

From "Readings on Romans" by C. Crain. Pp. 70- 78.

Romans 7:1 - 8:4

We will now consider the apostle's statement of the effect of one who is in Christ **making the law the rule of life.**

It is of very great importance to notice that **the apostle does not admit that God imposes the law as a rule of life on those who are connected with the risen Christ. He looks upon them as being dead to the law with Christ.** He recognizes that in the past dispensation the subjects of divine grace were put by God into relationship with law—a relationship he illustrates by the marriage bond. If death removes the husband, the woman is no longer in the marriage bond. So too the death of Christ, as our representative and substitute, ends for believers their relationship with law. A woman whose husband is dead is free to be joined to another man. So also, since the death of Christ, the law cannot prevent those who are of Christ being joined to Him. Their bond with law having been dissolved by the death upon the cross, they are thus freed from it, and a new bond has been formed. By the Spirit of God, who is given to believers (to all believers since the ascension of Christ—John 7:39), those who are of Christ are united to Him in this new bond (vers. 1—4).

We must also note another thing. Whatever fruit for God there was in the practical lives of those who were of Christ before His death, it was not the fruit of their bond with law. That was a barren, fruitless bond. But the new bond, the bond by the Spirit, is *not* a fruitless one. The law's very prohibitions intensified the opposition of the natural man's sinful passions (ver. 5). For this reason it could not help the true children of faith to a life of fruitful service for God.

But now, since the death of Christ, believers are delivered from the bond with the law, and are in a bond with the risen Christ, in which the Spirit of God is the energy of service—a service acceptable to God. **Serving thus by the Spirit, they serve in newness of spirit; not now with minds in rebellion against the authority of God, but with hearts in subjection to His grace.**

The doctrine of the apostle, then, is that those who belong to Christ now, not only have title to be practically free from the law, but are in a bond with the risen Christ, the fruit of which is realized and enjoyed in the measure in which the Spirit, who is the power of the bond, is obeyed in His leading (vers. 5, 6).

Here an objection presents itself. An ardent defender of the doctrine that the law is the rule of life for Christians, says, "If Christians are dead to the law, then the law is sin." The apostle's answer shows that it is in nowise so. Instead of its being sin, it *convicts* of sin. This was one of the purposes for which it was given; and no

matter to whom it has to say—an unconverted or a converted man—it convicts of sin. Whoever undertakes to live by it finds the lusts it forbids are in him, and that the very prohibition is the occasion of their vigorous activity. One just converted usually delights, with more or less ecstasy, in the love of God, which the Spirit that dwells in him sheds abroad in his heart. While thus occupied in the power of the Spirit with the love of God, he is not concerned or occupied with the sin that dwells in him. Without the law, it is not active (ver. 9). But as he begins to think of the claims which the love he has so much enjoyed has upon him, he assumes that the law is the power by which he is to meet those claims. He takes it up thus as the rule of his life. He finds, however, that he is continually being made aware of the presence in him of the prohibited lusts. Their activity has revived, and his conscience continually accuses him. What he took up for life, he finds to be a ministration of death—see 2Cor. 3 :7. He has been deceived. **The coming in of the law in this way as the rule of life, was the occasion of his being deceived. The result of the experience is the writing upon his conscience that he has no title to live—his conscience is under the sentence of death. He has to own that even as a child of God he has not the least title to live.**

The lesson thus learned is a good one; he has learned it through the law, though mistaken in taking it to be the rule of life. The law, then, is not sin. It is holy, and the commandment is "holy and just and good" (vers. 10-12).

There is yet another objection. The defender of the law as being the Christian's rule of life, considers the apostle's reasoning to imply that what is "good is made death" to the Christian. The apostle now shows that the objection is an entire misapprehension. Instead of the law being made death to a believer in Christ, as a ministration of death it shows how exceedingly sinful sin is. The fact that it is by means of what is good that sin works death in one who belongs to Christ, makes the deadly character of sin the more manifest. The objection, then, is shown to have no force (ver. 13).

We come now to the apostle's explanation of the exercises and experiences resulting from the mistake which so many believers in Christ make in taking the law to be the rule of life (vers. 14-20). To understand this explanation we must remember **the apostle is not speaking of the exercises and experiences of an unregenerate man—of a man whose position before God is that of being in Adam—in the flesh. He is speaking of a regenerate man—a man in Christ; in the new bond, therefore, possessed by believers ever since Pentecost. He is a man indwelt by the Spirit. While he is not walking according to the Spirit, yet the**

indwelling Spirit is leading him. He is leading him as to his aims and purposes, and He is also leading him in his decisions as he passes judgment on the strife that he finds going on within him. Terrible as it all is, he is being led and taught of the Spirit.

Let us trace the Spirit's ways with him under the authoritative guidance of the apostle.

First, let us mark that the spirituality of the law is spoken of as found in what we may call a common Christian consciousness. **In other words, it is the instinctive consciousness of every regenerate soul.** The *measure* of its spirituality is another matter. This, no doubt, differs in different individuals. But every new-born soul will unhesitatingly confess the spirituality of the law. With this common Christian instinct the Spirit allies Himself; hence the one who has mistakenly taken up the law as a rule of life is led to realize that by his carnality he is a captive in sin's power. He consents to the law, agrees with the Spirit that it is good, in mind and heart is subject to the Spirit's view of the law as being spiritual. yet he finds inward insubjection as well.

Second, as, under the Spirit's watchful eye and superintending care, he studies the conflict going on within himself, he is taught to distinguish between himself and the sin that dwells in him. He is unwillingly serving sin. He sees there is an "I" that is right though he has not yet learned to identify it. He does not yet see himself as a man in Christ, but he distinguishes the "I" that is right from the sin dwelling within him, and to which he is captive.

Third, further exercise and introspection, still by the sure guidance of the Spirit, teaches him the utter profitlessness of the flesh. The carnal mind, or the mind of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God. There is no power in the law to make it subject. He sees there is a will to do the good—a will that is not the will of the flesh—but power to do the good he does not find. His previous conviction and conclusion is thus confirmed, and in fact greatly strengthened. While he does not yet see himself to be a man in Christ, he is more than ever confirmed in the conviction that there is an I that is right, from which the indwelling sin is to be distinguished.

We come now to the final conclusions to which the Spirit leads him (vers. 21-23). All the exercises the Spirit has been pressing upon him, and all the experiences he has passed through in connection with the exercises, reveal plainly an ever-present law: however desirous of doing the good, evil is always present with him. It is a fixed established law. While he delights in the law of God, approves God's expressed will, he sees there is an opposing law in his members, not only antagonistic to the law of his renewed mind, but with sufficient power to make him a helpless captive to the law of sin dwelling in his members. Thus by the guidance of the Spirit, who

characterizes his true condition before God as a subject of divine grace, he has learned to place a right estimate upon his practical condition in not enjoying the aims and purposes with which the Spirit has energized him. He has not yet learned what the Spirit's power is, but he has become assured that it is a mistake to look for it in himself. He is now ready to abandon his search for it by introspection. He turns thus away from himself to find in another the power for holiness and fruitfulness that he has thus far been looking for in himself in vain.

We will now inquire, Where did he find the Spirit's power? How did he find it? When he found it, what did he find it to be? All these questions are answered for us in verses of chaps. 7:24—8:4. Let us look at them.

Having learned to realize his wretchedness as a helpless captive to the power of indwelling sin, he turns away from himself to think of and enjoy Christ—the Christ that died and rose again, with whom he is connected as being a subject of grace. Occupied now with Him, he sees himself as *in* Him—as belonging *to* Him, as being *of* Him. This, that he now sees, has been true of him all through. It has been the mind of the Spirit as to him all along. But the discovery fills his soul with praise. Convicted of needing a deliverer, he finds the need fully met in the One to whom he has turned, and his soul responds, "I thank God!" Through Jesus Christ he has been delivered from his captivity, and the joy of it fills him.

Now as a delivered one he looks back with spiritual intelligence—the intelligence of the Spirit—upon the terrible struggles through which he has passed. He understands that, as serving the law of God with the mind, and the law of sin with the flesh, he had been entirely mistaken as to his real condition before God. He did not have the mind of the Spirit about it. He now understands that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ: that God views them as being of the risen One, and thus as sharing in the favor and acceptability in which He stands before God.

If now (having learned to look at himself as belonging to the risen and accepted Man) he rejoices in being delivered from the bitter conflict he had been maintaining, what is it that has effected the deliverance? If it is the truth that sets free, what truth is it which sets free from the struggle we have been considering? Plainly, according to the apostle, it is learning this precious truth that, as being of Christ, he is under the operation of the law of life, which operates by and in Christ. Knowing, as he now does, that this is the law with which the Spirit identifies Himself, he understands that, according to the mind of the Spirit, he is no longer a subject of the law of sin and death.

Furthermore, he now sees that sin in the flesh has

already been fully condemned of God in the death of Christ; that God therefore is not requiring fruit from the flesh; that the righteous thing required by the law, instead of being produced by the flesh as he has hitherto supposed, is produced *in him by Christ with whom now he is occupied*. Walking according to the Spirit is holiness and fruitfulness.

Thus we see that all the victims of sin whose, hearts have been laid hold of by the grace that comes in through Jesus Christ, belong to the risen Christ. They are of Him—are sharers in the nature and character of His risen life. They belong to the position into which He has entered as risen from the dead.

As being thus of Him they are entitled to be practically free from the power of indwelling sin; but to really enjoy this practical freedom from sin's power, they need to learn the impossibility of doing so by walking according to law; that holiness and fruitfulness are found in the enjoyment of the mind of the Spirit. Walking thus according to the Spirit in the enjoyment of the risen Christ is practical liberty.

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Extracted by Ron Canner, August 10, 2005.

Notes in [brackets] mine.

Emphases' marked by **bold** mine.

Italics his.