

STUDY 17

SHOULD A GOSPEL PREACHER PREACH ABOUT THE LAW?

THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW IN ROMANS

EXPOSITION

Here is a description in chapter 7 of the experience of a true believer both before and after his conversion. Neither the experience described before Paul's conversion on the Damascus road (7-13), nor his post-conversion experience (14-25), could have happened unless he was born again. The whole chapter is to do with a regenerate person before and after his conversion.

(1) The failure of the Law

The word 'Law' is so important that it occurs 22 times in chapter 7. Paul states – **for we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal [of the flesh] sold under sin.** (7:14) Normally, we would not consider the law to be 'spiritual'. It brings death not life to the spirit of man; yet Paul declares it to be 'spiritual'. He is saying that it fulfils a spiritual purpose, and that it operates in a spiritual dimension and is thus the means by which it might be possible to come to God. But it was found to be an impossible way under the Old Covenant. Under the terms of the New Covenant it was not needed, for Christ is the way to God. It has, in Gospel terms, become redundant and obsolete.

At the cross, believers died to the law – **Therefore, my brethren, you have also become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit for God.** (4) What Paul is saying here is that, if we come to the cross by faith, we no longer come under the Law. Once, we came under a system of law that is in operation throughout the whole world – that is, God's Law. Everyone comes under it. But at the cross, we were delivered from the failure of the law to save us, and bring us to God, and make us right before God, and were handed over to something better – that is, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins on the Cross.

The two systems are quite distinct. John, in his Gospel, put it like this – **The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.** (John 1:17) One system belonged under the old covenant, where life and salvation could come by works, and by keeping the Law – **the works of the law**, as Paul described it (2:15; 3:28; 9:32) – trying to do our best, trying to do what we know to be right and good. But that was a failure. It is sad that so many preachers today are still demanding from their pulpits **the works of the law**. What they should be preaching is that all such pious efforts are doomed to failure; that no one can come to God by works because God demands perfection. If we proceed along the pathway of works, all we will find there are the threats of the Law. So we must come by another way, not the way of the Law that leads to condemnation, but the way of the cross that leads to salvation. The way of the Law of Moses was the way of Sinai, which failed. That is why Jesus came. If we could have found a way to God by our own efforts, there would have been no need for Jesus to come. Therefore, because Jesus came, we must conclude that the old way did not work.

Notice that Paul begins verse 4 with the words – **Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ**. He says this because of his own experience. Paul was a great exponent of the law, and the most ardent advocate of it that Judaism ever knew. Now, here is Paul the Christian, looking back to that time, saying that to become a Christian, to become a child of God, to come to know God and be accepted by God, he had to put all that out of the way. However, he still sees the Law as a very important element in the gospel.

(2) What place does the Law have in the gospel?

We know that it must play an important part because Paul mentions it so often. In the previous chapters (2-6), the word **law** occurred 42 times. Yet Paul declared – **Therefore ... you also have become dead to the law**. If it is 'dead', why mention it so often?

There are three important questions every gospel preacher should put to his hearers, and attempt to answer, from time to time.

Firstly, 'Does the law have any place in the Gospel?' Paul's answer is 'Yes'. But, as we have already noted in the previous Study, there are some today who teach that there is no place whatever for the Law in the life of a believer, called 'ANTINOMIANS'. They refuse to give a place to the Law of God in the Old Testament in the Christian life. They find it difficult to defend their position because Jesus said that he had not come **to destroy with the law, but to fulfil**. (Matthew 5:17) If he 'fulfilled' the Law, he must, therefore, have put himself within the scope of the Law. So we have no right to disregard it.

Secondly, we observe that antinomianism inevitably leads to sin because it becomes an excuse for sin. It is like living in a country when suddenly the government decrees that all past law have now been repealed. That country would fall into chaos and anarchy very quickly. All property would be stolen or destroyed, human life would no longer have any value, and people would fall into the most excessive sins. The rule of law would break down. That is what happens under the slogan 'No more law in the Christian life'. With such teaching, Christians inevitably fall into sin. Their teachers declare that they have been transferred to the law of Christ. What they do not seem to realise is that the law of Christ is simply the spiritual meaning of the old Law. When the Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus, believing him to be a false teacher, they asked, **Which is the greatest commandments in the law?** Jesus replied, **'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself'**. **On these two commandments hand all the Law and the Prophets**. (Matthew 22:36-40) Christ's reply contained two quotations from the Law of Moses, being a summary of the spiritual meaning and application of all the Ten Commandments.

The law of Christ is not dissociated from the Law of the Old Testament. There were not two ways in which God saves. The Saviour of the New Covenant is also the one who kept perfectly the Old Covenant, and declared it legitimate. He applied it, and impressed it upon those who followed him.

Does the Law have any place in the gospel in the age of grace? Yes; it does. The Law was also given by an act of grace. It is true that the Law was given through Moses; but it came from God. It was a gift of God's grace. It was a Law of grace.

(3) Is it possible to be saved without being convicted of sin?

The purpose of the Law is that we might be brought to acknowledge our own sinfulness. The Law reveals our sin and convict us of it. Too often gospel preachers make an appeal like this: 'Come to Jesus and things will be marvellous and exciting. You will have a new life. You will be full of joy. You will have peace with God', with many other statements like that. Now, these things are right. We cannot disagree with them. But nowhere in the New Testament do you find an example of evangelism like that. The sinner comes to God for mercy because he is depraved and abominable in God's sight. In repentance and faith, he comes to Jesus Christ for salvation. But then, we ask, what is salvation? According to these modern evangelists, salvation is simply inviting Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives so that we live a better kind of life. The balance sheet of our lives then comes out on the credit side.

We do not come to Christ for what we get out of our salvation. That is a materialistic and greedy gospel, and is not at all the gospel, but a false one. When we come to Christ, we recognise in him the only way in which we can be made right with God. And why do we need to be made right with God? We are sinners. This we recognise in our coming to Christ. No one can become a Christian unless he recognises something of the depth of his own sin. That is common to every true conversion experience. Can someone be saved without a conviction of sin? Indeed not. And it is interesting that so many of the converts under the ministry of these modern evangelists make an initial commitment of faith, then fall away in their thousands. We must question how any gospel preaching that brings in many professed Christians in through the front door of the Church, while many more are going out through the back door. The reason is that those who claim to be saved are saved under a false gospel – a gospel where there is no preaching of the Law.

Go back in time to the apostles and the New Testament and note what they preached. Go back to any period of great gospel preaching such as the theological Reformers of the sixteenth, seventeenth century, you find there men like Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox. What did they preach? They preached the Law. If you go back in time to the Puritan preachers of the seventeenth century, what kind of gospel do you find them preaching a gospel that begins with the preaching of the Law.

Go back to the time of the Evangelical Awakening of the eighteenth century, and hear the preaching of men like John and Charles Wesley, the Methodist preachers, and George Whitefield, and what would you find? The preaching of the Law to common people, and salvation only to be found in the righteousness of Christ. What was the result? Miners at Bristol with tears running down their face. Thousands going out to the listen to Whitefield at five o'clock in the morning. Why? Because he was preaching the Law to convict them of their sin, then applying the only remedy of Christ's saving work on the Cross. There is no salvation without a knowledge of sin, and there is no conviction of sin without the preaching of the Law.

(4) Why does the Christian sin?

The next thing we must bear in mind is the big question that we all ask from time to time: 'Why do I sin? I am a believer. I was saved by faith in Jesus Christ. I cannot understand why I go on sinning.' All those questions are dealt with in Romans chapter 7.

Let us consider in chapters 2 to 6 what Paul said about the Law. In 7:4, Paul says – **Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law.** So what sort of law

have we died to, and in what sense have we died to it. And, what then is the function of the Law of God?

The first thing that Paul says in Romans is that the Law of God convicts two groups of people of their sin. (2:12) First of all, it was given to the Jews, and was written down for Moses on tablets of stone. Eventually, the Jews copied it out on scrolls. Whenever it was read, it convicted the Jews of their sin and the uselessness of their religious and moral works in trying to come to God – **For as many as have sinned without law [the gentiles] will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law [the Jews] will be judged by the law.** The law of God judged the Jews according to its commandments. But what of the gentile world that did not possess the law? How could they be convicted of their sin? Paul tells us – **for when gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.** (14) The gentiles had God's law written in their hearts. The Jews had the Law written on scrolls, but the gentile world had the law of God written upon their consciences. And that is true for every child born into the world, set in the heart, and impressed on the conscience. So no one is without God's law. That law is there to convict both groups, which means the whole world.

Another point must be considered here. There are some people who mistakenly believe that the law has passed away because there are no longer priests, bells, incense and animal sacrifices. All these things have gone. Therefore they conclude that we are free of the law in that sense. They are wrong because Paul's law was quite simply the moral law, the Ten Commandments. **You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?** (2:21) That is one of the commandments. Paul continues – **You who say, Do not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?** (2:22) Here is another of the commandments. A third example is found in 7:8 – **But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.** 'Do not covet' is another of the commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Paul does not draw his commands from the sacrifices, or the fasts or feasts, or the religious observances, or even the priesthood. He goes to the moral law of God found in the Ten Commandments. Jesus did the same thing – **Behold one came to Jesus and said, What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? So he said to him ... If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.** The rich young ruler asked, **Which ones?** Jesus said, **You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honour your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.** Jesus, again, drew on the moral law. 'How do you get to Heaven?', asked the young man. 'By keeping the Law,' answered Jesus. 'Which Law?', asked the young man; and Jesus gave him six of the Ten Commandments. (Matthew 19:16-22) And preaching of the Law must be based on the moral law, the Ten Commandments.

The Law has both a positive and a negative function. Romans 3:20 tells us what the negative function of the Law is – **Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.** It cannot be made plainer than that. What, then, is the function of the Law? To make people realise that they cannot keep it and are therefore sinners. The negative function of the Law is to make us realise how God sees us as sinners. The positive function of the Law is seen in 3:21-22 – **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith to all and on all who believe.** How can sinners be made right with God? Not through the Law, not through its works, not through religious observances, not through ceremonial, not even by keeping the Ten Commandments, which are impossible to keep perfectly. The positive function of

the Law is to point down another road to Christ. As Paul was to say later in this letter – **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.** (10:4) The purpose of the Law was to cause sinners to admit that they could not keep it; so, so far as salvation is concerned, they must come to Christ. We fall out of the Law, and fall into the arms of Jesus Christ.

Next, 3:31 makes it perfectly clear that the Law is still in operation today – **Do we then make void the law through faith?** Has the gospel brought the Law to an end? **Certainly not!** replied Paul, the nearest he ever got to uttering an oath. **On the contrary, we establish the law.** Yes; said Paul, there is indeed a place for the Law in the gospel.

Next, the Law is important because it sets off a spiritual chain reaction – **the law entered that the offence might abound.** (5:20) When the sun shines through the window, we realise just how dusty and dirty everything is. That is like the Law when it focuses on the heart. ‘When the Law comes in,’ says Paul, ‘we begin to realise how great sinners we are’. The Law came in that the transgression might increase – **But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.** It plays this important part, that when it enters the mind and heart, sinners are convicted of their sin. And when they become convicted of sin, their only way out is to flee to Christ. They depart from the Law, and by faith come into the grace of the gospel. Thus the Law is extremely important. If there is no preaching of the Law there can be no conviction of sin. If there is no conviction of sin, there is no salvation from sin. Only through the Law can sinners become conscious of their sin. They become aware of their true sinful nature. Once they were dead, but now they are made alive. It is through the pain of conviction, realising just what great sinners they are, that they turn in wonder to the grace of God for salvation. There is a proper order of events: the Law first, sin next, then grace last. There is no going beyond grace because there is nothing greater. Grace is God giving us himself and all he possesses.

(5) Freedom from the punishment of the Law

Lastly, what is so fearful about the law is that, inevitably, punishments go with it. In any country, if you break the law you will be punished. Parents set rules for their own homes, and, if the children break them they are punished. If, at school, the school rules are broken, the offending students will be punished. Every organisation has its laws, and penalties if they are broken. Now, the same thing is true of sinners. If they come under the Law, they will be punished for breaking it. If we are under grace, the Law has no say over us. We are free of it. The Law cannot punish a believer – **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** (6:14) Even though we sin, the Law cannot punish us. That is a most wonderful verse in the Bible. We are not under Law but under grace. Once we were under the old master, under its dominion, under the dominion of sin and Satan and our own depraved nature, and we were in danger of being condemned in this life and punished eternally in the next. But all that is over, for Jesus died on the cross, fulfilling all the demands of the Law. He took our punishment on himself, and died in our place. If he bore our sin on the cross, there is no sin left to be punished. He took it all away. John the Baptist said of him – **Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29) The sinner who throws himself on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ finds that the condemnation of the Law has gone. He is free. That is the grace of the gospel. For some, it is too easy; for others it is too difficult to understand. But even a small child can understand and grasp it. This is the very heart of the gospel. The Law cannot punish a believer.

Finally, we come to Paul’s spiritual autobiography. What happened to Paul before he was converted? In a fury, he was travelling the main road from Jerusalem to Damascus? Why did he hate Christ? Why did he hate the Christian church so much? Because he knew in his

heart that he was a great sinner. How did he come to that truth? It was not because he was an expert in the Law and understood its application. The Spirit of God revealed to him his sin.

Paul says first of all – **Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you might be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.** (7:4) The bearing of fruit to the Law means death, but to bear fruit to God through Jesus Christ means our salvation. The Law brings forth death. If you are trying to be saved by keeping the Law, by being religious, and by doing good works, the fruit will be spiritual death.

Yet the Law does play a part in the work of the gospel – **For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.** (7:5) Paul is saying that the Law shows us what we are, spiritually dead before God. Of course, literally, no dead person could ever recognise the state of death. So how was Paul able to recognise that he was dead in sin? Because he had been made alive in Christ. He was born again. Only a person in whom the Holy Spirit is at work can recognise his terrible state of spiritual death. Every gospel preacher rejoices, firstly when he sees members of his congregation under conviction of sin; and secondly, when they come to him and ask how they can be saved. (Acts 2:37-38)

A believer is now no longer under the condemnation of the Law – **But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter of the letter.** (7:6) The believer is free from the condemnation of the Law in fact. This was a wonderful thought to Paul, who, all of his life, had been under the condemnation of the Law and did not realise it until the Holy Spirit worked in him. When he became a Christian, he was able to exclaim – **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us.** (8:1-4) Christ fulfilled the Law; and, if we belong to Christ, the requirements of the Law are fulfilled in us too, **who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

In 7:7-8, Paul discloses that Saul of Tarsus, the self-righteous Pharisee, had been found out by the Holy Spirit. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. **What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the Law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the Law had said, You shall not covet. But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin was dead.** He found coveting everywhere and in everything that he did. The self-righteous Pharisee was self-righteous no longer, finding himself sick unto death. His spiritual death is described in these words – **I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.** (7:9) The commandment would have resulted in life if he could have kept it. But Heaven was now out of reach because he was convicted of the sin of covetousness. So it became death for him. It proved that he was dead in his sins, and far away from God. **For sin, taking occasion through the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.** (7:11) Would that more sinners were 'killed', and recognise their sinfulness through God's holy commandments! But if there is no preaching of the Law, how can there be such a work? How can people be convicted of their sin if they do not know the Law of God?

However, we must end briefly by refusing to associate the Law with sin. The Law reflects God perfectly. The Law exposes sin; it is not the cause of sin. There is no sin in the Law. Paul asked, **Is the Law sin?** (7:7) His reply was emphatic – **Certainly not!** The Law is not sin because it comes from God who is without sin.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 17

(Note, that there are so many verses to look up, and so many questions to answer, Sections A and B have been combined this time.)

A & B COMBINED QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 7:14

1. Name a quality that describes God's Law.
2. Name a quality used by Paul to describe himself.
3. What is another word for 'carnal'?

Read Romans 7:4

4. What sets us free from the Law?
5. To who is the believer 'married'?
6. For what purpose?

Read John 1:17

7. Who brought in the Law?
8. What 2 things did Christ bring in?
9. What does grace bring? (See verse 16)
10. What does the Law bring?

Read Matthew 5:17

11. Who is the 'I' in this verse?
12. What do you think 'destroy' means?
13. What was done to satisfy and fulfil the Law?

Read Matthew 22:36-40

14. Who was talking to Jesus?
15. What did he want to know about the Law?
16. Jesus summed up his answer in two words? Write them down.
17. Which did Jesus say was the second most important commandment?
18. Where in the Old Testament does Jesus quote for the first Commandment?
19. Where in the Old Testament does Jesus quote for the second Commandment?

Read Romans 2:12-14, 21-23

20. Who are to be judged by the Law? (See verse 10)
21. Which law will judge the Gentiles?
22. What is the number of the Commandment about stealing? (See Exodus 20)
23. What is the number of the Commandment about adultery?

Read Romans 7:8

24. What is another word for 'evil desire'?
25. What was misused by sin?
26. What brings sin to life?

Read Matthew 19:16-22

27. What is an impossible way to eternal life?
28. How many commandments did Jesus quote here?
29. What other way did Jesus offer?

Read Romans 3:20-22

30. What can the Law not do?
31. What does the Law do?
32. What can be found apart from the Law?
33. How can this be obtained?

Read Romans 10:4

34. What is at the end of the law?

Read Romans 3:31

35. Does faith abolish the Law?
36. What does faith do?

Read Romans 5:20

37. What did the coming of the Law do?
38. What has taken the place of the Law?

Read Romans 6:14

39. What are Christians not under?
40. What are unbelievers dominated by?

Read John 1:29

41. What did John the Baptist say about Jesus?
42. Which verse in this chapter says almost the same thing?
43. What system in the Old Covenant is this referring to?

Read Romans 7:4-6

44. Who are now dead to the Law?
45. What did the Law bring to sinners?
46. What happens to believers in relation to the Law? (See verse 6)

Read Acts 2:37-38

47. What happened to many of Peter's hearers?
48. What did they need to do to be saved?

Read Romans 8:1-4

49. What are Christians delivered from?
50. Which law is it that they set free from?
51. What did God do to overcome the weakness of the flesh?
52. Who alone fulfilled the requirements of the Law?

Read Romans 7:7-9, 11

53. Is the Law sin?
54. What is the main function of the Law?
55. If the Law had not been given, what would have happened about sin?
56. What two things did sin do to Paul?

C. PRACTICAL

Preach a sermon on: 'THE PLACE OF THE LAW IN GOSPEL PREACHING'.

Send in the following:

- (1) Your main headings.**
- (2) A list of the Bible verses you quoted**
- (3) A brief summary of your gospel appeal at the end.**
- (4) (a) Any results made known to you.**
(b) How you felt preaching this sermon.

Here is a classic sermon by one of the great preachers of the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening. There are not many gospel sermons on the Law. This is outstanding in its treatment of the Law to bring a sinner to Christ.

There are no questions on this sermon. Just enjoy it, and learn from it.

THE ORIGIN, NATURE, PROPERTIES,

AND USES OF THE LAW

A SERMON BY JOHN WESLEY

(A version in easier English)

'Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.'
(Romans 7:12)

How is 'the law' to be understood?

Perhaps there are fewer subjects in all of the Christian Faith, which are less understood than this. The reader of the Letter to the Romans may often come away with the impression that by 'the law' Paul meant the Jewish law. And so, the reader, imagining that the law is of no concern to him, passes it by without giving it another thought. Indeed, some believe that

as the letter is directed to the Romans, we may judge that the apostle, at the beginning of this chapter, is referring to the old Roman law. And as they have no more interest in this than with the ceremonial law of Moses, they pass it over.

An explanation of Romans 7:1-6

However, those who study the apostle's words carefully will find a more profound meaning here. And the more they weigh the words, the more they become convinced that Paul means by 'the law' neither the ancient law of Rome nor the ceremonial law of Moses. This soon becomes clear to all those who pay close attention to the main thrust of Paul's argument. He begins the chapter – **'Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law),** (that is, to those who have taught the law from their youth) **'that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?'** Does this sound like the law of Rome, or the ceremonial law of Moses? No; surely not! It is the moral law. Paul continues, **'For'**, giving an example **'the woman who has a husband is bound by the [moral] law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.'** From this particular example, the apostle goes on to draw this general conclusion: **'Therefore, my brethren'**, (by the plain light of reason) **'you also have become dead to the law'** (the whole Mosaic institution) **'through the body of Christ'**, (offered up for you, bringing you into a new dispensation) **'that you should'** (without blame) **'be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead'**, (and by it has offered proof of his authority to make the change) **'that we should bear fruit to God'** (and this we can do now, whereas before, we could not). **'For when we were in the flesh'**, (that is, under the power of the flesh, under the power of corrupt nature, which was so till we experienced the power of Christ's resurrection) **'the passions of sins which were aroused by the law'** (that is, were exposed and inflamed by the Mosaic law, and remained unconquered) **'were at work in our members'** (that is, they were aroused in various ways) **'to bear fruit to death.'** Paul ends, **'But now we have been delivered from the law'** (from that moral as well as the ceremonial economy) **'having died to what we were held by'** (the entire institution being now, as it were, dead, and having no more authority over us than the husband has over his wife when he has died), **'so that we should serve [him]** (who died for us, and rose again) **'in the newness of the Spirit'** (that is, in a new spiritual dispensation) **'and not in the oldness of the letter'** (a bare outward service, conforming to the letter of the Mosaic law).

The Moral Law

Having gone so far as to show that the Christian had set aside the Jewish dispensation, and that the moral law itself, though it could never pass away, now stands on a different foundation from what it did before, the apostle now stops to pose and answer an objection: **'What shall we say then? Is the law sin?'** (7) Some might have imagined from these words that it was the passions of sins that came from the law. **'Certainly not!'** says the apostle, in case anyone should think like that. Indeed not; the law is an implacable enemy to sin, searching it out wherever it is. **'I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness** (a passionate desire to sin) **'unless the law had said, You shall not covet.'** (7)

After explaining more in the next four verses (8-11), he adds, by way of conclusion, this statement concerning the moral law from which the preceding example was taken – **'Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.'** (12)

A closer examination of the Moral Law

In order to drive home the importance of these words so easily overlooked, and so little understood, I will try to show, **firstly**, the origin of the law; **secondly**, the nature of the law; **thirdly**, the properties of the law; and **fourthly**, the uses of the law.

The origin of the Law

(1) Let me try, first, to trace out the origin of the law, often called ‘the law,’ because of its importance. Now, this is not, as some imagine, late institution from the time of Moses. Noah preached it long before that time, and Enoch before him. But we may find its origin further back, even beyond the foundation of the world, to that period, unknown to mankind, but doubtless written down in the annals of eternity, when the morning stars first sang together, having just been called into existence. It pleased the great Creator, to make these angels, his first-born children, intelligent beings that they might know the One who created them. To this end, he gave them understanding to discern truth from falsehood, and good from evil. And, as a result of this, he gave them freedom – a capacity to choose the one and refuse the other. By this, they were enabled to offer him a free and willing service, a service which has its own reward, as well as being most acceptable to their gracious Master.

(2) To engage all the faculties he had given them, and in particular to understand their freedom, he gave them a law, a complete model of all truth (so far as it can be grasped by a finite being), and of all good, as far as angelic minds were capable of embracing it. It was also the design of their benevolent Governor to increase their joy, as a continual instance of obedience to the law would both add to the perfection of their nature, and entitle them to a higher reward which their righteous Judge would give them in due time.

(3) In the same way, when God, at his appointed time, had created a new order of intelligent beings, raising man from the dust of the earth, breathing into him the breath of life, and causing him to become a living soul, he gave him the power to choose between good and evil. He gave to this free, intelligent creature the same law as his first-born children, not written on tablets of stone, or any earthly substance, but engraved on his heart by the finger of God, written in the innermost spirit both of men and angels, so that it might never be lost, never be hard to understand, but always be at hand, ever shining with a clear light like the sun in the sky.

(4) That is how the law of God came into being. With regard to man, it was consistent with his nature; but with regard to the older sons of God, it shone out in full splendour – **‘Before the mountains were settled ... when he marked out the foundations of the earth’** (Proverbs 8:25, 29). But it was not long before man rebelled against God; and, in breaking this glorious law, it was nearly erased from his heart, for the eyes of his understanding were darkened in the same way his soul was **‘alienated from the life of God’** (Ephesians 4:18). Yet God did not despise the work of his hands; but, being reconciled to man through the Son of his love, he, in some measure, re-inscribed the law on the heart of this dark, sinful creature. Again, **‘he has shown you, O man, what is good;’** although not as in the beginning, **‘to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God’**. (Micah 6:8)

(5) And this he showed, not only to our original parents, but also to all their posterity, by that **‘true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world’**. (John 1:9) But, despite this light, in the process of time, **‘all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth’** before him, till he chose from mankind a special people to whom he imparted a more perfect knowledge of his law. And, because they were slow of understanding, the important points he wrote on two tablets of stone, which he commanded the fathers to teach their children through all succeeding generations.

(6) And so it is, that the law of God is now made known to those who do not know him. They hear, with the hearing of the ear, the things that were formerly written down for our instruction, but that is not sufficient. They cannot, by this means, comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of it. God alone reveals this by his Spirit. And so he does to all who truly believe, in the light of that gracious promise made to all the Israel of God – **‘Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... But this is the covenant that I will make ... I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’** (Jeremiah 31:31, 33)

The nature of the Law

(1) The nature of that law which was originally given to angels in heaven and man in paradise, and which God so mercifully promised to write again on the hearts of all believers, is the second thing I propose to show. To do this, I need to say first that although **‘law’** and **‘commandment’** are sometimes thought of as different things (when the commandment is a part of the law), yet, in our text, they are used as equivalent terms. They are one and the same thing. But we cannot take it here to mean the ceremonial law. It is not the ceremonial law of which the apostle says, **‘I had not known sin except through the law’**. (7) This is too obvious to need proof. Neither is it the ceremonial law referred to when Paul says in the words immediately following, **‘You shall not covet’**. Therefore, the ceremonial law has no place in the present question.

(2) Neither do we understand by **‘the law’**, mentioned in verse 12, as the Mosaic dispensation. It is true that the word is sometimes understood in this way, as when the apostle said to the Galatians, **‘The covenant that was confirmed before God in Christ’**, (namely, with Abraham, the father of the faithful); **‘the law’** (that is, the Mosaic dispensation), **‘which was four- hundred and thirty years after, (which could not) annul the covenant’**. (Galatians 3:17) But this is not its meaning in this text, for the apostle never gave so high a commendation to that imperfect and shadowy dispensation. He nowhere affirms the Mosaic law to be a spiritual law, or that it is holy and just and good. Neither is it true that God will write that law on the hearts of those whose iniquities he remembers no more. It means that **‘the law’**, as it is called, is none other than the moral law.

(3) Now, this law is a reliable picture of the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity. It is the law that makes the One, whose essence no one has seen nor can see, visible to men and angels. It is the face of God unveiled, God manifested to his creatures as much as they can bear it, manifested to give, and not to destroy, life, that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God disclosed to man. Yes; in some sense, we may say of this law what the apostle says of the Son: it is the streaming forth or out-shining of his glory, the express image of his person.

(4) An old pagan author once wrote, ‘If virtue could assume such a shape that could be comprehended with our eyes, what wonderful love it would excite in us!’ If virtue could do this! It has already done it. The law of God is all the virtues wrapped up in one, in such a shape as to be seen openly by all those whose eyes God has enlightened. What is the law, but divine virtue and wisdom in visible form! What is it, but the original ideas of truth and good which were in the uncreated mind from eternity, and are now revealed and clothed with such a vehicle as to appeal even to human understanding!

(5) If we consider the law of God from another point of view, it is supreme, unchangeable reason; it is unalterable uprightness; it is the everlasting fitness of all things that are or ever were created. I am conscious of limitation, and even impropriety, in many human

expressions, when we try, by these faint pictures, to puzzle out the deep things of God. Nevertheless, we have no better way, no other way, during this our infant state of existence. As we now **'know in part'**, we are constrained to **'prophecy'** (that is, speak of the things of God) **'in part'** also. We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness while we remain in this house of clay. **'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.'** For when the perfect comes, that which is **'in part'** will be done away with. (1 Corinthians 13:9-11)

(6) But to return. The law of God (speaking in human terms) is a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature. Indeed, it is the fairest offspring of the everlasting Father, the brightest revelation of his essential wisdom, the visible beauty of the Most High. It is the delight and wonder of cherubim and seraphim, and all the company in heaven, and the glory and joy of every wise believer, every well-instructed child of God on the earth.

The properties of the Law

(1) Having considered the nature of the ever-blessed law of God, I come, thirdly, to its properties: not all of them; for that would exceed the wisdom of an angel, but just those that are mentioned in the text, There are three of them – the law is holy, just, and good.

(2) Firstly, the law is **holy**. By this expression, the apostle does not appear to speak of its effect, but rather its nature, as did James, speaking of the same thing under another name, says – **'the wisdom that is from above'** (which is none other than this law, written on our hearts) **'is first pure'** (3:17) – that is, chaste, spotless, and eternally and essentially holy. Consequently, when it is written into the life as well as the soul, it is (as James calls it **'pure and undefiled religion'** (1:27); nothing less than the pure, clean, unpoluted worship of God.

(3) To the highest degree, the law is indeed pure, chaste, clean and holy. Otherwise it could not be the immediate offspring, and, much less, the express resemblance of God who is essential holiness. It is pure from all sin, clean and unspotted from any taint of evil, a chaste virgin, incapable of any defilement, or any pollution that is unclean or unholy. It has no fellowship with sin of any kind, for **'what communion has light with darkness?'** (2 Corinthians 6:14) As sin is, in its very nature, enmity to God, so his law is enmity to sin.

(4) That is why the apostle rejects with such abhorrence the blasphemous idea that the law of God is either sin itself or the cause of sin. God forbid that we should suppose it to be the cause of sin! It is the discoverer of it, because it detects the hidden things of darkness and drags them out into the light of day. It is true that by the law (as the apostle argues in Romans 7) sin is made to appear sin. All its disguises are torn away, and it is shown in all its natural deformity. It is true, also, that sin, through the commandment, becomes exceedingly sinful, hating both light and knowledge. The commandment strips away even the poor plea of ignorance as an excuse and a disguise, and this ignorance becomes odious both to God and man. Yes; it is true that **'sin was producing death in me through what is good'** (13), through what is in itself pure and holy. When sin is dragged out into the light, it rages all the more; when it is restrained, it bursts out with great violence. Thus the apostle (speaking like someone who was convinced of sin, but was not yet delivered from it), says, **'But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment'** (detecting and endeavouring to restrain it, hated the restraint more and more) **'produced in me all manner of evil desire'** (all manner of foolish and harmful desires which that commandment sought to restrain). Thus, **'when the commandment came, sin revived and I died'** (that is, it fretted and raged all the more). But this activity does not reflect in any way on the commandment. Though it is abused, it cannot be defiled, proving alone that **'the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked'**. (Jeremiah 17:9) But the law of God remains holy still.

(5) Secondly, the law is **just**. It renders to all their rightful due. It prescribes exactly what is right, precisely what ought to be done, said, or thought, both with regard to the Author of our being, and with regard to ourselves, and with regard to every creature he has made. It is adapted in all respects to the nature of everything in the universe, and to every individual. It is suited to all circumstances, and to all their mutual relations, whether they existed from the beginning, or commenced any period afterwards. The law is exactly suited to things, whether essential or accidental. It clashes with none of them to any degree, nor is it ever unconnected with them. There is nothing arbitrary in the law of God. Every part is totally dependent on his will, so that '**Thy will be done**' becomes the supreme, universal law on earth and in heaven.

(6) But if the will of God is the cause of his law, and the law excites sin, is it his will, then, that is the origin of right and wrong? Is a thing, therefore, right because God wills it, or does he will it because it is right? I fear this celebrated question is more curious than useful. And the way in which it is put hardly brings credit to the creature, who is questioning the Creator and Governor of all things. It is hardly decent for man to call the supreme God to account for himself. Nevertheless, we will speak a little of this with awe and reverence. The Lord pardon us if we speak wrongly!

(7) It seems, then, that the whole difficulty arises from considering God's will as distinct from God. For none can doubt that God is the cause of his law. But the will of God is God himself; it is God considered as willing in this matter or that matter. Consequently, to say that the will of God, or, that God himself, is the cause of the law, is one and the same thing.

(8) Again, the law, the unchangeable rule of right and wrong, depends on the nature and fitness of things, and on their essential relationship with one another. I do not say their **eternal** relations, because the eternal relation of things existing in time is nothing more than a contradiction. If, I say, this depends on the nature and relations of things, then it must depend on God, or the will of God, because those things themselves, with all their relations, are the works of his hands. It is by his will and for his pleasure that all things were and are created.

(9) And yet it may be granted (which is probably all that a thinking person would agree to) that in every particular case, God wills this or that because it is right, and is agreeable to the fitness of things, and to their relationship with other things.

(10) The law, then, is right and just in all things. And it is good as well as just. This we may easily infer from the fountain from which it flows. For what is this law, but the goodness of God? What but goodness alone prompted him to impart that divine copy of himself to the holy angels? To what else can we account his bestowing upon man the same transcript of his own nature? And what but tender love constrained him afresh to manifest his will to fallen man – either to Adam, or any of his seed, who, like him '**come short of the glory of God**'? (Romans 3:23) Was it not sheer love that moved him to publish his law after the minds of men became darkened, and to send his prophets to declare that law to the blind, thoughtless, children of men? Doubtless, it was out of his goodness that he raised up Enoch and Noah to be preachers of righteousness; that caused Abraham to become his friend; that made Isaac, and Jacob witnesses of his truth. It was his goodness alone, which, when darkness had covered the earth, and deep darkness the people, (Isaiah 60:2), which gave the written law to Moses, and through him to the nation he had chosen. It was love which explained these living oracles through David and all the prophets that followed, until, when the fullness of time came, he sent his only-begotten Son, '**not to destroy the law, but to fulfil**' (Matthew 5:17), confirming every jot and tittle of it. When he has written it in the hearts

of all his children, and put all his enemies under his feet, he will deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to the Father that God may be all in all.

(11) And this law, which the goodness of God gave at first, and preserved through all ages, is like the fountain from where it springs, full of goodness and generosity. It is mild and kind; it is, as the psalmist expresses it, '**sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.**' (Psalm 19:10) It is attractive and pleasant. It includes '**whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report**' (Philippians 4:8). If there is any virtue, if there is any praise before God and his holy angels, they are all found in this law in which are hidden all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge and love.

(12) And it is good in its effects, as well as in its nature. As the tree, so is its fruit. The fruits of the law of God written in the heart are '**righteousness ... peace ... quietness and assurance forever**'. (Isaiah 32:17) Or, rather, the law itself is righteousness, filling the soul with a '**peace which surpasses all understanding**' (Philippians 4:7), causing us to rejoice evermore in the testimony of a good conscience toward God. It is not so much a pledge, as '**an earnest of our inheritance**' (Ephesians 1:14), being part of the purchased possession. It is God made manifest in our flesh, bringing with it eternal life; assuring us by that pure and perfect love that we are '**sealed unto the day of redemption**'; and that he will '**spare us as a man spares his own son who serves him**' – '**in the day when he makes up his jewels**' (Malachi 3:17), and there remains for us '**the crown of glory that does not fade away.**' (1 Peter 5:4)

The uses of the Law

(1) It remains only to show, fourthly and lastly, the uses of the law. And the first use of it, without question, is to convince the world of sin. This is, indeed, a special work of the Holy Spirit, who can work without any means at all, or by whatever means please him, however insufficient they are, or even improper. And, accordingly, some there are whose hearts have been broken to pieces in a moment, either in sickness or in health, or without any visible cause or any outward means whatever; and others (very infrequently) who have been awakened to a sense of the wrath of God abiding on them, and by hearing that '**God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself**'. (2 Corinthians 5:19) But it is the usual method of the Spirit of God to convict sinners through the law. It is this that homes in on the conscience, breaking the rock in pieces. It is more especially this part of the word of God, which is quick and powerful, full of life and energy, '**and sharper than any two-edged sword**' (Hebrews 4:12). This, in the hands of God and of those whom he sends, pierces through all the layers of a deceitful heart, and '**divides asunder even the soul and the spirit**', indeed, as it were, the very joints and marrow. By this, is the sinner exposed to himself. All his fig leaves are torn away, and he sees that he is '**wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**' (Revelation 3:17). The law brings conviction on every side. He feels himself a great sinner. He has nothing to say; his mouth is stopped; and he stands guilty before God.

To slay the sinner, then, is the first use of the law; to destroy the life and strength in which he trusts, and convince him that he is dead while he lives. The law not only brings a sentence of death, but actually shows that he is dead to God, and devoid of all spiritual life – '**dead in trespasses and sins**' (Ephesians 2:1).

(2) The second use of the law is to bring him to life, as it is in Christ. It acts the part of a severe schoolmaster. It drives him by force rather than draws by love. Yet love is the spring of it all. It is the spirit of love, which, by this painful means, tears away his confidence in the flesh, leaving him without a broken reed to lean on. It constrains the sinner, stripping him of everything, so that he cries out in the bitterness of his soul, or groans in the depth of his heart:

**I give up every plea beside —
Lord, I am damned; but thou hast died.**

(3) The third use of the law is to preserve us alive. It is the grand means by which the blessed Spirit prepares the believer for the life of God. I am afraid this great and important truth is little understood, not only by the world, but even by many whom God has taken out of the world, and who are the real children of God by faith. Many of these hold it as an unquestioned truth that when we come to Christ we have finished with the law, because, they say, '**Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes**' (Romans 10:4). Yes; he is 'the end of the law', for he is the ground of our righteousness and justification, if we believe. This is where the law comes to an end. It justifies no one, but can only bring him to Christ, who is also, in another respect, the end or scope of the law – the point to which it continually aims. But when it has brought us to him, it has a further office, namely, to keep us faithful to him. For it continually excites all believers, the more they see of its height and depth and length and breadth, to exhort one another the more:

**Closer and closer let us cleave
To his beloved embrace;
Expect his fullness to receive,
And grace to answer grace.**

(4) Allowing then, that every believer has finished with the law, if it means the Jewish ceremonial law, or the entire Mosaic dispensation (for Christ has taken these out of the way) – yes; allowing that we have done with the moral law as a means of obtaining our justification, for we are '**justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus**' (Romans 3:24) – yet, in another sense, we have not finished with the law. It is still of great use, first, in convincing us of the sin that remains both in our hearts and lives, and thus keeping us close to Christ, that his blood may cleanse us every moment. Secondly, it drives us to receive strength from our Head, in which he empowers us to do what his law commands. Thirdly, the law confirms our hope of doing whatever it commands, and have not yet attained – of receiving grace upon grace till we are in actual possession of the fullness of his promises.

(5) How clearly does this agree with the experience of every true believer! While he cries out, 'O how I love your law! All day long is my study of it!' He sees daily in that divine mirror more and more of his own sinfulness. He sees more and more clearly that he is still a sinner in all things – that neither his heart nor his ways are right before God, and that every moment the law sends him to Christ. This is the meaning of what is written – '**You will make a plate of pure gold, and engrave on it, Holiness to the Lord. And it will be on Aaron's forehead**' (Aaron being a type of our great High Priest) '**that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel shall make holy in all their holy gifts**' (so far are our prayers or holy things from atoning for our sins); '**and it will always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.**' (Exodus 28:36, 38.)

(6) To take another example, the law says, '**You shall not kill**'; but, as our Lord teaches, this not only forbids outward acts, but every unkind word or thought. Now, the more I look into this perfect law, the more I feel how far short I come of it; and the more I feel this, the more I feel my need of his blood to atone for all my sin, and of his Spirit to purify my heart and make me '**perfect and complete, lacking nothing**' (James 1:4).

(7) Therefore, I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ. I want it as much to keep me close to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him. Otherwise, this 'evil heart of unbelief' would immediately 'depart from the living God'. Indeed, each is continually sending me to the other – the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrains me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me above gold or precious stones, as I know that every part of it is a gracious promise which my Lord will fulfil in due time.

(8) Who are you, then, O man, to judge the law, and speak evil of it, ranking it with sin, Satan and death, and sending them all to hell together? James regarded judging, or, 'speaking evil of the law' such a great piece of wickedness that he could find no greater means of judging his brethren than by this. 'So now', he is saying, 'you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it!' (A judge of what God has ordained to judge you! So you set yourself up on the judgement-seat of Christ, and cast down the very rule by which he will judge the world! Oh, know what advantage Satan has over you! In the coming days, never think or speak lightly of the law, much less dress it up as a scarecrow, this blessed instrument of the grace of God. Indeed, love and value it for the sake of him from whom it came, and of him to whom it leads. Let it be your glory and joy next to the cross of Christ! Declare its praise, and treat it with honour before all.

(9) And if you are convinced that it is the offspring of God, that it is a copy of all his perfections, and that it is 'holy, and just, and good,' and especially to those who believe, then, instead of treating it as a polluted thing, see that you cling to it more and more. Never forsake the law of mercy and truth, of love to God and man, of lowliness, meekness, and purity. **'Bind it around your neck, write it on the tablet of your heart'**. (Proverbs 3:3) Keep close to the law if you desire to keep close to Christ. Hold it fast; never let it go. Let it ever lead you to the atoning blood, and ever confirm your hope, till all the 'righteousness of the law' is fulfilled in you, and you are 'filled with all the fullness of God'. (10) And if the Lord has already fulfilled his word, if he has already written his law in your heart, then **'stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free'**. (Galatians 5:1) You are not only free from Jewish ceremonies, and from the guilt of sin, and from the fear of hell (these being the least and lowest part of Christian liberty) but, what is infinitely more important, from the power of sin, and from serving the devil, and from offending God. Stand fast in this liberty, in comparison with which all the rest is not even worthy to be named.

Stand fast in loving God with all your heart, and serving him with all your strength! This is perfect freedom. So keep his law and walk without blame in all his commandments. **'Do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage'**. I do not mean Jewish bondage; nor yet bondage to the fear of hell. These, I trust, are far from you. But, beware of being entangled again with the yoke of sin, of any inward or outward transgression of the law. Hate sin far more than death or hell; hate sin itself far more than its punishment. Beware of the bondage of pride, of desire, of an evil temper or word or work. Look to Jesus; and in so doing, look more and more into the perfect law, 'the law of liberty'; and 'continue in it'. So you will grow daily in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

STUDY 18

THE BELIEVER AND SIN

ROMANS 6:1-2

EXPOSITION

With a change of chapter, we come to a change of subject: Should a Christian continue in sin? However, this theme in Chapter 6 of Romans is not without a connection with the glorious theme of God's grace outlined in Chapter 5. Paul opens this new section in chapter 6 with the solemn and shameful subject of sin – **What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?** (1) He reacts to these two questions with a strong exclamation and a further searching question – **Certainly not! How shall we who died live any longer in it?** (2)

(1) Where is the Law in the life of a Christian?

We remember Paul's words in the previous chapter where he set out the great doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the Law – **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (5:1) Put into its simplest form, it means that a sinner can only be made right with God on God's terms, never on his own, and never on the basis of anything that he can do. The open secret of the gospel is that sinners can do nothing to merit salvation. They can never make themselves right with God, no matter how hard they try. It is God who makes the sinner right with himself by his grace, apart from man's religious works. No effort is required on the sinner's part to gain salvation. Nothing he does will relieve him of his burden of guilt because of his sin.

Paul now moves on to make a further point in Chapter 6. He deals first of all with a wrong idea that arose in the minds of some who came under his teaching and which led to the heresy of **ANTINOMIANISM** (pronounced, ANTI-NOME-EE-AN-ISM). Basically,

antinomianism is the belief that no matter what a Christian does, his salvation cannot be taken away from him. It becomes a licence to sin, permitting its followers to feel that their sin is only a slight thing, and that God will forgive it automatically for Christ's sake. Thus it is argued, 'When Christ died on the Cross, he removed all our sins.' So it really does not matter if we fall into further sin.' In effect, it encourages Christians to do what they like. It is a very attractive doctrine, but it leads to a low view of sin, lazy Christians, and occasion scandalous behaviour. Antinomianism teaches that little effort is required of the believer. Once he comes to Christ for salvation, he does not need to do anything else. Christ has done it all for him.

Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi, where a similar problem might have arisen – **Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work on behalf of his good pleasure.** (Philippians 2:12-13) This verse is not saying that that we can add anything to our salvation, but that we must work out our salvation in practical terms. Our salvation begins and ends with God. (Psalm 3:8) He brought us to Christ; he gave us faith and the ability to believe in Christ; he touched our conscience, and showed us our need of Christ. It was his good pleasure to set his love upon us and save us. What remains for us to do is to apply it – 'work it out' – in every part of our lives. This 'working out' is the practical application of what has already been 'worked in', and is what theologians call the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification means holiness of life.

(2) Death and life

A summary of sanctification is found in 6:11 – **Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** There are two aspects of sanctification mentioned in this verse – in one direction, dead to sin, and in the other, alive to God. Salvation delivers us from sin, and sets us apart to God. So far as we are concerned, we turn away from the old master, and declare to our beloved new Master, 'We will obey you because we love you for paying the price to redeem us from a life of slavery to sin.'

We were delivered from sin, and saved for God; saved from death and saved into a new life. Once, we were dead in our sins, but now we are alive to God, knowing him in an intimate way, living in friendship with him and under his fatherly care. We have open access to God, and pray to him. Ultimately, we will be with him forever in heaven. No sin in our lives will ever separate us from the love of God, but at the same time we recognise that sin offends him who sent his Son to die for our sins on the Cross. Just as God hates sin, and cannot bear to look upon it, so too the believer hates sin, and will not tolerate it in his life. We cannot be continually sinning and love God. We cannot live for sin and, at the same time, continue in a loving relationship with God. Sin separates; so it is the duty of every Christian to deal with it in a way that Paul later calls describes as 'putting to death', and what theologians call 'mortification' – **But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** (Romans 8:13) It is important for every believer to deal with sin before it comes to birth, or, if it comes into existence, to execute it.

(3) Justification and sanctification.

What shall we say then? (6:1) Paul shows that there is a close connection between the doctrine of justification by faith – being put right with God – and the doctrine of sanctification – being kept right with God. If a believer dies, and is called into God's presence, he will appear to God as perfect as the Son, for what the Father sees in the believer is the righteousness of his Son. The saved sinner is clothed with Christ's righteousness. Yet there is also a practical outworking of our salvation whereby we must deal with those sins that appear while we remain in the flesh. Remnants of the old life appear from time to time in the

believer's life like traitors in the citadel of God, as John Bunyan states in his **HOLY WAR**. The traitors live secretly in the cellars of the City, and need to be dragged out into the light of day and hanged without mercy. Every Christian needs to live a life of holiness, not only because it is his duty to do so, but because he loves his Saviour and desires to please him and be like him.

Consider the spiritual meaning of these words from John Bunyan's **HOLY WAR**, after Diabolus (the devil) is cast out of the city of Mansoul, and Prince Emmanuel comes in to rule there:

After this was done, Emmanuel issued a command that that those three great servants of Diabolus should be arrested – namely, the two former Lord Mayors, Mr. Unbelief and Mr. Lust, and Mr. Forget-Good the Recorder. Beside these, there were those whom Diabolus made burgesses and aldermen in Mansoul, who were put in prison by the hand of the now valiant and right noble and brave Lord Will-be-will. And these were their names – Alderman Atheist, Alderman Hard-Heart, and Alderman False-Peace. The burgesses were: Mr. Untruth, Mr. Pitiless, Mr. Haughty, and others. These were committed in close confinement to prison, where the gaoler's name was Mr. Trueman. This Trueman was one of those that Prince Emmanuel brought with him from his Father's court when he had first made war on Diabolus in the city of Mansoul... So the city of Mansoul executed them according to the world of the Prince. But when the prisoners were brought to the cross to die, you would hardly believe the hard work Mansoul found to put these servants of Diabolus to death ... Now the great Shaddai had a secretary in the town who was a great lover of the citizens of Mansoul. He was at the place of execution also; so he, hearing the men of Mansoul struggling with the unruliness of the prisoners, rose up from his place and came and gave a hand to the men of Mansoul. So they crucified these servants of Diabolus who had been such a plague, a grief, and an offence to the city of Mansoul.

[NOTE: A **mayor** is the head of a city council.

A **recorder** is a judge.

A **burgess** is a citizen with full voting rights.

An **alderman** is a co-opted member of a city council, a position of great dignity.]

The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness the moment he believes. However, there is no such thing as imputed holiness. God sees the saved sinner as holy through the holiness of his own Son, but he calls him to play an active part in his sanctification. The gospel preacher, to the delight of himself and his hearers, is able to declare that every believer has victory by God's grace over his sin. The Christian soldier must fight temptation and sin if he is to make progress in the Christian life. He has a faith to defend and battles to win. Bishop John Charles Ryle (1816-1900) says this in his book **HOLINESS**:

It would not be difficult to point out at least twenty-five or thirty distinct passages in the Epistles where believers are plainly taught to use active personal exertion, and are addressed as responsible for doing energetically what Christ would have them do, and are not told to 'yield themselves' up as passive agents and sit still, but to arise and work. A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier's life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian ... But the plain truth is, that men will persist in confounding two things that differ – that is, justification and sanctification. In justification, the word to be addressed to man is believe, only believe; in sanctification the

word must be 'watch, pray, and fight'. What God has divided, let us not mingle and confuse.

This is what caused the Apostle Paul to exclaim – **Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air, but I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.** (1 Corinthians 9:26-27) And, **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** (2 Timothy 4:7)

Justification is given freely by the God of all grace, but our sanctification requires our own effort as well. Justification is associated with such words as 'faith', 'believing', and 'receiving Christ', but sanctification is associated with such words as 'watchfulness', 'being on the alert', 'mortification', and 'fighting'.

(4) The importance of a question.

In Chapter 6:11, Paul deals with the principle of holiness. How do we become holy in God's sight? He begins with an imaginary questioner, who argues that the more a believer continues in sin, the more powerful the saving grace of God is shown to be. The questioner obviously has a very low view of sin, and slight regard for it. When he sins, he sees it as a means of magnifying God's grace. 'We cannot be saved by the works of the Law', our objector is saying, 'so we rely entirely on God to save us.' The argument could be concluded, 'If believers go on sinning, it reveals God as a great Saviour who forgives us this tendency to sin. So don't worry too much about it because there is plenty of forgiveness in Jesus Christ through the grace of the gospel.'

In contrast to this, however, the Bible teaches us that in every believer there is a hatred of sin, and an aversion to sinning. John wrote – **My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin ... Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him.** (1 John 2:1; 3:9) A believer, having professed faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, has no right to call himself a Christian unless his life is greatly changed after conversion. That is holiness. It is not only a confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour, but a total commitment to him. Should a believer go on in the old sinful way? **Certainly not!** replies Paul emphatically.

The sinfulness of sin

One of the challenges of gospel preaching is to address these questions: 'Should a saved sinner live a different life after his conversion? Will he be as defeated by sin as he was before he became a Christian? Can a believer meet the moral standards of the Law of God?'

We need first to define sin. We are challenged by these words – **Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.** (1 John 3:4) Sin is a transgression of the Law. The first joyful reaction of a Christian is to the fact that he has been set free from the Law. This raises another important question: What place, then, has the Law in the life of a Christian? This question is addressed by Paul in Chapter 7 where he states that the Law plays a vital role both in the life of the unbeliever under spiritual conviction, and in the life of the believer. Without the Law there is no knowledge of sin. (Romans 7:7) How can we know that we have offended God if we do not know the standard from which we have fallen short? (Romans 3:23) The Law continues to play a part in the Christian experience by exposing his sin. But a believer finds that God gives him the ability to deal with that sin.

Sin is the opposite of God's Law – **sin is lawlessness.** (1 Timothy 1:9) God's moral standard is found in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:2-17). Sin is a breach of the

moral Law of God; it is a moral corruption that affects the whole human race. It has become as much part of man's nature as his ability to breathe. David concluded long ago – **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.** (Psalm 51:5) At the conception, in the mother's womb, the nature of the growing baby is inevitably sinful. Paul has already stated – **Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ...** (Romans 5:12) By one act of disobedience against God, Adam reproduced his sinful nature in every one of his descendants.

The Westminster Catechism poses this question: **What is sin?** The answer is as follows – **Sin is any want of conformity unto, or any transgression of, any law of God.** The Confession enlarges further – **By sin, Man fell from his original righteousness and communion with God, and became dead in his sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.** Thomas Watson, one of the Puritans whose writings are fairly easy to read, says this of sin in his Body of Divinity (1690) – **What a heinous thing sin is! It is the spirit of mischief distilled. It is compared to the venom of serpents and the stench of sepulchres. Sin is the devil's first-born.** That is why all true believers have such an utter abhorrence of sin. That is why Paul reacted so strongly to the question: **Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!**

Should we not strive, as Gospel preachers, urge our hearers to please the Saviour who died for our sins on the Cross, and follow his example of holiness and obedience to the demands of God's Law? **How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it?**

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 18

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 5:1

1. What does justification come by?
2. State an important result of justification.

Read Philippians 2:12-13

3. What should accompany a 'working out' of our salvation?
4. Who 'works in' our salvation?
5. What is it that believers delight in most of all?

Read Romans 6:11

6. What is the state of Christians with regard to sin?
7. What is the state of unbelievers with regard to God? (See Ephesians 2:1)
8. Through whom do we become 'alive to God'?

Read Romans 8:13

9. What happens to someone who professes faith in Christ, but lives a worldly and sinful life?
10. What must a true believer do?
11. Who helps in this?

Read I Corinthians 9:26-27

12. What two active words are used here to describe the Christian life?
13. What must the Christian discipline totally?
14. What was Paul very concerned about?

Read 2 Timothy 4:7

15. What three active words are used here about the Christian life?
16. What prize did Paul expect at the end?
17. Who will give him his award after all his efforts?

Read 1 John 2:1; 3:9

18. Is verse 1 open to the possibility that a Christian might sin?
19. Who defends Christians who sin?
20. Does a born-again Christian continue in a sinful life?
21. Where will God's holy seed germinate?

Read 1 John 3:4

22. What does sin bring with it?
23. What connection is there between sin and the Law of God?
24. What causes God to overlook sin in the believer?

Read Romans 3:23

25. What happened to the sin of a Christian before he believed?
26. What is now his goal in life?

Read Psalm 51:5

27. What convinced David that he was a sinner by nature? (See the introduction to the Psalm)
28. When did he receive his sinful nature?

Romans 5:12

29. Who was the 'one man'?
30. What did that man bring to the whole world?
31. What is the proof of the spiritual death of mankind?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION.

(1) Romans 6:1-4 shows how a Christians may live, trusting in Christ's finished work alone for salvation. So then, how would you reply to someone who says that your preaching of justification by faith alone encourages people to sin?

(2) Read Romans 6:2 again. What do you think Paul means when he says that the believer is dead to sin?

C. PRACTICAL

There are two fairly long quotations from Christian authors in the transcript.

Read the two quotations again carefully, and answer the following question, so that you could make use of them in your preaching.

A. The Holy War, by John Bunyan (written 1662)

(1) Explain what has just happened to the city of Mansoul?

(2) Who exactly are Diabolus and Emmanuel?

(3) (a) What sins are represented by the Aldermen and Burgesses?

Give a description of these sins.

(b) Find some verse in the Bible where these sins can be found, and write them down in your script.

B. Holiness by John Charles Ryle (1816-1900)

- (1) Write out 5 verses from the New Testament 'where believers are plainly taught to use active personal exertion.'
- (2) Give a brief definition of justification and sanctification, and explain what is the difference between them.
- (3) What would be the best thing to say to a Christian who comes to you after you have preached on the believer and sin, and says, 'I have tried very hard to live a holy life, but I keep on failing.'

STUDY 19

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

ROMANS 6:3-11

EXPOSITION

We come now in Chapters 6-7 to a closer examination of the principle of gospel holiness. Holiness is that process by which God causes Christians to grow spiritually and morally. Verses 1-7 deal particularly with what prevents growth: that is, our sin, and our inability to deal with it or fully understand it apart from our justification and sanctification. In verses 8-11, we come to the effect of the resurrection of Christ. Paul is right to point out the importance of the resurrection in the gospel, and that the gospel concerns the resurrection of Christ.

Now, in verses 3-11, we see how Christ justified us by rising from the dead. This great act of deliverance from sin is symbolised in baptism — an outward sign of something that has happened spiritually and inwardly.

(1) The meaning of baptism

Baptism has three parts to it: the water itself, being a symbol of death and the grave; the immersion under the water, being a symbol of burial to the old life; and the coming up out of the water, being a sign of resurrection to a new life. Paul assumes that all believers have been baptised – **do you not know that as many of us as were baptised ...** (1) This phrase

as many as indicates **all of us**, as in the case of the prophets in Acts 3:24 — **all the prophets ... as many as have spoken**. The outward sign of Christian conversion is therefore in the act of baptism. Christ sent his disciples out into the world to **make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit** (Matthew 28:19). What a great opportunity is a service of baptism for the preaching of the gospel! Notice the phrase **into Christ Jesus**. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward act of God. It indicates the believer's union **into** and with Christ. It also means a complete identification with God's saving purposes and will.

Baptism, like the Communion service, reminds us of death – Christ's and ours – **we were buried with him through baptism into death**. The believer enters the water as if being buried. He shows that he is now dead to the old life and its claims upon him. The second truth concerning baptism is being raised into a new life in Christ – **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life**. Christ rose from the tomb; we too have risen from our spiritual tomb – **Most assuredly I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live**. (John 5:25) The death and resurrection of Christ meant complete victory over the devil – **that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage**. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

If baptism is an outward sign of the believer's spiritual union with Christ, it is also a sign of his identification with Christ – **For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection** (5). So then, finally, baptism indicates the believer's close association with the effects of Christ's resurrection. The word **united** (literally, 'planted') is used on only one other occasion in the New Testament. It means to be planted in the same patch of ground as Christ, and partaking of the same life. What a great theme to develop in any gospel sermon!

(2) The lessons we learn from baptism

In baptism, many things are involved, such as spiritual death, justification and resurrection. The believer's union with Christ is intimately connected with these four things: first, the crucifixion of the old sinful nature – **knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him**. Here is salvation; here is the ground for the 'no condemnation' of 8:1. Secondly, the means of dealing successfully with indwelling sin, remnants of which remain in the believer – **that the body of sin might be done away with**. This is a great encouragement in the light of Paul's later frank confession of sin in Chapter 7. Thirdly, a refusal to be enslaved by sin any more – **that we should no longer be slaves of sin**. The believer has been redeemed, pardoned, and set free. Fourthly, justification which delivers the believer from the guilt of past sin – **For he who has died has been free from sin**. (7) What conviction there is in Paul's preaching when he declares – **Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins; and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things** (Acts 13:38-39)

(3) The power of Christ's resurrection

Why did Christ rise from the dead? We have seen previously that Christ rose for our justification. We can put it in this way – it is 'just if I'd never sinned', for that is how God sees us. And secondly, Christ rose from the dead in order that we might receive his life and be brought to the Father. At the moment of faith in Christ, all this became true. All our sins were wiped out, and we were set free from the guilt of sin. That is tremendous, when you come to think about it. We may lay our heads down on our pillows at night knowing that if we died in our sleep, we would go guiltless into the presence of God. We are justified because Christ

rose for our justification – **delivered up because of our offences, and raised because of our justification.** (4:25) We once lived with no hope of resurrection, no justification, and no deliverance from the guilt of sin. Imagine carrying this burden all our life long and then into eternity! Freedom from the guilt of sin; freedom from any accusation brought against us; freedom from the condemnation of God.

Again we must ask, why did Christ rise from the dead? Not only to justify us and set us free from the guilt of sin, but to regenerate us, make us born again, and put a new life, his life, in us. The life of the vine flows in the branches – **I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit** (John 15:5). If we have this new life in us, we are not only set free from the guilt of sin, but we are set free from the dominion of sin.

**Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.**

**Augustus Montague Toplady
(1740-1778)**

riven = broken, cut open, pierced

And that is what Paul says – **For he who has died has been freed from sin.** (7) We are set free from the guilt of sin through justification, and from the power of sin through regeneration. God makes us new altogether. So we are set free from the old way of life by being set free from the old master.

(4) Two questions answered

Now, we considered two questions when we came to the beginning of chapter 6. The first question was this: Is it right for a Christian to sin? Paul replies with a short answer in verse 1 – **Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!** It is unthinkable that a Christian, having come to Christ, should go on exactly the same as he did before. The mark of a Christian is a horror at the thought of sin in his life. A Christian should not sin, and yet we do. How can we overcome it in the gospel? It seems a paradox that we are saved from sin and yet go on sinning. That is what Paul says in the second part of verse 2 – **How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer in it?** The defeated Christian, who goes on committing a particular sin over and over again, finding no relief, no deliverance, and constant defeat, has never come to grips with verse 2. It would never occur to him to say, 'I cannot go on like this anymore. It is wrong, God help me!' Paul exclaimed, **Who shall deliver me from this body of death?** (7:24) That is the mark of a true Christian, the mark of a growing Christian, the mark of a holy Christian. Therefore the Christian finds himself in this strange position, striving not to sin, and having the power of God to enable him not to sin, and, at the same time, crying out to God due to his consciousness of sin. It seems that the more holy a Christian becomes, the more conscious he is of sin within. That is the mark of a true Christian.

How then can we overcome sin? Well, let us return to those two reasons why Jesus rose from the dead. We said first of all that he rose to justify us, and then he rose to regenerate us. Those are the very grounds of victory for the Christian. Let us consider them. First of all, Paul said that we can overcome sin on the grounds of our justification (3-7). If we were baptised into Christ Jesus, we were baptised into his death. We died to sin. Paul declares

– **There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.** (8:1) If we are in Christ, then all that Christ accomplished on the Cross is of benefit to us who believe in him.

Secondly, on the grounds of regeneration we may overcome our sin. (8-11) We are born again into a new life. That is what Paul says in verse 11 – **reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** How can we live this new life? How do we receive this new life? The answer is, we already have the new life. We received it the moment we were in Christ, the moment we believed in him. But, unlike the time when we were dead in our sins and unable even to cry out to God for mercy, and when we could contribute nothing whatever to our salvation, in contrast, in our sanctification and in our growth as Christians, the Lord has given us a part to play. We can add nothing to our salvation but we can most certainly do something about our Christian growth. We co-operate with Christ in the work that he has begun in us, and which he continues to do until he presents us faultless before the Father. (Jude 24) The clue is in verse 6 – **knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.**

You will notice the conditional ‘**might**’ be done away with. The body of sin is done away with as far as God is concerned. As far as we are concerned, there are remnants of the old life that remain with us that we must put to death. That is a theme Paul takes up later in 8:13. Life in the Spirit, and the life of the Christian in the Spirit, is the life that strives with sin, defeats it and puts it to death. **For if you live according to the flesh** (that is, the old life) **you will die.** You are living a pretence; you are not a real Christian. The mark of a true Christian is found in the words that follow – **but, if by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live** (you are a true Christian). In order to understand why it is so important to mortify (put to death) sin, we need to know two further things. The first is this: in verses 8-10, Paul informs us that we have come into a new relationship, In the old life we formed certain relationships, but none of them can be compared with the new relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. This is something new altogether. It is a supernatural, deep work of God through his Spirit in our hearts that makes us one with Jesus Christ. It is a fellowship, a mystical union with Christ, which the world can never know or experience. It is a closeness with the Saviour that we know when he becomes our Saviour.

This fellowship with Jesus Christ directly affects our sin. In verse 8, we read – **If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.** Notice the **if**. Paul is always the evangelist. He never lets slip any opportunity to make quite sure that those whom he is addressing know exactly where they stand in relation to Jesus Christ. It can never be said that Paul left any of his congregations in any doubt where they stood in relation to God. They knew what he was talking about, and they knew on which side they stood. So far as Paul was concerned, they were either with Christ or against him. Any gospel preacher must stop and apply the message personally when he comes to the **if** in verse 8 – **if we died with Christ.** If our self-interest died the moment we put our trust in Christ, then we are Christians. The seal on this new fellowship with Christ is the new life. The seal is repeated in verse 9 – **knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him.**

Another characteristic of a Christian is that he will never die. It is true he will put his body to one side, leaving it behind to be put back in the earth from which it came. But the essential Christian, that new creation that Christ has set in the body, that will never die. Therefore, we have this assurance that when we lay our body aside, we are going to be with the Lord. **Absent from the body, present with the Lord,** declares Paul. (2 Corinthians 5:8) When we are present with the Lord, who will care

about the trials and tribulations of this life in the body? We will be with Christ, enjoying the new life which is the seal on every Christian – the seal of deliverance from sin and death. Christ rose from the dead and will never die again, so those who believe in him will not die either. **Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die**, declared Jesus (John 11:26), with everyone looking on in wide-eyed astonishment. But it is true; there is no fear in death for the Christian. We observe the people of God, some of whom have reached quite an advanced age, and see them preparing to go to be with the Lord. A quiet composure of soul comes over them, and somehow the presence of Christ seems to be with them. Then, when their time comes, they go quietly. As the old spiritual puts it, they ‘steal away to Jesus’. They do not fight it. They are not afraid of it. They just desire to be with Christ, which is far better. (Philippians 1:23)

(5) Union with Christ

Thirdly, we notice the power that comes from this intimate union with Christ – **For the death that he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life that he lives, he lives to God.** (10) What does it mean to die to sin? For one thing, it does not mean that we stop sinning. You cannot say that that was ever true of Christ. John Calvin, commenting on this verse, says, ‘the very form of expression as applied to Christ, shows that he did not die to sin for the purpose of ceasing to commit it’. It means, then, for the Christian, that he dies to the guilt of sin. Sin has no hold on him. It has no claim on him. Sin is powerless to drag him down to hell once he is saved. You may know of the story of the Cornish Methodist, Billy Bray, a very rough man who devoted his life to building churches in Cornwall. Billy Bray was going through a time of great spiritual turmoil in which the tempter came and suggested to him that he was a terrible sinner and that he deserved to go to hell because that is where sinners should go. In his despair, Billy Bray was heard to cry out, ‘Well, if God should allow me to go down to hell, and put me in a beer barrel and send me down to hell, I would shout Praise the Lord! through the bung-hole.’ Even in hell, he felt that the sense of God’s presence would never desert him because he belonged to God, he had the new life within. That is true of every Christian. Sin is rendered powerless over the life of the Christian.

(6) Two negative relationships

Finally, we have come into a new relationship with Christ, but also we enter into two negative relationships when we are saved. They are mentioned in verse 11 – **Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** We are dead to sin. That is what Paul says. For the Christian, sin no longer exists as a great power to be reckoned with. We can well afford to ignore its claims. It is like a slave turning from his greedy, grasping, cruel, old master, and turning to the new master, saying, ‘Master, I belong to you now. Tell him to go away. I don’t belong to him any more’. That is the position of the Christian. We ask God, ‘Tell the old devil to go away. I don’t belong to him any more’. We reckon ourselves to be dead to sin. That word **reckon** has been used previously. We remember Abraham in Genesis 15:6 – **He believed in the Lord, and he accounted** (reckoned) **it to him for righteousness.** (Romans 4:3)

If we believe in God, if we trust in God, if we follow his Son, we are reckoned dead to sin. That is how God sees us. All he sees are the perfections of Jesus reflected in us. Isn’t that a wonderful relief? We are reckoned dead to sin – **For I through the Law died to the Law, that I might live to God.** (Galatians 2:19) The Law showed us our inability to keep it. We became convicted sinners, so we turned to Christ instead, that we might live to God. Paul wrote – **I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** (Galatians 2:20) That is how we stand in relation to our sins if we are in Christ. Do not let them deceive you. Do not let them rob you of your

assurance in Christ. You have the life of Christ. You have died to sin. You have a new master.

Secondly, we die to ourselves. We turn from the old to the new master. There is no freedom for the Christian. Our only freedom is to be set free from the old life in Christ. God did not create man free to serve himself. God created him to serve him and to love him. That is true freedom. The Westminster catechism puts it this way – ‘The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.’ Christ set us free from the old master to put us back to that original purpose. We turn to Christ, who is our new master, and in so doing we come to God. **Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ... Let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering** (Hebrews 10:19-23). There is no other assurance of faith except along the pathway that Paul maps out for us in Romans 6. Our salvation comes from Christ. Our fellowship with God depends on our fellowship with Christ. Our power to overcome sin depends on the power of the Holy Spirit which Christ sent to indwell all those who believe.

So there we stand. Here is the background to the principle of holiness, the secret of Christian growth. In our next study, we will see how possible it is to put these principles into practice in the Christian life.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 19

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Matthew 28:19

1. Who were to be baptised?
2. In whose name were they baptised?

Read John 5:25

3. Who hears the voice of Christ?
4. Do they hear his voice now?
5. So is this physical or spiritual death?
6. What does Christ give to the dead who hear his voice?

Read Hebrews 2:14-15

7. Did Jesus physically die?
8. What through death did he destroy?
9. Who did he defeat?
10. What does fear of death bring?
11. What does Christ do for those who fear?

Read Acts 13:38-39

12. Who were Paul's 'brethren'?
13. Where did Paul preach this sermon?
14. Who is 'this man'?
15. What 2 things can be obtained from 'this man'?
16. What could the Law of Moses not do?

Read John 15:5

17. Who is the true Vine?
18. Who are the branches?
19. What must the 'branches' do?
20. Which 2 things does Christ promise?
21. Why do Christians depend on Christ?

Read Jude verses 24-25

22. Who is 'God our Saviour'?
23. What present thing does Christ do?
24. What future thing does Christ do?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:8

25. What made Paul confident as he faced death?
26. How did Paul feel about being parted from his body?

Read John 11:25-26

27. To whom did Jesus direct his question?
28. What had he promised? (See verse 25)
29. Who will never die?

Read Philippians 1:23

30. What were the 2 things Paul was thinking about?
31. Which previous verse states that Christ is the same in life and death?
32. Why was Paul not afraid of death?

Read Galatians 2:19-20

33. When Paul came out from under the power of the Law, for whom did he live?
34. When the old Paul was 'crucified', what happened?
35. What 2 things did Christ do for Paul?

Read Hebrews 10:19-23

36. How is the way to God described here?
37. Who opened up this way?
38. On what grounds do Christians come boldly before God?
39. What office does Christ have in heaven now?
40. What 3 things are required of us?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

1. What does Paul mean in verse 2, when he says that a believer is dead to sin?
2. What connection is there between the picture of baptism and the life of a Christian?
3. Complete this list of phrases in 6:3-11 that describes the life of a Christian. Give the verses where they appear.

Phrase

Completed

Verse

- baptised ...
- walking ...
- united ...
- no longer ...
- freed ...
- alive with ...
- dead ...
- alive to ...

4. Here are the complete words of A. M. Toplady's hymn quoted in the exposition:

1. **Rock of Ages cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.**

2. **Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands:
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone.**

3. **Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace,
Foul, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!**

4. **While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown
See thee on thy judgement throne;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee!**

(The meaning of some of the words in the hymn:)

thee = you; thou = you; thy = your; mine = my; cleft = split;
riven = pierced; respite = without stopping.)

1. Who is the Rock of Ages?
2. The water and the blood is called 'the double cure'.
3. What are the two things they cure?
4. What cannot fulfil the law's demands?
5. Naked; 'helpless'; 'foul'; remind us of a verse in Revelation 3.
Give the reference, and quote it.
6. How will Christian escape condemnation at the judgement throne?

C. PRACTICAL

In a sermon, say how you personally are enjoying the benefits described in verse 3-11:

- (1) Give your testimony how you became a Christian to your congregation.
Write it down, and send it in.**
- (2) Say why these verses mean so much to you in your Christian experience.**
- (3) Describe any reactions you received to this sermon from your congregation.**

STUDY 20

CHRIST IS KING

ROMANS 6:12-14

EXPOSITION

1. The practice of holiness.

We come now to a new section in Romans. Paul was always eager to put principles into practice, and he does so here. We need that sort of preaching today, when the preacher declares, 'Look, this is the truth of the gospel; but this is what we must do to put it into practice in our own lives' The Puritans preachers used to add a section at the end of each sermon – sometimes lasting as long as the sermon itself. In many parts of Holland, preachers had a 'former sermon' and a 'latter sermon' where the first sermon dealt with the doctrines and principles of a passage, and, after singing, there would be a second sermon which would apply all that they had learnt from the Scriptures to everyday life. Many in the congregation would often find the second sermon more interesting than the first! The

Puritans used to call this part of their sermon 'The Uses' – that is, how to make use of the doctrines.

2. Three relationships illustrating holiness.

We learn in the next few verses (6:12 – 7:6) something practical about the principle of holiness – when the Christian comes to know about himself, and is coming to terms with the fact that he is not perfect. He did not become perfect when Jesus Christ became his Saviour, but God allowed that for a reason. What is it that God is doing to us Christians? How is it possible to come to terms with what we are? And how can we grow in the Christian life? Negatively, we discover that, although we are saved, we are still sinners, but that we should not sin. We see that there is power available from God himself to help us overcome sin in our lives. Sin has no right to claim any authority over Christians for two reasons. **Firstly**, because they are dead to sin. They have come into a new life. They are now, in God's sight, justified by faith. God sees them as being sinless through the Lord Jesus Christ. **Secondly**, because they received a new life, they have enough power to overcome any sin that rises up within them. That sounds good in theory, but how is it possible to put it into practice?

We also discover how to practise the way of holiness, the way of sanctification, which means 'separated from sin' and 'separated to God'. When a person becomes a Christian, he is not set free absolutely. He is set free from sin, and set free to serve God. There is no such thing as total freedom. A Christian is only set free to serve the one who sets him free.

Paul now goes on to use three illustrations of how a Christian dies to sin and to the power of sin. He uses the illustration of the king and subject (12-14); secondly, the master-slave relationship (15-23); finally, the husband-wife relationship (7:1-6). All three tell us something about how Christians stand in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ who has set them free.

3. The king and his subjects.

Let us look first of all at the most thrilling of all these relationships. The fact is that when Jesus Christ becomes our Saviour he also becomes the King of our lives. What does Paul say about sin and the believer? **Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body** (12). The emphasis here is on two words: **therefore**, and **reign**. The **reign** refers to the reign or rule of a king. 'Now', asks the gospel preacher of his congregation, 'which rules in your heart and life – sin or Jesus Christ?' This is what Paul is asking here of his readers. The answer can only be one or the other. There is no in-between, and there can be no mixture of the two. The principle is true of everyone who is either under the dominion of sin or the kingship of Jesus Christ. The other important word – **therefore** – is one of Paul's favourite words in Romans – this is the ninth occasion where it appears. On every occasion, **therefore** refers back to the previous passage. Now, Paul writes – **Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body**, admitting the possibility that it may seem to do so in the Christian, and so needs to be dealt with. There is no such thing as a sinless Christian. There is no perfect Christian in this life. We will never be perfect until we enter the glory of heaven. Paul here admits the reality of the Christian life, that we are yet sinners. But the Christian's attitude towards sin is quite different from the non-Christian's. Paul says, 'Therefore do not let sin be your king.' Why? Go back one verse, to verse 11 – **reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord**. If we are alive to God, what has sin got to do with us? The fact that we belong to God should make us ashamed of our sins. And if we have too low a view of sin, then what sort of Christians are we? What is the point in being Christians? Yes; Augustine did say, 'Love God and do as you like', but the

true believer will desire to do only what God likes – which are holy things, things that please our Lord Jesus. Paul wrote – **God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness** (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

Now, many people appear to have the very strange idea that sanctification is something a few Christians experience after a special initiation – producing a few enthusiastic Christians, a few spiritually-minded Christians, a few Christians who have experienced some sort of supernatural experience, and rest there. But holiness is a doctrine for all Christians. It is not something that comes after some super-spiritual experience. It is something really down-to-earth for every Christian. It is very much related to how we act in the home, the way we treat other people, the way we act at work, our attitude towards other Christians, and our attitude to the things of the world. Holiness is very much earth-bound and practical.

See how Paul expanded on Christian holiness when he wrote to Titus. His letter was obviously not only a personal one but was for all Christians, particularly those under Titus' ministry – **that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience.** (2:2) 'Yes indeed!' say their wives. Then Paul writes to the older women – **the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.** 'Yes indeed! say the younger women. Then Paul writes to the younger women – ... **that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their husbands, that the word of God may nor be blasphemed.** (verse 5) 'Yes indeed!' say their young husbands. So Paul says to them – **exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works.** (6-8) This is practical holiness. It is personal and practical; it is Christian holiness. There is no such thing as a sincere Christian who is not pursuing holiness. **Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.** (Hebrews 12:14) If the Spirit of God is in us, we should be reflecting the very nature of God in us. And if God is holy, so are his children. Paul describes these effects in our passage, 'Therefore, concerning sin and the believer, it should not be. Sin shall not reign in your mortal bodies. When it appears, it is time to expose it, look at it, and put it off its throne. Instead', says Paul, 'you are alive to God.' Now, if we are alive to God, and alive for God, and if sin no longer reigns in us, we should be measuring up to God's holy standards.

What is holiness? That is a difficult question, which occupies some very large theological books! Put into one sentence, we could say that holiness is abstaining from sin. It is as simple as that. Holiness is what God causes to appear in us when we abstain from sin. This is also from Paul – **Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.** (1 Thessalonians 5:22-23) Abstain, and God will do the rest. We have a part to play in Christian holiness, and that is to deal with all known sin. That, then, is the relation of sin and the believer. Because of what Jesus is to us, we will not let sin reign as king within us.

4. What are 'lusts'?

Let us ask a question of verse 12: 'Why should we not let sin reign in our mortal bodies?' The answer is in the second part of the verse – **that you should not obey it in its lusts.** Do not let sin pretend to be king in your body, that it should possess it because of the sins of the old life. What do we gospel preachers say to those who have not been Christian very long, and who are feeling guilty because the things that they hated in their lives before they became Christians are still reappearing. They thought that they would disappear when they became Christians, but here they are again in the new life. 'However,' you must reply, 'the difference between when you were not a Christian and a sinner, and now that you are a believer, is that you are now revolted by your sin, and are now a rebel against your sin.'

You never felt like that before you became a Christian. You rebel against your sin; you hate it. That is what Paul is saying here in verse 12 – **do not obey it in its lusts**. If we prevent sin usurping the throne of our lives, then we will not obey its lusts. What does the word **lust** mean? Well, most people think it relates to sexual desires and sexual sins. But the Greek word means a general desire, usually a bad one, arising directly from uncontrolled bodily needs. As sin pretend to reign in our bodies, any desire that comes from our bodies must be viewed with suspicion – especially if it is a strong desire. The reason is this: God put into Adam some naturally strong desires. However, in his sinless state, they were no problem to him, but when he fell into sin, and we with him, sin made use of these natural and strong desires in us, and twisted them and used them for his own sinful ends. Therefore, these strong bodily desires can be used by the sin to undermine our obedience to the rightful King of our lives.

Let us consider a few examples. When we were unbelievers, we may have had a temper. We would grow irritable; and when we became Christians we found the same thing. It stems from the natural man, and sin uses it to spoil our Christian experience. When we were unbelievers, we had a strong pride. Now we are believers we still have that pride. It is seen in things like refusing to apologise when we have done wrong. Before we became Christians, we may have been subject to the desire for drugs or alcohol or tobacco. When we became Christians, we were sorely tested by desires for these things. These are the lusts of the mortal body. Now, I stress the word ‘mortal’. If we are not unhappy in giving way to these strong desires, they will trip us up and spoil our testimony. They also cloud our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if we give way to them in a mortal body, what will happen when we are in our immortal resurrection body when it is not possible to practise them? How will it be then? That is what Paul is really pointing out: that if we are happy to let these things overcome us when the Lord Jesus is reigning in us, what will happen when Christ alone reigns in us? Will we miss these things we indulge in, these things that reign over us? Will there not be a vacuum there? **Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.** (Hebrews 12:1-2) How right it was when I was told as a young Christian, ‘The easiest way to find out whether it is right or wrong to do something is to ask, ‘Would Jesus Christ be pleased for me to invite him to participate in the activity? Would he go with me to this place? Would I be happy for him to be there? Would he be happy to see me doing this thing?’ Older Christians were strict in those days; but it was only applying the application of Scripture. Dare we indulge in these things and still be able to say to Jesus Christ, ‘King of my life, I crown you now’? So, holiness it is a question of obedience to the rightful king of our lives, King Jesus. Are we being obedient to him?

5. The activities of sin.

We need now to consider sin and its activities – **And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.** (13) In order to dethrone this false king in the body, we must do two things. We find a negative command, then a positive command here. What must we not do and what is it that we must do? Do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. There are four things here. **Firstly**, there is the command, ‘Do not go on presenting your body ...’ The Authorised Version of the Bible uses the word **yield**, and that is a correct translation. **Do not yield** has two meanings in the Greek. It means to give in to, or give way to; which means that our will is over-ruled. Anything that over- rules the will of a Christian is sin, except God, of course. The word **yield** also means to serve. In ancient Greek culture,

it was when something was brought to the temple to offer to a god. That was yielding service; presenting something for the service of the god. Now, the apostle is saying here, 'You must not yield your body and offer it to the service of sin'. Also, we note the means of yielding – through our members. What are these **instruments**? They are the members of our body, our bodily faculties: ears, eyes, tongue, hands, and feet. In other words, Paul is urging, 'Do not let sin use your members, for they belong to God.' Jesus died to destroy the power on sin on the Cross so that he could use them in his service. By yielding to sin and allowing it to use our members in its service, we allow it to usurp God's proper place over them.. They belong to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He died on the Cross not only to take away our sin, but to purchase our hands and eyes and feet and tongues – all our bodily faculties – for use in his service.

The object of sin in using our members is to make **them instruments of unrighteousness**. The word that Paul uses here does not refer to musical instruments but was a military term involving arms and weapons. The Greek word includes spears and daggers and swords and everything else concerned with the weaponry of soldiers. The fact is, our bodily faculties are weapons that can be used for good or ill. The same weapon that is used in warfare can also be used for personal revenge. The hand that is raised in rightful defence of country, can also be raised in manslaughter. Against whom does sin try to use our faculties as weapons? Against you. The devil turns the faculties of our own bodies against ourselves, to injure our own testimony to the Saviour. So, to use them in such a way that they let you down. And what is the result of yielding? Unrighteousness. That is where the wrong use of our faculties will lead us. '**Unrighteousness**' means being in a wrong relationship with God; '**righteousness**' means being in a right relationship with God. The moment our faculties are used by sin, we come into a wrong relationship with God.

What, then, of the positive command? What should we do about the situation? **Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God**. Paul says that we should yield ourselves to God. Sin misuses our body, but God uses all of us – body, soul, spirit and minds. We should completely serve God with all that we are, so that we are able to say to the old master, 'we are dead to your service but alive to the new master.' We must yield our bodies to God for righteous service. **But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God....by purity, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.** (2 Corinthians 6:4, 6-7) The very weapons are turned into armour for us in God's hands. Sin uses them as weapons against ourselves; God uses them as armour. So this is what we ought to do – yield and present consciously all that we are to God.

6. The triumph of grace.

Finally, sin and its pretences are exposed – **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** (14) Sin is like its author, a deceiver, a liar, and a cheat. That is what it is to Christians. When you give sin an inch it will take a mile. 'Do not', says Paul, using a different word, 'let it dominate you.' Not in one member, not in one part of the body, let it become an absolute tyrant. We can thank God that he will never permit any of his children to fall under the absolute dominion of sin.

That, then, is the truth about sin. What does it lead to? It takes us to this promise from God – **sin shall not have dominion over you**. When we languish, when we feel despair, when we caught up in the heat of battle, when we feel we are losing, we can turn to the promise in this verse, which assures us that never, never, will a Christian be dominated by sin, but that there is victory in everything. That is implied here. Now, why is Paul so urgent, so commanding? Because we are no **longer under law, but under grace**. As Christians, we

are no longer under the condemnation of law of God. We are not judged by God's moral law or dominated by it. We no longer fear the curse of the Law, when **as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse...But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident.** (Galatians 3:10-11) The Law is used by sin to dominate us. **But the just shall live by faith.** (Habakkuk 2:4) We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, not by trying to do good works according to God's Law, but by being brought out from under the pitiless Law into faith in Jesus Christ.

God has delivered us from that tyranny, a righteous and holy tyranny, but a terribly condemning one. Whenever we read the Law, we become fearful of God because we know that we have broken it. Instead, under the Gospel, we hear Jesus gently calling us from under that terrible load, saying, 'Come this way to me, you who are tired and weary and heavy-burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke – the only way of salvation, the only remedy – upon you'. That is what we mean when we issue a gospel invitation; a call to come out from the condemnation of the Law, and come out into a new life, a new dimension, a new experience. We throw ourselves on the mercy of God on the basis of what Christ, who kept the law perfectly, has done on the cross in our place.

We have come into grace and mercy with a new king on the throne of our lives, and this new king brings in a new law. In many countries of the world we see new regimes taking over. Have you noticed that when a new leader comes to power, he very often announces an amnesty for all previous political prisoners. That is so with the Lord Jesus. We are set free by him when he comes to take the throne of our lives. We have a new king, a new reign, a new life and a new freedom. Jesus has dominion in the believer's heart now, otherwise we would not be here preaching about sin! We would not tolerate it; we would not be so concerned about it; we would not want to go on in the Christian life and become better Christians. Sin does not, and will not, have dominion over us. Indeed, if sin does have dominion, then we were never set free from the old king, the old tyrant of sin.

As the great preacher Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1900-1980) pointed out, 'The unbeliever, on the whole, falls into sin continually. The Christian sins, on the whole, only occasionally. The unbeliever is dominated by sin; the believer not at all. That is the difference.' For the Christian, his life is one of tender conscience, of overcoming, and of victory. If not, then Christ did rise victorious from the dead to give us the power to overcome sin under the law of grace. Every Christian, as it were, sets up shop in new premises. Outside, he has put up a sign that reads in large letters:

'UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT'

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 20

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:7

1. What is Paul contrasting holiness with?
2. Is holiness a calling?
3. Write down the three examples of holiness by abstaining from certain sins:
 - (a) Verse 3
 - (b) Verse 4
 - (c) Verse 6

Read Titus 2:2-6

4. Four groups are exhorted to holiness of living in verses 2-9. Name them:
 - (a) Verse 2
 - (b) Verses 3-5
 - (c) Verses 6-8
 - (d) Verses 9-10

Each of these groups should show outstanding examples of practical holiness.

Name these things:

5. Verse 2 – six things
6. Verses 3-5 – eight things
7. Verses 6-8 – six things
8. Verses 9-10 – five things

Read Hebrews 12:14

9. What must we do to obtain holiness?
10. Is it possible to be accepted before God without holiness?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:22-23

11. What is the negative side of holiness? (See verse 22)
12. What sort of sanctification does God require of us?
13. Which three parts are affected by holiness?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

14. Where would you find a long list of holy, faithful and witnessing saints?
15. What is an evil quality of sin described here?
16. Being holy and faithful is described here like what?
17. Who is the best example of faithfulness and holiness?
18. Which verse in this chapter describes the need for holiness?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:4, 6-7

19. Which leading believers are mentioned here in verse 4?
20. What other name for holiness is found in verse 6?
21. According to Paul, how many things accompany holiness? (See verses 6-7)

Read Galatians 3:10-11

22. What do the works of the Law bring?
23. Why?
24. Can the Law ever justify a sinner?
25. What else can?

Read Habakkuk 2:4

26. Who cannot be justified?
27. If sanctification cannot save, what can?

B. & C. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION & PRACTICAL

(1) What connection do you see in verses 12-14 between declaring Christ as King, sin, and the normal Christian life?

(2) The life of a believer can be described by these three statements:

‘A life of sin, that grace may abound.’

‘A life of constant battle against indwelling sin.’

'A completely victorious life above temptation and sin?'

(a) Say which statement appeals to you, and explain why you chose it?

(b) (i) Meet with a fellow-preacher or minister, and discuss these two statements together with a view to mentioning them to the congregations in your respective churches.

(ii) Send in a report of your conversation, together with the date and name of the participant.

STUDY 21

THE MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONSHIP

ROMANS 6:15-23

EXPOSITION

We have already seen how Romans 6 deals with the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ in a life of holiness, a relationship in which Christ has brought freedom from the old life, and freedom to live a new life. This is all part of our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. With three illustrations, the apostle shows exactly what it is like to be a Christian. **Firstly**, he states that a Christian is like someone who is subject to a king. The Lord Jesus comes to reign on the throne of our lives. **Secondly**, he goes on to say that the Christian stands before the Lord Jesus as a slave before his master. He has been set free from one form of service only to be brought into another. **Thirdly**, in Romans Chapter 7, Paul uses the illustration of the husband-wife relationship, where the believer stands in relation to his Saviour as a wife does to her husband.

(1) The slave is obedient to the word of his master

In verses 12-14, we noted the effect that the new-found freedom from the dominion of sin has on the Christian. Now, the illustration is changed to that of being set free from slavery – **But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.** (17) This verse is important for gospel preachers for it speaks of the source of their authority – **that form of doctrine**. The first preachers **went everywhere preaching the word.** (Acts 8:4) This was not only the basis for entering the Christian life, but continuing in it. It involved entering into a special relationship with Christ and obeying his word. **If you love me**, said Jesus, **keep my commandments.** (John 14:15) His commandments are very carefully recorded in the pages of the Bible. Because of this, the apostle was able to write to the slave-owner Philemon on this very basis, that because he had the authority of the God, he was able to command Philemon to receive Onesimus, his runaway slave, as a brother in Christ, and not just as a former slave. (Philemon verse 15-16)

It is characteristic of a true Christian that very soon he displays a hunger and a thirst for the Word of God, so much so that he cannot get enough of it. It is always very encouraging to see a Christian reading and studying the Word of God regularly, and getting study aids and books to help him do this. It is also good to see the effect of God's Word on his life. The pattern for discipleship was laid down after Pentecost when **they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship.** (Acts 2:42) So Paul says here that the characteristic of the slave of Christ is one who obeys the word of his Master (17). That **form of teaching**, which built them up and strengthened them, was the doctrine of the gospel, which the apostles and the teachers of the Church proclaimed and wrote down in the pages of the Bible. In this way, the apostolic ministry still continues today to help us grow in the Christian life.

(2) Obedience from the heart

You will also notice that Paul states that they must be committed to this teaching **from the heart**. There are many Christians today who have a head-knowledge of the doctrines of the Word of God. If you examined them concerning particular points of doctrine, they would be able to give very sensible and very knowledgeable answers to the questions asked. However, sadly, you will find that some, when they find themselves in different circumstances, or under a weaker ministry, are easily swayed. They possess head-knowledge, not heart-knowledge.

It is good to consider the preaching of the Puritan John Bunyan. He says in his autobiography **GRACE ABOUNDING TO THE CHIEF OF SINNERS** that after he first embarked on preaching after his conversion, **'I preached what I smartingly felt'**. In other words, he was not conveying to his hearers just a set of doctrines. Growth in the Christian life is not dependent on our mental acceptance and knowledge of the Bible, but the obedient application of its teaching to our hearts. There are many who are quite happy to accept a particular doctrine, but it does not make any difference to the way they live. We can assure our congregations that there is no doctrine in the Bible that does not have a profound application to our lives. Indeed, doctrinal preaching is not proper preaching unless it is applied to the heart and life. Paul is saying here in effect, **'If you love Christ, you will love his word'**. No one has a more intimate knowledge of the Scriptures than Jesus. He declared, **'They speak of me.'** He is our supreme example; and if Christ knew the Word of God so well, we, who have greater need, should know them well too. It was Jesus who took up the Word of God and vanquished Satan in his temptations in the desert. So, we too need the Word of the Lord, not only in our heads, but in our hearts, so that when we encounter temptation, sin, and the pollution of the world, we can immediately resort to the cleansing Word. Jesus refers to this in John 15:3 – **You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.**

What, then, is this obedience to the Word? Is it not this, that we become so committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, that we love him with all our minds and souls and strength? That is the first and greatest of the commandments; and the Lord has set us free to keep it. It is impossible for the unbeliever to keep this prime command, but, in Jesus Christ, it is very possible, not on the basis of duty, or of the threat of judgement, but on the basis of love. The expression of our love is in our desire to obey him in every respect whenever his commands touch our lives.

(3) Commitment with the other slaves of our new Master

Christians become committed to their fellow-Christians, and to others who are in need. Paul wrote – **Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.** (Galatians 6:10) How good it is to do good to our brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps in prayer, or by a financial gift, or even just a word of encouragement or a letter! The spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12-14 were given that the body of Christ might be built up. (1 Corinthians 14:5) The only private gift we receive is our salvation. All God's gifts are for his Church, and should not be exercised privately. There is a sharing within the body of Christ. There is a ministry that we share with one other in the ministry of God's Word. It is easy to say at the end of a sermon, **'Yes; how I agree with that! How that moved me!'** Yet the temptation is to do nothing about it.

Every sermon should touch the hearts and lives of its hearers, and also the conscience of those in the church to care for the body of Christ. We should love God, love our Saviour, and love our neighbours as ourselves. That is what we are committed to. If that is not how we first understood the Christian life under the preaching of the Word, then there was something very wrong in the way we were converted. We are committed to Christ and his

church from the very moment that we are saved. We are saved also not only that we might love Christ and be obedient to him but also that we should be obedient to those whom God puts into positions of authority in the church. We should be obedient to the Word of the Lord and be very careful not to move away from it to other things. There is no growth without the Word of God, only shallowness. As gospel preachers, we are required not only to call sinners to a repentance of sin, but to charge them with a call to obedience to Christ, and separation from the world. This is a call to holiness, and is very much dependent on our understanding of the calling of a Christian.

(4) Freedom to serve

The other side of the question is found in verse 18 – **And having been set free from sin, you become slaves of righteousness.** There are many ‘independent’ Christians today, who say, ‘Oh, we will live our lives the way that we want, and we will fit our faith to that’. Of course, the truth of the matter is that a real Christian is so committed to Christ that the circumstances of his life have to fit in with that. I expect you have met this attitude in your own church, but it still comes as a shock. Some years ago, a family attached itself very loosely to our church. They attended perhaps once in six weeks, and then had the audacity to tell us that they felt the Lord had called them to take on the youth work. I made it clear to them that as a matter of priority, and as Christians, they should become involved in the life of the Church and accept God’s authority in the Word over their lives. As Christians, they needed to put Christ first in their lives, and their relatives whom they often visited on Sundays second. Their anger at this statement is not something I will forget quickly. They were not willing to accept that the Christian life is an involvement with Christ as a slave to a master. The world says, ‘I will run my life as I see fit’. The priorities of a Christian are the exact opposite. The proper order of priorities in the Christian life come from our relationship as slaves of Jesus Christ. We become **slaves to righteousness.**

To be called ‘a slave of Jesus Christ’ was as demeaning and degrading and offensive to the Roman readers of this letter as no doubt it is today. However, it was all of these things and more for Jesus to die on the cross. He did so because he loved us. We are willing to accept his slavery because we love him. And what is that slavery? His burden is light, his commands are not grievous, and his love is ever-present and overwhelming.

The apostle knew that it was an insulting term, for in verse 19 he says – **I speak in human terms.** In other words, he is saying, ‘I apologise for using that description ‘slaves of righteousness’. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. We are only human, but what I am doing is to try and help you understand by using this as an illustration. This is how Christians are in their relationship with Jesus Christ. And he goes on to ask, ‘Don’t you prefer this form of slavery? Think of what you were, think of what it was like, when you were dead in your trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1-3). You knew nothing of God; you were without God; you were without hope in the world.’ Here he is saying the same thing – **For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness.** Lawlessness (the Greek word is **ANOMOS**, ἀνομος, meaning ‘without the Law’), the opposite to living under the Law of God.

Today, we see the breaking down of society everywhere due to a turning away from the laws of God. People say, ‘Oh, we can’t have these old laws, they don’t suit us. We must do this, we must do that, and we must be free to do what we like.’ That is **anomos**. That is the way of the world. We expect it of a sinfully corrupt world that has no fear of God, and no concern for God. It is a world impure in thought and deed, impure and lawless. ‘But,’ said Paul to the Ephesians, ‘You were once like that. You know what it was like to be sucked down into that impure whirlpool, away from God, and with no hope and no purpose. By

God's grace, you came out of it. God called you. So,' he might have continued, 'because you were once like that, **present your members** (eyes, ears, hands, feet, body) **as slaves to righteousness**. Once you were hopelessly stuck in the clay at the bottom of the pit, but now you have been lifted up, and your feet set securely on a rock. (Psalm 40:2-3) **Therefore, present your members as slaves to righteousness.**'

(5) Slaves to righteousness.

What is the purpose of such a slavery? We come now to the third thing that the Lord Jesus requires of us in our sanctification. We need to ask a more basic question: Why did the Lord save us at all? He saved us in order that we might be sanctified. Just as we once presented our members as slaves to sin in disobedience, so now we present our members as slaves to righteousness in sanctification. This is the purpose of our salvation. We must warn our congregations that there are numerous books available today that say that when the Lord saves, it does not really matter what you do after that because your salvation is secure. But the Bible presents quite a different picture. There is a touching story about a Salvation Army officer who felt in rather a cheeky mood on one occasion when she saw a bishop passing by. She thought that she would challenge him about his faith. Fortunately, she picked on a fine evangelical bishop. When she crossed the road to ask, 'Sir, are you saved?', a broad beaming smile broke across his face as he very courteously replied to the young lady, 'Well, Miss, I have been saved three times.' 'Oh, whatever does that mean?' she thought. Then he explained: 'I have been saved; I am being saved; and I will be saved.' There, in the bishop's reply, are the three tenses of God's salvation, all of which you will find in the New Testament: a past salvation, a present salvation, and a future salvation. Our salvation may have begun in the past, but it continues in this life and will come to its sure fulfilment in the next. A sure and certain fruit of our salvation in this life is our sanctification. **Pursue ... holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.** (Hebrews 12:14) This is how the Lord breaks off the bonds of the old slavery, and prepares us for the glories of heaven.

Why should you wish to leave the old slavery and take on the new? Well, when slaves of sin, **you were free in regard to righteousness.** (20) Now that you are a Christian, you are quite different from what you once were. We are right to be alarmed when we hear teaching that encourages Christians to go on with their lives as they did before they were saved. It is impossible to act as we did before we became Christians. This is what Paul is saying here. The whole direction of our life changes. We become new creatures in Christ. Once we were slaves to sin, but now we are slaves to Christ. **When you were slaves to sin, you were free in regard to righteousness** (20), but, he asks in verse 21 – **What fruit did you have then?** Paul replies – **For the end of those things is death.** That was the result of the old slavery. Our former master did not care if he drove us cruelly, or if he worked us to death. That is exactly what he wanted. He hung on to us, held on to us, and was dragging us down to hell. **But now**, Paul concludes, **having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.** (22)

So there you have it: the three tenses of the Christian life: our salvation in being set free from the old master; our salvation in obeying the new Master and in being sanctified; and our salvation to eternal life.

(6) A great text for gospel preachers

We now come to one of the most important verses in the Bible – **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Christ our Lord.** (23). Why did we leave the old life of slavery? Because it led to death. Our old master was a hard taskmaster, who delighted in working us to death. **Death** meant to be away from God, and away from our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. 'The wages of sin is death,' **but ...**' Here is

one of the most crucial words in the Bible. Years ago, I heard Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preach for more than an hour a sermon just on that one word 'but!' He writes in his commentary on Romans 6 (**THE NEW MAN**):

But what is the end of those who are the slaves of God? What a contrast! 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. What is eternal life?...It means especially the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

As Gospel preachers, we are bound to challenge our hearers with such questions as 'Are you under the old slavery, or have you come into the new?' And, 'On which side are you – the old master or the new?' And, 'Have you been set free from the old?' And, 'Do you have eternal life?'

Why hang on to the old wages, which lead to death? Who would accept a wage packet that has written on the outside, 'The one who accepts this will be condemned to death'? That is ridiculous. The free gift of God, slavery under Christ, brings an uncountable number of blessings to us. What a slavery! There is no slavery like it. But the free gift of God under this slavery is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If we wish to remain faithful to our calling as gospel preachers, we must challenge our congregations. They face two destinies. Will it be death and hell, or eternal life and heaven? Which slavery are they under – slavery to sin, or slavery to Christ?

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 21

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Acts 8:4

1. What good result came from the persecution of Christians? (See verse 8)
2. Where did they go?
3. What did they do as a priority?

Read John 14:15

4. Which command of Christ is found here?
5. Of what was obedience a sign?

Read Philemon verses 15-16

6. Who ran away? (See verse 10)
7. How should Philemon receive back his slave?
8. Who commanded him to do this? (See verse 12)

Read Acts 2:42

9. Who were 'they'? (See verse 41)
10. How many converts were there?
11. Whose teaching did they accept?
12. Where can you find their teaching today?

Read John 15:3

13. What effect does the Word have on Christians?
14. Where would you find Christ's word today?

Read Galatians 6:10

15. Next to Christ, who is the object of Christian commitment?
16. How is the Church described here?
17. Is anyone excluded from receiving good things from Christians?

Read 1 Corinthians 14:5

18. What does God require above all for the Church?
19. What 3 means did God provide for this in the Corinthian Church?

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

20. Why do these verses humiliate Christians?
21. What was their condition once?
22. Why were they disobedient to God?
23. What was the object of their lives?
24. What terrible thing hung over them in those days?

Read Psalm 40:2-3

25. Which 3 things has God done for us?
26. What was the Psalmist's reaction to these facts?
27. What effect did this testimony have on many others?

Read Hebrews 12:14

28. Why do we need holiness to see the Lord?
29. Verse 15 calls someone who does not have holiness as falling ... Complete the sentence.

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

In Romans 6:15-23, Paul speaks of the believer as being set free from sin.

- (a) Why did he need to be set free?
- (b) In what sense was he a slave?
- (c) In what sense is he 'a slave of God'?

C. PRACTICAL

Write out a sermon outline on Romans 3:23.

Send in your introduction and conclusion in full.

Describe the circumstances in which you preached this sermon, and give any results.

STUDY 22

THE HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP

ROMANS 7:1-6

EXPOSITION

It is always difficult at the best of times for any gospel preacher to speak on the subject of holiness, for he too is a sinner, although a sinner saved by grace. It is good for him to be reminded from time to time of the intimate relationship he has with his Saviour – a relationship that can best be described in terms of a marriage bond. The same picture is used in the Old Testament when the Lord reminded the nation of Israel of their special status, yet their despising of it, and their unfaithfulness – **Return backsliding Israel, says the Lord ...Return, O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married to you.** (Jeremiah 3:12, 14) Maintaining this marriage bond is found in a life of holiness. **Pursue...holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.** (Hebrews 12:14) Holiness comes with putting away and defeating sin, and is the result of spiritual activity, as we have already seen – **But now, having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness** (Romans 6:22). Slavery to God is a perfect service before him. Holiness (or, sanctification) is not something imputed to the Christian in order to struggle against sin. Bishop John Charles Ryle wrote in his book **HOLINESS**:

‘The plain truth is that men will persist in confounding two things that differ – that is, justification and sanctification. In justification, the word to be addressed to man is ‘believe, only believe’; in sanctification, the world must be – ‘watch, pray and fight’.

When the Lord Jesus has the rule in any believer’s life, such is the power of that relationship that his resurrection power enables the believer to overcome sin – **that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.** (Romans 6:4) Notice that Paul uses the word **should** walk, and not **will** walk. Holiness requires effort on our part.

(1) The illustration of marriage

Notice that there is another complication here, in that these opening verses are really an introduction to the whole chapter which is dealing with the relationship between a Christian and God’s Law. Every gospel preacher constantly preaches that a sinner is not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Christ – **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.** (Romans 3:28) Although faith takes the place of the Law in salvation, Christians are not lawless. They come under the new law of the new King, the new master, and the new husband.

The rule of law is absolute in this life – **Or do you not know, brethren) for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?** The rule of law is such that if someone kills or steals, he will be judged by the law of his country. However, if he dies before the law can catch up with him, he cannot be tried, judged,

condemned or punished. The diarist James Shirley (1596-1666) wrote in 1653, just before his own death – **Death squares all accounts.**

Paul then moves on to the Jewish Law in relation to marriage (2-3). Under the law, the wife is bound to her husband – **For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.** If she deserts her husband, she will have the law to answer to. And if she goes to another man, she is still bound to her husband until he dies – **But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.** Her going with another man while her husband was still alive was such an act of unfaithfulness that she came into a special category in the sight of the law – **So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.** (3) Divorce was possible for a woman under Jewish law, but it carried with it a badge of shame, and a ban on re-marriage. Joseph was unwilling to divorce Mary (when carrying the Lord Jesus) for that reason – **Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.** (Matthew 1:19) The penalty for adultery under the law was death by stoning. (See John 8:2-11) However, when her husband died, she was free to marry again. Indeed, she had the full blessing of the law when she married again after the death of her husband. She came under no legal penalty or punishment.

(2) The application of this illustration

Here, Paul is referring to the state of the believer before his conversion. The 'wife' represents him before he believed in Christ. It is a state in which he is bound under the Law of God with its full force. The 'husband' represents his old unregenerate nature, which, through sin and moral corruption, had a tyrannical hold on him. 'The law of her husband' represents the old Law of Moses in the Old Covenant, which both confirmed him in his sin, and condemned him for his sin. The death of the old 'husband' occurred at his conversion, when the old unregenerate nature died – **knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.** (Romans 6:6)

(a) The nature of Christian freedom

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ (4) The Law, which condemned us in our sins, has now passed us by. We were declared sinless before God when we were clothed in the righteousness and perfection of Jesus Christ, and were therefore found not guilty under the Law. What does Paul mean by **the body of Christ**? This is a reference to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross – **By that [the New Covenant] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** (Hebrews 10:10) Because he possessed a body, Christ was able to die on the Cross. Because of his death, we, who believe in him, also die to the claims of sin over us.

But we are not set free to please ourselves. Our conversion is like a wedding service. Having been set free from the old husband who has died, no time is wasted in marrying the One who made that freedom possible, and did indeed set us free.

(b) The author of Christian freedom

Paul continues – **that you may be married to another, even to him who was raised from the dead.** There is nothing theoretical about Christian freedom. It brings us into a deep union with Christ – a relationship that can only be explained by using the illustration of

marriage. As he died, so we die; as he rose from the dead, so we too rise to a new life with him. This is only possible if the believer is brought into a lasting and unbreakable union with the Saviour. Christ's parable of the vine is appropriate here, with Jesus as the true Vine, and we as the branches – **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.** (John 15:4)

(c) The results of Christian freedom

Paul makes it clear that there will be outstanding results from the believer's union with Christ – **that we should bear fruit to God.** Jesus continued – **I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing.** (John 15:5) This is the mark of a genuine Christian. Here is the fruit of the Spirit, seen in the fruit of holiness. (See Galatians 5:22-23) Here is the fruit of following Christ's example in daily living. Here is the fruit of dedication to the service of Christ. All require great effort and discipline, and a determination to live a life faithful to the Saviour and in holiness.

(4) A comparison between the first and second husband (5-6)

Concerning verse 5, Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, **This verse teaches us the truth concerning the terrible nature of sin. What a terrible thing sin is! What a terrible power it is!** The apostle Paul makes it very clear that believers have experienced a very great deliverance – **For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.** While under conviction of sin, the sinner finds no consolation in God's Law. On the contrary, it is an agony to him, only serving to increase **the passions of sins** within him.

In verse 6, Paul delights in the Christian's new-found freedom in Christ – **But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.** The second marriage is one of service, no longer to sin, but to Christ. The only action of the Spirit in the unconverted sinner was to reinforce the strength of the Law. But now, under the New Covenant, the Spirit empowers the believer to serve Christ. **Firstly**, he effects that which was the original intention of the Law, to cause sinners to flee to Christ. **Secondly**, when the believer is united with Christ, he makes it possible for him to delight in God's Law, not because he must, but because he wishes to, is able to do so, and loves doing so. Paul testifies – **For I delight in the law of God.** (22)

The gospel preacher not only delights to present to sinners a way out of agonising conviction and fearful condemnation under God's Law, but is able also to encourage believers to obey the demands of the Law out of love for their Deliverer, and their love of his Law.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 22

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Jeremiah 3:12, 14

1. What was the sin of Israel?
2. On what grounds was God prepared for a reconciliation?
3. What did Israel need to do about her sin?
4. Why was God jealous for Israel?

Read Romans 6:22

5. From what are believers set free?
6. Why are Christians still slaves?
7. Which words describes our character as slaves?

Read Romans 6:4

8. Which 2 words are used to describe what baptism represents?
9. 2 words are used here concerning the life of Christ and the gospel. What are they?
10. Why does Paul use the word 'newness' here?

Read Romans 3:28

11. The Law convicts of sin. Thus the works of the law bring what? (See 6:23)
12. How is a sinner saved according to this verse?

Read Matthew 1:19

13. What sort of man was Joseph?
14. Who is the 'her'?
15. What false conclusion did Joseph come to?
16. What did Joseph decide to do?
17. What did the angel explain about the child? (20)

Read John 8:2-11

18. Which sin had the woman committed?
19. How was this against the Law of Moses?
20. What did the authorities want to do to her?
21. What did Jesus not do?
22. What did he tell her to do?
23. Why do you think John added these further words of Jesus in verse 12?

Read Romans 6:6

24. What do you think 'our old man' is?
25. At which point in our lives was our 'body of sin' crucified?
26. What was the result?

Read Hebrews 10:10

27. What is the 'that'? (See the transcript)
28. Which word describes the state of believers?
29. What does the writer emphasise concerning Christ's sacrifice?

Read John 15:4-5

30. Who is the 'me' here?
31. What is the condition for Christian fruitfulness?

Read Galatians 5:22-23

32. Who produces Christian fruit?
33. How many fruit are mentioned here?
34. What do the words 'Against such there is no law' mean?

B & C. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION, AND PRACTICAL

- (1) Read again the brief quotation from J. C. Ryle in the transcript.
- (2) Now read the last two pages of this Study, which is a further and longer extract from Bishop Ryle's book on HOLINESS.
- (3) You will find this statement in the transcript:

'Holiness (or, sanctification) is not something imputed to the Christian to struggle against sin.'

- (a) What does 'imputed' mean in connection with justification?
- (b) Why cannot holiness (sanctification) ever be 'imputed'?
- (c) State briefly in your own words the similarities and differences between justification and sanctification.

[C. FOR PRACTICAL]

AN EXTRACT FROM 'HOLINESS',

BY JOHN CHARLES RYLE

(In easier English)

1. In what are justification and sanctification alike?

- (1) Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of his gift alone that believers are justified and sanctified at all.
- (2) Both are part of that great work of salvation in which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has undertaken on behalf of his people. Christ is the fountain of life from which pardon and holiness both flow. The root of each is Christ.
- (3) Both are to be found in the same person. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be put asunder.
- (4) Both begin at the same time. The moment a Christian begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person. He may not feel it, but it is a fact.
- (5) Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ, without a fitness for eternal glory as well as a title. The one is just as necessary as the other.

2. Let us now reverse the picture, and see where they differ.

(1) Justification is the reckoning and counting a Christian righteous for the sake of another, that is, Jesus Christ the Lord. Sanctification is the actual making a man inwardly righteous, though it may be to a very feeble degree.

(2) The righteousness we have by our justification is not our own, but is the everlasting and perfect righteousness of our great Mediator Christ, imputed to us, and made our own, by faith. The righteousness we have by sanctification is our own righteousness, imparted, inherent, and wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but mingled with great infirmity and imperfection.

(3) In justification, our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needed. In sanctification, our own works are of vast importance; and God bids us fight, and watch, and pray, and strive, and take pains, and labour.

(4) Justification is a finished and complete work, and a Christian is perfectly justified the moment he believes. Sanctification is an imperfect work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.

(5) Justification admits of no growth or increase: a Christian is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ by faith as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is eminently a progressive work, and admits of continual growth and enlargement so long as a Christian lives.

(6) Justification has special reference to our persons, our standing in God's sight, and our deliverance from guilt. Sanctification has special reference to our nature, and the moral renewal of our heart.

(7) Justification gives us our title to heaven, and boldness to enter in. Sanctification gives us our fitness for heaven, and prepares us to enjoy it when we go there.

(8) Justification is the act of God about us, and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God within us, and cannot be hidden from the eyes of others in its outward manifestation.

3. Conclusion

I commend these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask them to ponder them well. I am persuaded that one great cause of the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people in the matter of their faith, is their habit of confounding, and not distinguishing between, justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. No doubt they cannot be divided, and everyone who is a partaker of either is a partaker of both. But never, never, ought they to be confounded, and never ought the distinction between them be forgotten!

STUDY 23

INDWELLING SIN IN THE CONVICTED SINNER

ROMANS 7:7-13

EXPOSITION

Chapter 7 gives us a good insight into the way God works in all Christians. That is not to say that everyone is converted in the same way as the apostle Paul, suddenly and instantaneously. But we do know that the spiritual principles at work in Paul, and which accompanied to his conversion, are also true of all Christians.

1. The importance of God's Law

We have looked previously at the word 'Law' which occurs often in the Letter to the Romans. This is not strange as Paul had been a Pharisee and a teacher of the Law before he was converted. The Law meant a great deal to him; and he came to see that it has a function to fulfil in the Christian's experience. We cannot be saved by the Law for it is impossible to keep it. Thus salvation is not attained by doing good works. A right relationship with God, and righteousness before God, is not by moral effort. What is at issue here is something that lies at the very heart of the Christian gospel – that is, that God saves sinners not because they beg him to, but because he desires to save them in his love. Salvation is a sovereign act of grace begun in eternity and completed when Christ died on the Cross. The results of his death become available for us the moment we believe.

How is it that we have come to believe when so many do not? Is there something special about us? Do we possess a kind of religious instinct that brings us to faith in Christ? No; not at all. We would be like everyone else except for the grace of God. God sought us in the darkness, and his light illumined our minds when he removed the blindfold from our eyes put there by Satan himself. The devil's defeat was absolute when we surrendered to Jesus Christ. But God did not save us because we surrendered. The ability to believe and surrender our lives to Christ came from God.

What made Paul realise that he could not be saved by keeping the Law and observing the Ten Commandments? He came to recognise over a period of time his sinful condition through his failure to keep the last of the Ten Commandments – **You shall not covet.** (Exodus 20:17) It is possible that Paul coveted money. I think it is more likely that he coveted the good opinion of his fellow countrymen as the foremost teacher of his age, the greatest exponent of the Law, and the most energetic defender of Judaism. Like so many Pharisees, he coveted the praise of others, as John commented – **for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.** (John 12:43) The Pharisees paraded their religion that others might admire them. Romans 7:8 informs us that when Paul came to read the last of the Ten Commandments – **sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire** [covetousness]. It was through this commandment, together with the inner working of the Holy Spirit that he came to realise what a desperate sinner he was, a thing he had never realised before.

2. The ability of the Law to convict of sin

The preaching of the Law plays an important part of the proclamation of the gospel. There can be no preaching of the gospel apart from the Ten Commandments because, as Paul points out here – **I would not have known sin except through the law**. He declares, **I was alive once without the law** (9). He once had a high estimate of his good character before God, thinking that he was assured of a place in heaven. Then, all his hopes were dashed – **when the commandment came, sin revived and I died**. In other words, if our salvation is dependent on our conforming to God's perfect standard, we will be found wanting – there will be no salvation, no heaven, no eternal life, no acceptance with God. There is not one person on the earth who does not fall short of the Law. We are all under condemnation because of our sin. God made us alive to the realisation that we have broken his Law, and we died spiritually. That was the pre-conversion condition of Paul, and it is our experience too. Only when the Spirit causes us to be born again do we come to appreciate what a desperate condition we are in. When did Paul realise that he was spiritually dead? Was it when he looked into the angelic face of Stephen when they took up stones and killed him in the stoning pit outside Jerusalem. Did the final prayer of the first Christian martyr to forgive his tormentors (Acts 7:60) convict Paul in his heart?

I wonder if it was at that time Paul realised that Stephen had something he had never known himself, and that he was party to murdering an innocent man, a man who knew his God in a way that was outside Paul's experience. Paul knew nothing of Stephen's forgiveness. This martyr had a living, vital relationship with his God. Was it then that Paul's spiritual pilgrimage began? Was it then that God made him alive to his condition of spiritual death before God? Perhaps so.

What an important part the Law played in bringing Paul to know himself! Without a knowledge of the Law, there would be no knowledge of sin, and without a knowledge of sin, no salvation, and without salvation, no application of God's grace. Here is a chain of events every gospel preacher should put before his congregation. The links go like this: the Law first, conviction next, repentance next, then faith, and finally, salvation. This series of events is what is often called 'the order of salvation'. It begins with the new birth, and ends in glory with Christ in heaven.

This 'order of salvation' needs to be grasped first by the preacher, then the congregation; for without the Law, there is no conviction of sin, and without a knowledge of sin there can be no salvation. How can the hearers be saved unless they know what they are being saved from? The gospel message begins with the application of God's Law to bring conviction of sin. We have God's Law because we are rebels against God. That is not extravagant language; it is Paul's language – **For if when we were enemies, he says, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son ... (Romans 5:10) God commends his love to us**. When? **While we were still sinners**. Therefore, coming through this process of conviction of sin, Paul acknowledged his sin, and received forgiveness in Christ.

3. Conflict in the Christian

We now take the story on a little. What did happen to Paul after he came to a deep and painful knowledge his sin? What happened after he was converted? Did his condition ease after that? The answer is, 'No; it did not. It actually became worse. As Christians, it is good to compare our experience with that of the converted apostle Paul, for his was a normal Christian experience. As we read and study Romans 7, must we conclude that Paul have some kind of long-term mental breakdown? Did Paul suffer from a split personality problem? No; not at all. His experience was normal for a Christian. Unless we go through this pain also, we will be shallow in our Christian experience – if we are Christians at all. It is all part

of growing up. The difficulty is that we never grow up, not in this life. We are growing constantly. It is only in eternity that we will come to maturity and perfection.

In this life, we experience the growing pains of spiritual adolescence. Paul outlines them for us in this his masterly exposition of growth in the Christian life. He digs deep into his own experience; and we find there what is common to every Christian.

Of first importance, he declares that the Law plays a crucial spiritual part in the Christian's life – **For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.** (14) He uses **we** to show that he is speaking with authority among the Christian community. This is not something he has made up. He is not bringing in a new philosophy or psychology to the Church, but is declaring what the Old Testament says. All agree on this principle – **we know that the law is spiritual.** The Law came for a good spiritual purpose. Martin Luther, commenting on these difficult verses, writes:

'The whole passage shows very clearly a strong hatred against the flesh and a sincere love for the Law and all that is good. No carnal man ever does this. He rather hates the Law and follows his flesh and evil lusts. The spiritual man fights against his flesh and deplors that he cannot do what he desires to do. The carnal does not fight at all, but readily yields to sin.'

4. A further function of the Law

Now we come to one more function of the law, in addition to the other two we considered earlier. The Law comes to a Christian to expose all that is not spiritual in his life. He now has something against which he can measure his own life – the measuring stick of God's perfect standard, the Law. Anything that falls short of it, must be dealt with. John Bunyan, a Puritan preacher, spent much time thinking about the Christian life. He eventually wrote a classic called **THE HOLY WAR**, which every Christian needs to read. In his story, Bunyan describes the unconverted Christian as being like a large city that has been overrun by an enemy. Once it belonged to Prince Emmanuel, now it belongs to Diabolus (another name for the devil). Diabolus has taken the whole city and ruined it from top to bottom. His agents are everywhere, and the citizens of the city are in a constant state of terror. They have no power to do what is good, and evil has become the good. The processes of law only serve to support what is evil.

But a time comes when Emmanuel approaches the walls of Mansoul, and he lays siege to it. The result of that siege is that the gates are broken down, the walls breached, and Emmanuel and his army come in to take the city. Diabolus fled with his troops, leaving some of his people to work in secret. Their purpose – to cause as much damage as they could. Even though the city had come under new management, having a new king, under a new order of things, there are still traitors at work, plotting in the cellars of the city. From time to time, they come out and try to spoil the work of King Emmanuel. The city is commanded to find these traitors, and put them to death.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 23

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Exodus 20:17

1. What other words could be used for 'covet'?
2. What is the number of this Commandment?
3. Why do you think this Commandment made Paul feel so uncomfortable?
4. Which seven things does this commandment ban from coveting.

Read John 12:43

5. What did the Pharisees prefer?
6. What title is given them in verse 42?
7. What did the Pharisees do unjustly to good men?

Read Acts 7:60

8. How do we know Stephen forgave his executioners?
9. What did Stephen see when he was preaching? (See verse 55)
10. Who was looking on at the stoning? (See verse 58)
11. Why is Stephen called 'the first Christian martyr'?

Read Romans 5:10

12. When did God love us? (See verse 8)
13. What terrible thing falls on God's enemies? (See verse 9)
14. What are 2 things that God does to a great number of his enemies?

B. QUESTION ON THE EXPOSITION

What is taught in verses 7-13 about God's Law, and its use?

(Aim to write at least 100 words, and comment on some of the words Paul's uses)

C. PRACTICAL

You are explaining to your congregation that you have recently read Martin Luther's Commentary on Romans. You state that a passage has interested you greatly in the Christian's struggle against sin. You will find this passage quoted in the sermon in the opening part of this Study).

Write how you would explain this passage to your congregation, and show the difference between a carnal and a spiritual person.

STUDY 24

INDWELLING SIN IN THE BELIEVER

ROMANS 7:14-25

EXPOSITION

We come now to consider the place of the Law in the Christian's experience. The Christian is required to make a great effort in overcoming the power of indwelling sin. This is what Paul says in the next chapter – **but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** (8:13) So what is the normal Christian experience? 'Well,' Paul might have replied, 'having measured myself up against the Law which is spiritual, I find that I am of the flesh, sold into bondage to sin.' That was his former condition. He was sold into bondage to sin. Why is it, that when we are saved we are not made perfect? God does not do that. He sets us on a pathway to perfection, but we are not made perfect. Why does God allow these traitors to remain in the city? You can be sure it is for a good purpose. Paul says, **I am carnal** [of the flesh]. (14) In other words, God allows something of the old life to remain, which was actually part of the bondage we were under in the days before our conversion. Notice, 'I am sold into bondage to sin'. 'I am of the flesh'. Now, what we find in this chapter are two I's. Some believe that Christians have two natures, just as Christ had two natures, a human and a divine. Christians, they say, have two natures, one carnal and the other spiritual. This they conclude from verse 14, where Paul says, 'I am carnal'. This word **carnal** [of the flesh] represents the whole of our life before we became Christians. Our life worked according to this principle, which is described as **the flesh** (carnal). It simply means a 'worldly' or 'natural' life – a sinful, depraved human nature before the Lord saved us.

1. A downward pull

'Now,' says Paul, 'this is one part of me, and it is a very strong in pulling me down.' Now, of this fleshly nature that we had before we were converted, remnants of it remain. The Lord allows them to remain for a good purpose – that we might learn to counteract their downward pull in our lives. This leads to spiritual growth. It is sometimes very difficult, according to Paul, to distinguish between the remnants of the old nature, which no longer belong to us, and the real me which is now a Christian and born again. Sometimes we fail to resist its powerful voice, and believe that it is really **me** (the Christian) who is producing sin.

Paul recognised that sometimes Christians fall into sin. Paul was far from sinless, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles. We also read in 1 John 1:10 – **If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.** But the remedy is provided – **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** (9). Here is something that helps us counteract this pull from the remnants of our old nature, the fleshly principle that is at work in us, the traitors that lurk in the dark ways of our life, desiring to do us harm and spoiling the work of Christ there.

2. Remnants of the old life

So then, this spark of the old life is what caused us to be sold into bondage to sin. 'I know,' Paul is saying, 'that this is true of my experience all my waking hours.' **For what I am doing, I do not understand.** (15) 'There is something in my actions that I cannot really understand. I cannot grasp it; I cannot get to the bottom of it.' Paul needed to think it through; but, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he came to realise what it was that

made him fall into sin. **For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.** As a Christian, he now knows what to do. The Spirit of God tells him. 'But, he says, 'I find myself doing the very things that I hate.' He continues – **If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.** The Law has a vital role to play in the Christian's experience. Just as it brought us to a conviction of sin before we were converted, it continues to do the same afterwards. It is God's perfect standard, against which we measure our life and experience.

But now, it is no longer I who do it. (17) Here we are introduced to the second of the two I's. The first I is the old Paul – what he was like before he was born again, the unregenerate Paul, the I that is of the flesh, sold into sin. But now we meet a second I, the real Paul. Every Christian is summed up in this second I. Here is Christian Paul, the new man, the new I in Christ. Later, he calls it **the mind**, where the Spirit is at work. It is the only nature to which Paul will admit. **But now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.** And so the conflict goes on in Paul's mind between the I of the old nature, and the remnants of the old life. The new I is spiritual, the Christian Paul who approves of the Law of God, and fights the remnants of the old unregenerate man that God has allowed to remain. He declares, **It is no longer I who do it.** Of course not! Does the Christian want to sin? Certainly not! Does the unbeliever want to sin? Yes, indeed he does! The unbeliever loves sin, enjoys it, reads about it, observes it, and enjoys experiencing it. Oh, yes! The world has no conscience about sin. But the Christian is the opposite. He hates sin, and hates falling into sin. **It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.** (17) This is called **indwelling sin**. Christians should beware of it. Now, these sins need to be dealt with. Whatever wrong things there are in the Christian life, we will call them what the Bible calls them – sins: such as lust, gluttony, fornication, adultery, theft, covetousness, and rebelling against authority. All these things are sins; and there are many others also.

3. What to do about it.

What could Paul do about it? How could he resolve this conflict within his own Christian experience? He says – **For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.** (18) Which I (or me) is that? Is it the old I that was crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), or is it the new I – Paul the believer? It must be the old I, for he says, **in me nothing good dwells.** No mercy shall be shown to these enemies, these traitors, the indwelling sin that remains. Gospel preachers must challenge those professed Christians who go on for years making little progress in their lives because they are not willing to deal with their indwelling sin. Paul recognised the danger – **In me nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.** We discover the second I (or me) here – that is, Paul the Christian. The will was present with him, but not among the traitors. **For the good that I will to do, I do not do** – that is the old Paul; **but the evil I will not to do, that I do** – that is the new Paul, occasionally falling into sin, and doing the very things he wished to avoid. **Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.** (20) Paul is saying that you cannot put the blame on your new nature for your sinfulness. He concludes – **I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the persons who wills to do good.** (21) What sort of law? Not the Law of Moses, nor the Ten Commandments, but a spiritual principle at work within his new nature.

4. A summary of Christian experience

What is the true experience of the Christian? How may we sum it up? Here it is in verse 21 – **evil is present with me**. There are traitors in our life that must be dealt with, for they cause damage and misery. They are terrorists who want to bring down the very structure that Christ is building up.

One of the finest books ever written on the subject of indwelling sin and how to deal with it is by the Puritan preacher John Owen. Not only does it fully analyse the problem, but it also encourages Christians to persevere and overcome. He writes:

This is the subject, the seat, the dwelling place of this law of sin – the heart. It is the entire principle of moral operations, of doing good or evil, for out of it proceed good or evil. Here dwells our enemy. This is the fort, the citadel of this tyrant, where it maintains a rebellion against God all our days. Sometimes it has more strength, and consequently more success; sometimes less of the one than the other. But it is always in rebellion as long as we live.

In his practical Chapter 5, Owen exhorts his readers (and congregation) with these words:

What ails our foolish and wretched hearts to harbour such a cursed and secret dislike of God and his ways? Let us be ashamed and astonished at the thought of it, and walk humbly all our days! Let us bear with it in the most secret of our thoughts. And, as this is a duty which God finds acceptable, and he delights to dwell with those who possess a humble soul and a repentant spirit, so there is a remarkably efficient base here for weakening the evil we must face and deal with.

We find an encouraging summary in verse 22 – **For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man**. This **inward man** is the spiritual man, the Christian Paul. He delighted in the Law of God, not this spiritual law, this principle that was working in him, counteracting the downward pull of sin. The Law of God is a delight to the Christian for many more reasons than we have considered in this Study. Like the Psalmist (Psalm 119:97) Paul the Christian loved the Law. We should not tolerate anyone who says that Christians have nothing to do with the Law. Paul set it at the very heart of his Christian experience, and loved it.

5. The inward conflict

He speaks finally of the great conflict within him – **But I see another law [or, principle] in my members, warring against the law of my mind**. (23) The members of the body are where the principle of evil is at work. But spiritual progress in the Christian is always made in the mind – not the heart or the emotions – through the reason, and through the new life, as the Holy Spirit proceeds to renew the mind. Paul describes how miserable this conflict can make him feel at times – **bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members** (23) Paul cries out against the wretchedness of his condition, and acknowledge that he is torn in two – **O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** (24) How is it possible

to win this warfare that is going on every day of our life? Where is the victory?' Paul replies – **I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!** Obviously, he is not thanking God for the war that is going on within him! It is painful. It is horrible. No, he is thanking God that there is victory through Jesus Christ.

So, on the one hand, **with the mind** (that is, the Christian Paul) **I myself serve the law of God, but**, on the other hand, **with my flesh** (that is, the remnants of the old life) **I serve the law of sin.** (25) How can the conflict be resolved? The answer is found in our Studies on Romans Chapter 8. You will find, when you arrive at 8:13, that having found victory in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are back in the old, old battle again. There is no let-up in the Christian life, there are no holidays, there is no truce, there is no armistice. It goes on right through our Christian life. What we must point out to our congregation is that the Christian who is not aware of this warfare going on in his soul is not a Christian. Our experience tells us so. We must deal with these treacherous remnants of the old life that remain in us, or perish. God give us victory in the power of Christ! Let us thank God for the victory **through Jesus Christ our Lord**, and learn to depend on him.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY 24

A. QUESTIONS ON THE TEXTS QUOTED IN THE EXPOSITION

Read Romans 8:13

1. According to Paul, what is the normal activity of a Christian?
2. What is living 'according to the flesh'?
3. Another name for 'putting to death' is mo_____ion.

Read 1 John 1:9-10

4. Give 2 reasons why it is wrong to say that we have not sinned today?
5. What does God provide for our sin?

Read Psalm 119:97

6. What became an object of the Psalmist's love?
7. What did he do about the object of his love?
8. Is it right for a Christian to feel the same way?

B. QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITION

- (1) From verses 14-23, describe the spiritual warfare occurring in a believer, but in no more than 100 words.
- (2) In verses 24-25, Paul chooses to say 'who shall deliver me?' rather than 'how shall I be delivered?' Explain briefly the difference between these 2 questions.

C. PRACTICAL

You tell your congregation that you have recently read John Owen on Indwelling Sin.

- (1) What would you tell your congregation that you have learned from this passage? (Found in the sermon at the beginning of this Study)**
- (2) Based on this passage, what would you say there is in it to encourage struggling Christians in your congregation to deal with their sin?**

**(You know the circumstances of the members of your own congregation best!
So some brief examples would help.)**

THIS IS THE END OF MODULE 3

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