

Serve Lord in the New Way of the Spirit, and Not in the Old Way of the Written Code 《Ro 7:1-7,12,14-15》

Introduction: To a certain extent, <Romans 7> is one of the chapters greatly favored by believers, because it illustrates the reality of our faith living and especially, it answers a lot of dilemmas faced by believers in their pursuit of godly living. Often, many believers will relate to the pain that Paul felt in <Romans 7>, that “for I desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out... what a wretched man I am!” We can connect to this word from Paul greatly, and thus we want to make this statement the entire theme of <Romans 7>. Although this is a very important point and truth, holistically, we need to know what <Roman 7> intends to bring out concerning the position of law, and how it is related to Christ’s gospel. Today, there are 3 perspectives towards the law in churches, and thus comes its positions. First, the perspective of a legalist, the position they give to law has resulted in them being bound by the law. Whether consciously or subconsciously, they think that their relationship with God is about obeying the law. Therefore, their ideology of faith is centered on salvation through the law, and sanctification through the law. Such people need to realize their ignorance, pride and pitifulness through <Romans 7>. Eventually, they will discover that not only are they unable to save themselves through the law, they even run into the sin of hypocrisy. Second, one who walks to the other extreme, the non-legalist. Their mainstream thinking is that, the main reason why it is difficult to lead a godly living is because of the law. As a result, their teaching leads to people abandoning the law, causing them to proclaim that in grace, we do not need to be accountable to the law. They think that freedom is the secret to leading a godly living, apart from it, they do not teach people how to walk the path of sanctification (carry the cross daily and follow the Lord). Through the content of <Ro 7>, such people ought to know that man sin not because of the law but the sinfulness. No doubt, the law itself cannot deal with the sin, but if one does not know the spirit of holiness in the law, they will define their own godly living. Lastly, the perspective of the freeman who fulfills the law. Such people enjoy the most holistic and complete understanding of the law. Because they have already possessed the complete freedom in Christ, they do not need to be justified by law in order to be peaceful and happy. In their spirit, they enjoy true freedom because they have the heart to fulfill the law. Fulfilling the law mentioned here is not implying that they can attain Lord Jesus Christ’s standard (not sinning totally), rather, it is about knowing and living out the spirit of law (love God and men) through the Holy Spirit. Actually, they seek to live in the new way of the Spirit instead of the old way of written code (in another word: live in the newness of life), this is true freedom. Moreover, they truly know that the power to fulfill the law does not come from themselves but the Holy Spirit. They love the law, not “fearful” when talking about the law; they revere the law yet not bound by it. Try asking: Is the sanctification of our life, belief, state of mind, character and living like that of a freeman who fulfills the law? May Holy Spirit correct the incorrect knowledge we have in our hearts concerning the law and gospel. In addition, we who are already in the gospel ought to know how to serve Lord according to the new way of the Spirit.

1. Firstly, ought to have a comprehensive understanding of the law

1) 《Ro 7》 made 3 descriptions about the law

① 《Ro 7:1-6》 **In Christ, we’re released from the law.** Such statement appeared 3 times, speaking to the Jews then (and also we, who are in Christ, today). Indeed, we’re not under law but under grace. Therefore, we absolutely have to confirm this truth before we can enter into our spirit to follow and serve God.

② 《Ro 7:7-13》 **God’s law is holy, righteous and good.** Without the law, we will not come to know the holiness of God, and the nature of this holiness is not in the letters but in God’s heart, revealing the spirit of law (love God and men). Without the law, the sin committed by sinners will not be deemed transgressions, and thus they will not suffer the rebuke of their conscience and be convicted of sins.

③ 《Ro 7:14-25》 **The weakness of the law.** The law cannot deal with the sinfulness. This is like a mirror – it only tells us the flaw on our face (eg pimples), but only a skin doctor can deal with this flaw. If we do not seek and rely on the help of the doctor, but only focus on the flaw on our faces, we will only enter into greater helplessness. This is like how we rely on the law or conscience to solve our own sin, only resulting in complete failure. Not only do we sin even more (more corrupted, hypocritical, proud etc), we will also be further from God’s heart (the holiness of God). Hence, the law is weak in the face of sinfulness.

2) Do not misunderstand that “released from the law” or “died to the law” means a complete clean break with the law

* When reading <Ro 7>, many who experience accusations and pain while struggling with sin may easily produce a personal freed view on this. They may only grasp on certain words eg “released from the law”, “died to the law”, and think that we no longer need to teach Christians the law of morality (Eg the types of messages in <Ep 4:25-5:21>). They often use “Christ is the culmination of the law”, “you are not under the law” to proclaim the end of God’s moral laws. At the same time, we need to know from other parts of the bible such as <Ps 19>, there were also people who rejoice in the law, and see God’s law to be “more precious than gold, sweeter than honey, in keeping them there is great reward”. Their attitudes toward law are freedom and admiration, just like “Oh how I love Your law, I meditate on it all day long” in <Ps 119:97-100>. Hence, we cannot abolish God’s moral laws because of the finished work of Christ on the Cross, all the more we cannot say that the law is the requirement of the Old Testament and only causes us to be convicted of sin. In contrary, through the recarnation of Christ, death and resurrection, reigning on the throne, today through the law, we need to know the moral views, the living that is holy and liberated all the more. Actually, we need to be vigilant so that we will not fall into a state of not wanting to know more, nor meditate on the law of God due to fear of accusations.

2. The law has authority over a man only as long as he lives, but in Christ, we have died to the law once bound us

1) The binding power of the law is only effective as long as the man lives 《7:1-3》

* The binding power of the law is only effective as long as the man lives. But when death happens, man is released from the liabilities of the contract. In this, the bible uses an example of a lifetime commitment, eg the example of marriage, to illustrate how believers are related to the law. Be it in God or man, the marriage covenant lasts a lifetime. Therefore, only death can release two from their marriage covenant. If the husband of the wife is dead, the marriage covenant ends, and it is lawful for the woman to remarry (not adulteress). Hence, not only does death change the binding power of the dead, it also changes the liabilities of the people related to the dead. What these verses intend to bring out is – after we have gone through <Ro 6>, being united with Christ through faith in Him such that together with Him, we are dead to sin and alive to God in our spirit – we are no longer under the binding power of the law. (Remember, this takes place in the spirit, and it cannot become an assumption, our spirit need to truly confirm it: is there a new disposition that hates sin and love kindness, sets apart and race for the kingdom growing within us?). If we have already possessed the evidence of already dead and now resurrect with Christ, we need to be sure that: ① We will not suffer the punishment of sin when we disobey the law; ② We are not justified, sanctified, nor do we serve Lord because of the requirement of the law; ③ We do not lead a faith living with a fearful heart of disobeying the law, instead, we enter into the spirit to love God,

seek God, and live by submitting to Him. As such, the law is not the standard that propels us to pursue holiness, instead, living out the love given by the Spirit is the holiness we need to pursue.

2) Through our union with Christ, we are dead to the obligation of the law. Now, we belong to our “eternal husband” – Christ 《7:4》

* Here, we need to know that if a person is still obligated to the law, and wants to surrender to Christ at the same time, he will be in a spiritual dilemma. This is like a woman who has not sorted out if she is already officially done with the first marriage but entering into the second marriage now. Today, many believers in churches are in such dilemma. Although they have said the sinners’ prayer and believed in the Lord, there remain a lot of obligations to the law in their hearts unknowingly. Although they proclaim “I have already surrendered to Christ”, they feel guilty and accused when they are unable to excute the requirement of the law. Their inner rebukes are: “I do not pray, I do not read the scriptures or attend church meetings, I do not have good testimonies, I do not evangelise etc”. Actually, what God cares about is not whether they have done certain codes or obligations of Christians, rather, God cares about whether they acknowledge the Lord in their hearts at all times, seek God’s perfect will, receive the hearts and minds to love God and submit to God, and live in it. In fact, God wants us to enter into the spirit and serve Him, and bear fruits in the spirit to God. The fruits can only be borne after one is released from the belief on the law, and thus represents the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law, and these are impossible in people who still feel obligated to the law. Thus, God wants us to introspect our inner hearts, and He wants us to face Him with a living and active and freed spirit. Try asking: Is the eternal husband who lives in our hearts unhappy when we love Him in our hearts? Does He not care about you surrendering the sovereignty of your life to Him? Is it not the fruits borne from a genuine heart of loving Him desirable in His eye? This is the heart we, who have belonged to Christ (second husband), ought to pursue. Hence if we still feel obligated to the first husband (law) knowingly and unknowingly, we are unable to enter into the spirit and to truly surrender to the second husband (Christ).

3) For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death 《7:5》

* Here, Paul told the Jew legalists (also what we, today’s believers, ought to know) a very amazing spiritual truth, that is before we were born again in Christ, our sinful passions were continuously aroused by the law (or the heart of right vs wrong). To put it in 3 aspects: ① Always enduring so as not to sin, but unable to curb the passions and thus fall flat eventually (just like when we always see the pimples and keep wanting to deal with them ourselves, in the end they become worse); ② Hypocrisy (just like the sin committed by the Pharisees). They deceive their own conscience with their devoted outlook, and also deceive others. But Lord Jesus exposed their hypocrisy through the sermon on the mount, because they cared about the form of godliness but denied its power (inner heart of loving God and men); ③ Because they have exceptional moral views and will, and after having done the requirement of the law, they judge those who cannot (this was the state that Paul was in before he was called). Although he was upright and loyal to the Jewish religion and laws, but he did not have love in his nature. Therefore, he was far from the heart of God, so far that he persecuted many innocent Christians, deeming the obedience of law more important than the salvation of souls.

* Those that are mentioned above are the fruits of death in the eye of God. What all these lead to – be it increasing corruption, hypocrisy, proud – have all revealed that a man is still in the state of sinfulness. The law is absolutely powerless in releasing them from sin, instead, it causes them to sin increasingly, and their dispositions become further from God. Indeed, these are fruits of death and deserve punishment.

3. We serve Lord in the new way of the Spirit, not in the old way of the written code

1) Translation of the original text: newness in the spirit, not in the oldness of the letter

* The “oldness of the letter” mentioned here refers to the law written on the tablet in the old testament. And the newness in the spirit here refers to the new testament that is spiritual. Basically, the era of new testament is the era of the Holy Spirit (Holy Spirit has revealed the complete essence of the law of God through Christ – therefore we will not remain unclear about God’s will). Thus in this era of spirit, Holy Spirit inscribes the law of God in our hearts. Pay attention: writing on the tablet and writing on our hearts carry completely different meanings. To explain in 5 aspects: ① **The seal of the Holy Spirit:** we are not justified (become the children of God) through obeying the law, instead, the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children <Ro 8:16>; ② **The freedom in Christ:** the freedom we receive in our hearts is because we are slave to righteousness, not a freedom out of sinning recklessly (in another word: the freedom that loves holiness); ③ **The motive in serving God:** we serve not out of the requirement of the law, thus we feel compelled to serve; rather, because Christ is now our husband (the one we love), thus we do willingly; ④ **The method of serving God:** not restricting to certain time, certain crowds or places, or certain actions (eg: not stealing, not lying, helping others, keeping the Sabbath day etc), instead, it is the ever-ready and infinite conviction and leading of the Holy Spirit; ⑤ **The outcome of serving God:** receiving rewards from God, and sees God’s greater love in grace. Actually, when we serve God according to the new way of the Spirit, we will always see the overwhelming grace of God manifested through our weaknesses and limited life, hence, we will naturally love God and depend on Him even more.

2) In churches today, we are greatly in lack of believers who serve God in the new way of the Spirit

* Try asking: Why are there so many believers who are powerless in serving God in churches? Obviously, believers have not received the encouragement and help of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, therefore, serving God is always a kind of burden and thus not enjoyable. Why is the serving of believers restricted to churches only? The christian living understood by many saints is merely giving God some time on Sabbath day, or offering Lord what is necessary. This shows that believers have not entered into serving in 24 hours and in all things (live by the Holy Spirit). Why are there so many problems of doubting one another and judging one another among believers, instead of protecting and covering each other’s weaknesses? This shows that believers are still relying on their own strength and growing their self-excellent hearts through their serving, instead of seeing them as the grace from God. In fact, Lord’s churches need our prayers. Believers need to have the correct understanding through the complete gospel, experience the Holy Spirit correctly, only then can we establish a kind of “Immanuel” culture, and enables the people of the world to see how Christ lives among us through us serving in the new way of the Spirit.

3) Conclusion: Today, we need to learn to live in the new way of the Spirit practically, and live in the freedom and joy of Christ daily

① Firstly, we need to build the temple of life (build a rooted and grounded thinking system through the gospel truths, after that, make every attempt to enter into a brethren-centered living system) – without building the holy temple, it is very difficult for us to be grounded and rooted in receiving the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Despite we may see the partial conviction of the Spirit and occasionally see His help, we will still remain blur in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our practical living.

② We need to pay more attention to the conviction given by Holy Spirit in our hearts, especially, we need to become a believer who loves to live by testing and approving God’s perfect will <Ro 12:1-2>. Actually, a faith that doesn’t examine God’s perfect will can never receive the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not to mention to live by the Spirit. God’s leading is infinite, but only revealed stepwisely to the ones who seek, and God gives them the assured heart to submit.

③ After we’ve submitted to God, we need to introspect and confirm the leading of the Holy Spirit. We need to know the leading of Holy Spirit is infinite, but when we introspect how He leads us through every small detail of our life, we come to understand many spiritual homeworks unknowingly, and we know how God is leading us. Just like Paul once again confirmed how Lord had been leading and helping him in <2 Ti 3:10-

11; 4:16-18>, similarly, when we introspect and confirm the works of God on us, only then will we come to realize how God has been leading us respectively in the many objective encounters God bring us through. Therefore, we will have increasing fixed perspective and assurance from God individually as we submit to the Holy Spirit.