

VICTORY OVER SIN – Romans 7:1-25 (Part-eight of a sixteen-part study)

Whenever we are faced with a complex problem or puzzling situation, it is easy to become engulfed with and confused by all the details that are a part of the issue at hand; so that we can't see the forest for the trees. Then it's time to take a step back and try to gain an accurate view of the big picture. This is certainly the case when attempting to interpret Romans 7. In doing so, two characteristics of this chapter stand out. There is a significant *contrast* which exists within the chapter, coupled with an overarching *common bond* that provides for a unifying theme.

The contrast consists of Paul's use of two distinct tenses. In 7:1-6, he uses the past tense in reference to the believers in Rome and their conversion to Christ, freeing them from the condemnation of the Law. He also applies the past tense to himself in 7:7-13. The present tense occurs in vv14-25, where he reveals to us a very candid level of frustration with his current condition. Yet, throughout the entire chapter, a common theme emerges when it comes to the issue of interacting with God's Law. I am convinced that the contrast in tense from past to present, as well as the ongoing impact of God's Law upon the life of an individual Christian, provides us with the key which unlocks the true meaning of this profound and significant passage of Scripture.

Not only does Paul change the tense from past to present, in moving from v13 to v14, he also informs the believers in Rome that there are three elements to the character of God's Law which interact with and impact each of us. The first is revealed in Romans 7:1-6, where the Law of God has the authority to "*condemn the sinner.*" These six verses may not seem to fit in with the rest of the chapter, but are essential in making the necessary transition from chapter six. The specific sin which Paul uses as an example of the Law's authority to condemn us is that of adultery (7:1-3). But then, in vv4-6, he reminds us that as a result of one's conversion to Christ, the Law of God no longer has the authority to condemn us. He also reaffirms that blessed truth in Romans 8:1 – **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**

But why did Paul consider this to be such an important reminder, as a follow-up to the content of Romans chapter six? It seems as if he is seeking to temper the high expectations which a chapter like Romans 6 could generate in the believer. Simply put, he knew from his own personal experience (7:14-25), that any follower of Christ who seeks to implement the principles for Christian living spelled out in Romans 6, will not experience a 100% success rate. And when we do experience such failure, and we will, it is good to know that due to our position in Christ, the Law of God no longer has the authority to condemn us. A critical aspect of experiencing victory over sin involves not becoming discouraged when we do sin; and that God doesn't condemn us when we do go through a time of moral and spiritual failure in our efforts to gain victory over sin.

This is why the apostle makes the rest of Romans chapter seven so personal. Beginning in Romans 7:7, Paul moves from the general to the specific in sharing a testimony about his interaction with the Law of God. When he uses the past tense in vv7-13, it appears to be a reference to the impact the Law had upon him prior to his conversion to Christ. There, the Law of God would play a crucial role in imparting upon Paul a "*conviction of sin,*" which would eventually result in his salvation. When he suddenly shifts to the present tense in vv14-25, common sense would indicate that he is describing his ongoing experience as a believer; expressing a high level of frustration in being "*confounded by the presence of sin,*" as he seeks to gain his own personal victory over sin. In both instances, there is a positive purpose being accomplished as a result of his interaction with God's Law. That will be the focus of our attention, next.