

# THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12

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## **"BRIEF COMMENTS ON ROMANS 7 - No. 2." (Page 374)**

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THE remainder of the seventh chapter of Romans is a graphic account of the steps which lead the sinner to hate the sin to which he was bound, and to his freedom therefrom. It is not, as some have supposed, a Christian experience; it is simply an account of the experience of a man passing from a state of sin, through conviction, to a new creature in Christ. It will be worth our while to give it a little study, that we may learn more of the law's dealings with the sinner.

The apostle first declares (verse.7) that the law is not sin; this is proved by the fact that it points out sin. But for the law he could not have known what sin is. "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." Verse 8. Here sin is regarded as a person, producing all manner of evil in the heart. And since without the law there would be no sin he says that sin took occasion by the commandment. In the next verse he embodies this idea and carries it farther. He says:—

"For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Verse 9.

The first clause of this verse presents to us a picture of carnal security. It is the confidence of the man who is insensible to danger. "Without the law" means that the law had not been driven by the Spirit into his heart. Many a man who has read the ten commandments scores of times, has never felt them searching his heart. Therefore his way is right in his own eyes, and he feels secure. An easy mind is by no means a sure test of acceptance with God. It was forgetfulness or ignorance of this fact that caused David so much trouble. Ps. 73. He saw the wicked wholly at ease, and that there were no bands even in their death. But when he learned their end, he found that such a Condition is not an enviable one.

But as soon as a personal application of the law is made to one's heart, the sin stands out in bold relief. "When the commandment came, sin revived." The law did not create the sin; it simply brought to his view that which already existed. A room may be very dusty and dirty, yet if it is dark, the filth will not appear. But let a bright light be brought in, and the foulness becomes all too noticeable. So the law of God lights up the dark corners of the heart and reveals the depravity within.

When this had been done, says Paul, "I died." He does not here mean death to sin; for the next verse says: "And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." The law had shown him that he was a sinner, and "the wages of sin is death;" therefore he felt himself to be virtually a dead man. He did not actually die, but he speaks as though that which was inevitable had already come. In like manner the Lord said to Abimelech, who had taken Abraham's wife, "Thou art but a dead man." Ex.20:3. "For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." Rom. 7:11. Sin is deceitful; it arrays itself in a pleasing garb so that to the unsuspecting one it appears to be good. But underneath its pleasing exterior it carries a weapon that wounds to the death all who come in contact with it.

Notwithstanding all that the law had revealed to Paul, he could say, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Verse 12. He would uphold the dignity of the law, and shield it from all blame for his present deplorable condition. Although he had before said that the law, which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death, he insists that it was not the law,— "that which is good" (verse 13),—that was made death to him, but that it was sin that condemned him to death, and that the commandment had simply made sin "become exceeding sinful." Happy is the awakened sinner who views the law in this light. Such a one is "not far from the kingdom of Heaven." Unfortunately too many rail at the law, as though it were the cause of their lost condition, and then, as if they could avert the danger by shutting their eyes, they turn away from the law, and relapse into their old state of false security.

"For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Rom. 7:14, 15.

Again we must caution the reader against supposing that in these verses Paul is relating a Christian experience. Up to this point he has shown how any person is convicted of sin. He has related the experience of one who, when the law convicts him of sin, does not turn from the light, but honestly desires to obey. Now he proceeds to give the experience of one under conviction, until he is made a free man in Christ. He uses the first person and the present tense in order to make the narrative more vivid, as he portrays the sinner's struggle for freedom. It was once a present matter with him, and is the experience that all pass through, though with various modifications, before they find peace with God.

"Sold under sin." This idea is carried out in many places. Peter says that the sinner is "in bondage." 2 Peter 1:19. Paul says that he is in bondage "to the weak and beggarly elements of the world." Gal. 4:3, 9. He is a slave to sin. Rom. 6:16, 17. In a future article we shall see the case stated in even stronger terms. The idea is that the sinner is helpless. He may "consent unto the law that it is good" (verse 16), and may with his mind serve the law of God (verse 25,); that is, he may desire to obey it, yet sin has dominion over him, and he is forced to serve the law of sin, namely his natural, sinful habits. As Paul elsewhere says, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7); and "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Gal. 5:17.

This is the condition of the awakened sinner. He would do good, but evil is present with him, so that he does the very thing that he has resolved not to do. The flesh is depraved, having no good thing in it, so that although he may determine to do good, he will not find any power in him to carry out his determination. The trouble is, sin dwells in him; it has never been killed.

Let the reader imagine a man bound with fetters and having a dead carcass fastened to him by a strong chain. He is fully conscious of the seriousness of the situation, and knows that death must be the inevitable result. Every day the load which hangs to him becomes more noxious, and the whole air becomes putrid. Imagine the terror of the man as he contemplates the steady and sure approach of a horrible death, and imagine his despair when he finds that all his frantic efforts to escape from the disgusting cause of that death are in vain. It would be impossible for the imagination to overdraw the feelings of horror and despair that would fill the soul of the unfortunate man. This was the condition in which Paul found himself. Sin was upon him as a terrible burden; he knew that unless he could get rid of it and lead a life of righteousness it would sink him into perdition; and he found that his most desperate efforts to get rid of it, and to do the good that he longed to do, were unavailing. It was the law that revealed his condition to him. As he continues to look into that holy law, his sin becomes more and more disgusting to him, and yet the more he looks, the larger and more revolting does the burden of sin become. What shall he do? Must he sink into perdition? In the agony of his despair he cries out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Even as he utters this wail for help, the help appears, and he immediately

answers his own question, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He has found peace and rest in Christ. His condition now is presented in the following words,—a Christian experience:—

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath 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 sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8:1-4.

"No condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," because they are new creatures. They are not the ones against whom the law had such a terrible indictment. The condemned ones have died, have been crucified with Christ, and now although they live, it is no more they, but Christ dwelling in them. Once sin dwelt in them; now Christ has taken its place.

Verse 2 is a parallel to Rom. 3:21, 22. The righteousness of Christ being imputed to the sinner, frees him from sin and the fear of death. For a long time he may have tried to make himself righteous, but he found his best deeds so far below what the law requires that they alone would have been sufficient to ruin him. Even if he could have fulfilled the requirements of the law, that would not have removed past transgression. What the law cannot do is to make a sinner righteous. This is not on account of any defect of the law, but is solely owing to the weakness of the flesh. The law points out the disease and shows what a condition of health would be; then the man begins an ineffectual struggle to reach that high condition; the law goads him on until he finds that he has not power to accomplish his desire; and when he has lost all confidence in himself, he accepts Christ as the only source of help, and at once becomes free. Thus the law drives the sinner to Christ that Christ may free him from his past sins and enable him to keep the law.

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