

**~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:**

Paul continues to address Jewish objections to his gospel. Imagine one of his Jewish opponents arguing, "It was God Himself who gave us the Mosaic Law! How can you claim that Jews who believe in Jesus need not keep it?" Paul replies with an analogy derived from the Law itself, which taught that a woman was free to remarry if her husband died. His death released her from the law that held her. So Jewish believers who are in Christ are released by His death from the Law that held them. But this is not a license to sin. Paul expands his analogy to say that, just as a widow might join herself to another husband, so Jewish believers are joined to Christ to "bear fruit for God" (7:4). Now they "serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (7:6). That is, Jewish believers are not absolved from obedience, but they now follow the indwelling Spirit who leads them in holiness, and have no real need for a written law. The same is true, of course, for believing Gentiles.

"But you are teaching that the Law, given to us by God, was an evil thing, because it only resulted in evil!" some apparently were saying. So Paul explained that it was sin against the Law, not the Law itself, that resulted in death. "The Law is...holy and righteous and good" (7:12).

It is quite obvious that in 7:4-13, Paul was writing about his (and his fellow Jewish believers') former experience under the Mosaic Law. When we then arrive at verse 14, should we conclude, as some do, that Paul began to write about his experience as a Christian simply because he started using the present tense, especially when the experience that he describes sounds no different than his experience prior to his being born again? I don't think so. All of us sometimes use the present tense to describe past events. I've been doing that in this day's teaching from the very first sentence: "Paul continues....Paul replies....Paul expands..." and so on. But I switched to the past tense in the second paragraph.

If Paul was describing his experience as a Christian in the last part of chapter 7, affirming that he was "sold into bondage to sin" so that he practiced the very evil that he hated (7:15, 19), why then in chapter 6 did he repeatedly affirm that Christians have "died to sin" (6:2), are no longer "slaves of sin" (6:6, 17, 20), are "freed from sin" (6:7, 18, 22), are "slaves of righteousness" (6:18), and are "enslaved to God" (6:22)? Can the man of chapter 6, set free from sin, be the same wretched man of chapter 7 who is a prisoner of sin? Can the man of chapter 6, whose old self was crucified with Christ that his "body of sin might be done away with" (6:6), be the same man of chapter 7 who longs for someone to set him "free from the body of this death" (7:24)?

If Paul was speaking in 7:14-25 of his present condition as a wretched prisoner of sin, practicing evil, it greatly surprises those of us who have read what he said about his personal holiness in other places (see 1 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Thes. 2:10; 2 Tim. 1:3).

Some say that Paul must have been speaking of his current Christian experience because he said that he wanted to do right and "joyfully concurred with the law of God in the inner man" (7:21- 22). Surely, they say, no depraved unbelievers would say such a thing, being sinners to the core.

We must remember, however, that Paul was a very zealous Jewish Pharisee before his salvation. He, unlike the average unsaved person, was doing everything he could to obey God's laws, to the point of even persecuting the church. But he found that no matter how hard he tried, he remained a slave to sin. Truly, there is no more wretched person than the one who is trying to live by God's standards but who is not born again. Praise God for Jesus!