his moral code and the consequences of failing to fulfill it (sin became alive [or "sprang to life"] and I died). For the kind of death Paul has in mind (i.e., moral corruption and frustration), see vv. 13–24. The law is good (v. 12), but sin is so strong that it can use the good law as a weapon to kill an unbelieving person (vv. 10–11, 13), for sin influences people to violate the law and bring upon themselves the moral and spiritual sentence of death. 7:14–20. Verses 14–25 develop the theme of death introduced in 7:5d. Death is mentioned twice in v. 13 and again in v. 24, forming an inclusio (brackets) on the whole paragraph, clarifying what Paul means by "death." As in 6:15–23 (see the comments there), death refers to "moral frustration and corruption," not the cessation of biological life nor spiritual or eternal separation from God. Verses 7–13 are dominated by aorist tense verbs, traditionally understood as reflecting Paul's past experience before he knew the Lord. In vv. 14–25, on the other hand, Paul used predominantly present tense verbs, and these have sometimes been interpreted as a description of Paul's present experience as a believer. But it is better to understand the present tense verbs as indicating Paul's emphasis in this chapter. His main point is to explore the unbeliever's moral frustration and corruption due to sin and its consequences (called death, not "condemnation," in vv. 14–25), not how "the Law arouses sinful passions" (vv. 7–13). The present tense verbs in vv. 14–25 indicate this emphasis. This interpretation is supported by much of Rm 6, which explores freedom from sin and death (cf. the comments on 6:2–14), and Rm 8:1–13, which reiterates this theme. When Paul says I am of flesh (v. 14; also my flesh in v. 18), it is extremely unlikely that he is referring to his Christian experience, for no Christian is "in the flesh" following conversion (cf. v. 5). Sold in bondage to sin is the experience of an unbeliever, for Christians are no longer enslaved to sin (cf. 6:7, 18, 22). This is an unbeliever enslaved to sin who, like Paul before his conversion, loved the law and strove to obey it, but was frustrated by his inability to do so (vv. 15–17). While Paul does have a category for "fleshly believers" (see the comments on 1Co 3:1–4), his use of "in the flesh" in Rm 7:5, and flesh in vv. 14, 18, indicates that he used flesh in a way that differs from 1Co 3. Here it

delineates the unsaved condition (“while we were in the flesh” in 7:5 indicates that Paul believes Christians are no longer “in the flesh,” indicated also by the “then-versus-now” contrast in 7:5, 6), but the use of “flesh” in 1Co 3:1–3 describes true believers who are acting like the unsaved.

**LESSON NUGGET** – Believers are not under the law, but that does not give them license to become outlaws. They have a new life (6:1-11) and a new Master (6:12-23), and they also have a new love; they are married to Christ (vv.1-6). If a marriage must be based on laws instead of love, it is going to make for an unhappy home.

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***