SERVING IN THE NEW WAY

Romans 7:1-25
Key Verse: 7:6

“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”

In the previous passage, we learned that when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we died to sin. When we count ourselves dead to sin, we can be alive to God as slaves of righteousness. This is the gift of God that we must claim by faith. Everyone likes to think that they might become instruments of righteousness for themselves, for their friends and for their nation. But we cannot forget that unless we die to sin, we will remain slaves to sin. In today’s passage, St. Paul teaches us why we must die to sin and shares with us his personal struggle to be set free from the body of death. May God bless each of us to persist in the struggle against sin, and to serve Christ in the new way of the Spirit.

I. A new life in Jesus (1-6)

First, a new commitment. (1-3) Look at verse 1. "Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?" Paul is speaking to those who were once observers of the law but who are now Christians. In the past, their pride had been in the law of God handed down to them from Moses. They considered that the statutes of the law were sweeter than honey, and more precious than pure gold. So they committed themselves to observing the law for the sake of obtaining and maintaining God’s blessings. Indeed, the law ennobled and strengthened God’s people, the Jews. But the law did not congratulate them for their self-improvement. Rather, the law condemned them for their sins before God. Try as they might, the law declared, “Not good enough! Guilty!” Therefore, in their desperation they turned to Jesus and put their faith in him as their Savior and King. Because they believe in Jesus they are freely justified and are pronounced "not guilty." What is more, they have received a precious hope to live from
now on as pleasing children of God only by God's grace. However, just as the sudden freedom given the Iraqi people was confusing and even painful, so the Jewish believers felt confused and vulnerable. The law was good. But living up to the law was impossible. We are saved by faith. But they were still going to be judged for what they did. Paul sensed the problem in their hearts. Therefore, Paul began to teach them the benefits and limitations of being under the law, why we must come under grace, and how one makes the transition from being under law to being under grace.

Read verses 2,3. Here Paul gives an illustration from marriage to the believers to help them have a fruit-bearing new Christian life. Undoubtedly, Paul drew this illustration from his own experience, which came from his life of faith. Paul once married the law because he thought the law was the best way for his salvation. Paul pledged commitment to the law. Virtually, he married the law. Thus Paul became "Mrs. Law." Mrs. Law did her best to please Mr. Law. She cooked 3 meals a day. She washed his laundry, ironed his neckties and white shirts. But Mr. Law was never happy with her. Instead Mr. Law only pointed out Mrs. Law's weaknesses. Mr. Law also made ever-increasing demands on her every day. Mr. Law condemned her so much until Mrs. Law became helpless and full of self-condemnation. Paul says the law is holy and good. (7:12) But man can never meet all the demands of the law. (3:20)

Look at verse 4. "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God." In this verse Paul explains that we are freed from the demands of the law through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, Paul doesn't nullify the law; instead, he explains the relationship between the law and grace. When Paul said, "died to the law," he meant that when Christ died on the cross to save us from our sins and guilt, we also died with him. By the same token, we died to the demands of the law. Thus we are set free from bondage to the law. And when Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised also. In this way, we have an inseparable relationship with Jesus Christ. (Ro 8:38,39) What kind of new relationship do we have with Jesus? We are his virgin brides, and
he is our bridegroom. (2 Co 11:2) On the basis of this relationship, we are absolutely free from bondage to the law. At the same time, we must have the assurance of a new relationship with Christ. Now it is required that we who have a new relationship with Jesus Christ must commit ourselves to him.

But many people are not sure about their new life in Jesus. Also, they do not make a commitment to Jesus. One young man fathered a child with a girl when he was 17 and she, 13. Then, he left his hometown to go live with his brother, leaving the girl behind. He said, “I loved her then, but now, I don’t.” He was a man of no commitment, and an instrument of wickedness. If we turn our backs on the law, only to follow our sinful natures, we cannot experience God’s grace. Instead, we will bring wrath and anger down on our heads. We can have a blessed assurance that we died to Mr. Law and were married to Mr. Grace only through a life commitment to Jesus. We must make a new life commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul had this assurance and commitment in Jesus, he was ransomed from the bondage of Mr. Law, and he could bear fruit to God (4) and serve in the new way of the Spirit. (6) We feel sorry to see so many people who do not commit themselves to God. Thus they don’t commit themselves to anyone or anything. Psalm 1:4 says that they are like chaff blown by the wind. Let’s make a deep commitment to Jesus so that we can bear the fruits of faith.

Second, a new life in Jesus is a fruit-bearing life. Read verses 4,5. “So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions that were aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.” In these verses, Paul convinces the Jewish Christians that unless we die to the law, we cannot die to sin, nor can we bear the fruit that God seeks. It is a bitter irony that when the law came, sinful passions were aroused, and we were condemned by them. We must know that God saved us through his Son's blood so that we might bear fruit to God. Verse 6 says, "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit,
and not in the old way of the written code." Serving in the new way of the Spirit is serving by faith. It is serving by God's power given to us when we believe in Christ's death and resurrection. Serving in the new way of the Spirit, we can fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. But first, we must die, and be set free from our self-righteousness and fruitless commitment to the law.

II. The law and spiritual struggling (7-24)

First, Paul's struggling with sin. Many people expect no more struggling after conversion. Contrary to their expectation, there is more struggling than before. This was Paul's problem also. Nevertheless, it is interesting to know what made Paul struggle most. Look at verse 7. "What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" Here Paul says that the law is good, but the demand of the law makes man rebellious, and it makes sin seize the opportunity to enslave man. We know this reaction very well. One girl said, "I was ready to dance for the Christmas worship service. But because you ask me, I won't." People become like this because of the power of sin. Genesis 4:7b says, "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door." Romans 7:8a says, "But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire." In verse 9 the same idea is repeated. This is true. One young man attended an overnight revival meeting. There he repented of his sin of anger. Then he went to his fellow Christians' meeting and began to pour out his anger for no obvious reason. After the meeting he said regretfully, "I really wanted to show myself to be a gentle and spiritual man since I attended a meeting that emphasized the Holy Spirit. But I don't know why I was angry in that way." He did so because he was seized by the deception of sin. In the movie "The Dirty Dozen," the prison chaplain asked, "What is your last word?" Then the murderer, sentenced to death by hanging, repeated, crying, "I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! It just happened!" He didn't mean to do it, but he murdered someone because he was seized by the power of sin. It's hard for anyone to struggle with sin. But the Bible encourages us to struggle with sin to the end. Hebrews 12:4 says, "In
your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

Look at verse 8 again. Paul's specific spiritual problem was covetousness. The tenth commandment, "Do not covet," is somewhat different from the others because it concerns the motives of the heart. When Paul heard, "Do not covet," he really wanted to be a sacrificial servant of God, overcoming his covetousness. Contrary to his wishes, he became all the more self-ambitious. Paul could not bear himself because of his malevolent personality. He felt that his personality was split. Nevertheless, he did not give up his struggling with sin. He kept on struggling with his sin of covetousness. We call this the spiritual battle, or the good fight. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight" (2 Ti 4:7). Here we learn we should not give up our struggling with sin. If we give up our struggling with sin, we become like dead fish floating downstream. Paul struggled with sin to the end. Thus he became the everlasting champion in the spiritual battle.

The Bible teaches that there are two kinds of struggling. First is the struggling between men and men. Second is man's struggling with God. Jean Jacques Rousseau was a good example of a person caught up in vicious human struggling. He struggled with many aristocratic women. He finally married an idiot over whom he could have complete control. He said many good things, but his inner man was so weak that he abandoned his four cute children to orphanages and cried. A different example is found in St. Augustine. He struggled with God until an intellectual hedonist was transformed into a devout man of God. This once wretched man was known later as Saint Augustine. While he was indulging his sinful nature, he was at war with God. So he went to see Ambrose for counseling. Finally he was converted by the words of Romans 13:13,14. "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." After his conversion, Augustine did not struggle anymore with women or men. He struggled with God. St. Augustine studied the Bible with the premise, "That I may know God's grace, and that I am a sinner." In his struggling with God, he grew up
to be the pre-eminent figure in the Christian thought world. God used him as the defender of the church of God at a time when people thought that Christianity would be destroyed with the fall of the Roman Empire.

Martin Luther is another example. In an effort to find peace with God, he climbed the steps of Pilate's staircase in Rome on his knees, until his knees were badly injured and bloody. While struggling with God, the words of Romans 1:17 came to his mind, "The righteous will live by faith." Then God used him to reform the church, from politics and ritualism to a Bible-centered church. St. Paul's struggle with God has been the most influential. Paul only struggled with God to know Christ. He said in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ." Thank God who saved us from struggling with sin only. Thank God who saved us from the struggle between husband and wife. Thank God who helps us struggle with him until we can grow in Jesus.

Second, Paul's view of man. Paul saw that man has a two-fold nature. Mencius, a Chinese philosopher, advocated the doctrine of the "inborn goodness" of man. Soon Ja, on the other hand, insisted on the doctrine of the innate evilness of man. Both of them lacked universality, and neither of them could explain the antithesis: If man is good, why is the world full of evil, and vice versa? It is important to keep this truth in our hearts, that men are both good and evil. One lady married a man because of his gentleness while dating. Later she found out that he was devious, wolfy and a drug trafficker. She divorced him after 3 months of marriage. We must believe that only God is good, and that men are both good and evil.

Third, two spiritual principles at work in us. (14-24) Look at verse 15. "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Paul really did not understand what he was doing. He discovered that when he did something, it was not he, but sin living in him that did it. Look at verse 17. "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." In the course of struggling with sin, Paul grasped a spiritual secret--that the power of sin is working in all men. Read verse 18. "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I
can not carry it out." Paul wanted to do good. But he found that he had actually done what he really did not want to do. He acknowledged that sin was reigning in him, and that he was utterly helpless. Man is man because man has the most splendid dreams that he wants to fulfill; man has the highest desire to do good. But the total depravity of man does not allow him to do so.

Look at verse 17. "As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." He confesses that there is nothing good in him. He has the desire to do what is good, but he cannot carry out that desire, for he is under the control of sin. At the moment he wanted to do what was good, the law of sin in him was like a crouching lion ready to pounce upon him. (Ge 4:6,7) He confessed in verse 21a, "I find this law at work." Here the word "law" means "principle" or "power of sin." He said in verse 21b, "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me." And in verses 22,23 he repeats the same idea, "For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body..." In the end, he realized that there were two powers or two principles within him. Verse 21a reads, "So I find this law at work." In verse 22, "the law of God" refers to God's power. In verse 23, "another law" refers to the power of sin which lived in him secretly. Read verse 23. Paul was caught between the Law of God and the law of sin that waged constant war within him. What Paul needed was God's help.

III. Jesus Christ, the only Savior (25)

Look at verse 25. "Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." Paul was a fine-looking Pharisee, but he felt that he was the most wretched man in his inner person. He felt that he was carrying the body of death. So he cried out in verse 24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Paul was totally helpless. But there was a way when he looked at Jesus. He could find rescue in Jesus. Paul simply believed in Jesus and was freely justified to be a righteous child of God. Then he could become a servant of Jesus Christ. This was the secret that had enabled him to really grow in Jesus.
In today's passage we learn that we must have an assurance that we are justified freely by our Lord Jesus Christ. So we must commit our lives to Jesus only. We also learn that we must never give up the struggle with sin. If we give up struggling, we are no more normal human beings. Most importantly, we learn that we should not struggle with men only, but with God. May God bless you to struggle hard with God so that you may grow in faith.