

Romans 8:1-4 There is now no condemnation!

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Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*

The big *Therefore* follows on from Paul's line of reasoning in chapters 5-7 that Jews and gentiles, that is, those who know the law and those that don't, have been set free from sin that leads to death (compare with Romans 5:1). For the gentiles Paul gives thanks that although they were once slaves to sin, they have now become obedient to righteousness (Romans 6:17-18). For those who know the law, i.e. Jewish believers (Romans 7:1ff), Paul uses an example from the law to show that they also have been released from the law, *having died to that which held us captive* (i.e. sin) (Romans 7:6). By the end of chapter 7 I believe it becomes clear what law it is that these believers have been released from. It's not the Law of Moses, for which Paul argues strongly in Romans 7:7-20, but it's the law of sin they have been set free from.

What it comes down to is this: both Jewish and gentile believers at the church in Rome were under sin (Romans 3:9), and both through faith in Jesus have been set free from this law of sin. Therefore, there is no condemnation for Jew or gentile, for those in Christ Jesus, because Jesus took all our sins upon himself at the cross.

In the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, Philip runs up to his chariot and finds the man reading from Isaiah 53, which speaks prophetically of the cross. Using this Scripture Philip began to share Jesus. We can imagine him speaking about Isaiah 53:5,

Isaiah 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

This verse is about a Suffering Servant who would be pierced, who would be crushed, for our transgressions, for our sins. It says that he took our punishment, in our place, in order that we may have peace with God. Sometimes we need to remind the devil, who is the accuser, and ourselves as well, of the cross. If we have confessed our sins then Jesus' forgiveness is full and free. That is why he died, and there is no condemnation. But no-one is so holy that he does not need to repent. We should repent every day, and when we do our hearts are immediately cleansed and reconnected with God. Christians who are in Christ do not walk around with a burden of guilt, but with joy and a clean conscience.

But what does it mean to be *in Christ*? It means that we are no longer in Adam, who sinned; instead we are in Jesus, who lived a sinless life, who defeated death and was raised to life, never to die again. It means that we are alive to God and His Spirit lives in us.

Romans 8:2 *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*

What is this law of the Spirit of life, and this law of sin and death? The first is something good, and the second is bad. We have already met the law of sin, which wages war in our minds with the law of God (Romans 7:22-23). The law of sin and death says this: the wages of sin is death. It is an irreversible law that we cannot get away from, and it never fails!

The trouble is that Satan always presents sin as so attractive. If he didn't we would never fall for it. Moses realised that suffering for a short while for the sake of Christ was of greater value than enjoying the *fleeting pleasures of sin* (Hebrews 11:25-26). This should be an encouragement to us, because as long as we are in the body of this flesh we experience the same struggle. I'm sure Paul had Cain in mind when he talked about *the evil which lies close at hand* (Romans 7:21, Genesis 4:7). The law of sin wants to take us captive to sin which leads to death. This is the law we are set free from (Romans 7:6).

The law of the Spirit of life is clearly something good, and liberating. I believe Paul has Ezekiel's prophecy of the new covenant in mind, *I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws* (see all of Ezekiel 36:25-27). So the Spirit leads us to obey His laws.

How does this relate to the Law of Moses / Torah?

Law of sin and death = is not the Law of Moses, but an imposter law, set up contrary to God's law, or the Mosaic Law improperly understood and perverted by our old sinful nature (bad, e.g. legalism)

Law of the Spirit of life = is not a new law, but the Law of Moses properly understood by the power of the Spirit in believers lives (good, e.g. the Spirit frees us from sin) = law of Christ / law of Messiah.

When Messiah (Jesus) came, he brought a proper understanding of the law (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount). There was a reprioritising of the law, for example the prioritising of the law of love. Some aspects of the law were changed, for example there was a new priesthood, and animal sacrifices for sin were no longer required because of Jesus' sacrifice once and for all. But these changes were already anticipated in the law, (and to actually an extent in Jewish tradition as well.)

What does this mean in practice? I think most Christians realise that the teaching to honour our parents is part of living God's way, and has not been abolished. But it can be hard, and in some situations it can be very hard. But this is where we need the power of the Spirit to help us in our weakness. We need a new heart of flesh to see our parents as real people so we can love them in an objective way.

Romans 8:3-4 *For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

The law itself is powerless to help us, but when we are empowered by the Spirit and filled with His love, our attitude changes, for example, towards our parents. A paper from the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge on the Law of Love says,

"If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 4:15). Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper include the uncomfortable thought that there is an intimate link between love of Jesus and obedience to His commands. His disciples today are not so used to thinking of a connection between love and obedience or between love and law.

Those questions are not only theoretical; they are immensely practical. In a heavily indebted economy, is the ban on interest merely a dead letter? Ought Christians to be marking one day in seven as special, putting aside work for the whole day? Does it matter is a man and his niece get married? Is there anything wrong with cross-dressing? Should Christians tithe? Should Christians not eat meat with blood in it?

The argument of this paper is that Christians should still reflect on the Torah, in the light of Christ's life and teaching, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and learn from it how to make wise decisions about how to love God and to love our neighbours today.

I would say that the law of the Spirit of life, or the law of Christ, is not only Moses, but includes the whole Bible, the whole word of God, to be applied in our lives, not legalistically, but by the Spirit who gives us His life.