

ROMANS 7–8

Romans 7:1–6. The Mosaic Law of Marriage

“Now we are released from the Mosaic law, dying in what we were bound so we might serve in the newness of spirit and not by antique writing.” (Romans 7:6)

In this verse, Paul draws an analogy between a part of the Jewish law of marriage, under which a woman is “released” from her husband upon his death. She is then free to marry another. Likewise, by the death of Christ, followers of Christ are released from the old law. This allows us to be “married to another,” the Bridegroom, “even to him who is raised from the dead” (7:4). The analogy here is a bit forced, but it makes a good point to some previous Jews who were having trouble converting completely over to the teachings and commandments given by Jesus.

The verb *katērgēthēmenin* literally means “to be made idle or released from employment” and does not have the sense of being delivered from having to keep any moral standards, rules, or God’s commandments, as it has been traditionally interpreted. To take Paul’s analogy one step further, being married by covenant with the bridegroom brings, of course, binding obligations to that new husband. Thus, this verse refers especially to the liberation of Christians from the strict Mosaic law of *animal sacrifice*, which no longer saves anyone. These blood sacrifices point to Christ’s last, final sacrifice and were replaced and transcended by that sacrifice, which established a new covenant. Paul “speaks of ‘serving’ this same law but in a new manner. Before the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we are subject to the law in the ‘oldness of the letter’: but after the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives, we submit to the law in ‘newness of the spirit.’”¹

The Greek words *palaiotēti grammatos* at the end of verse 6 mean “by antique writing,” referring to certain trivialities of the Mosaic tradition no longer applicable but not referring to the commandments, especially the Ten Commandments. Early in Romans 2:29 Paul wrote, “But he is a Jew, which is one

inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Likewise, when Jesus visited the Nephites, He encouraged them replace the sacrifices in the law of Moses with the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, not a wild, antinomian existence in which one does not need to keep any commandments in order to become sanctified through Christ (3 Nephi 9:19–29).

Romans 7:7–12. The Holiness Illuminates the Commandments

Paul next explains that Christian doctrine does not make the commandments irrelevant. For one thing, the law made Paul aware of the concept of sin: “I would not have understood the concept of sin unless it were through the Mosaic law” (Romans 7:7).

In this verse, the Greek means “I would have not understood the sin,” not “if I had not known sin” (King James Version). Because Paul wrote “the sin,” with a definite article, he is referring to the *concept* of sin, part of the Mosaic law’s strict law of holiness delineating the sacred from the profane: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy” (7:12).

The Greek implies that sinfulness needs to be defined in order for people to appreciate Jesus’s atoning sacrifice. Archibald Thomas Robertson wrote, “Notice the plea that the Law points out our transgression. This commandment is used as an illustration to show that we would not know sin . . . unless the Law teaches us this precept. So, the Law of God is being contrasted with the law of sin and death. It is not removed as a standard but as method of righteousness. If one declares that in order to lead a holy life it is necessary to be delivered from [even] the [Mosaic law], this is to make the law an evil and an unholy thing. ‘What shall we say then? Is the law sin?’ (7:7) ‘God forbid,’ cries the apostle; and then he proceeds to show that the law is good in its own sphere and for its proper purpose. It was designed to reveal sin, not to relieve from sin. It can give relief neither to the soul suffering under the conviction of sin (7:7–13), nor to the soul struggling against the power of sin (7:14–25).”² Jesus’s Atonement relieves humankind of sin upon conditions of repentance.

Romans 7:13–25. Serving God’s Law Consciously Defeats Sinfulness

“Who shall loose me from this body of death? Indeed, [the answer is by answering with] a ‘reciprocal gift to God the Father’ [charis de tō theō] on account of Jesus Christ our Lord. So therefore I myself serve by my intelligence [noi] the law of God, even though I serve in my body the law of sin.” (Romans 7:24–25)

The phrase *charis dē tō theō*, meaning “a reciprocal gift to the God,” seems to account best for the rise of a few extant variations of this Greek verse in the manuscript tradition and is probably the original reading.³

For a first-century reader, *charis*, or an obliging gift and more specifically the gift of Christ's Atonement, created a vertical relationship. In a gospel context, this relationship is more specifically the new covenant made possible by Jesus's atonement, which obligated the recipient to reciprocate to Heavenly Father in some way this unfathomable, obliging gift through a covenantal relationship. Paul, in the holistic sense of Jewish thought, implies here that more than his mind is needed to serve the law of God. The nature of Christ inspires a disciple to change not only his or her mind and aptitude but his or her nature and behavior. This is accomplished as disciples move up the spiritual ladder to be more godlike, as they draw nearer to their Creator, and as they become like Him.

Without further explanation, the King James Version's translation of *charis dē tō theō* as the simple abstract "I thank" is again based on late Neo-Platonic thinking of one-directional, no-strings-attached gifts to an abstract deity that is later embraced by Augustine and ultimately the Reformers. Showing gratitude to God for His *charis* is, of course, important, and disciples give profound thanks to the Father for His incomparable goodness. But more is called for as we relate to God than words of thanks alone. We also show our gratitude by our deeds, keeping His commandments, and following His Son.

Romans 8:1–11. Sensuality Drives out the Spirit

"Moreover those who are sensually focused cannot please God." (Romans 8:8)

The King James Version reads, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God," which is a literal rendition of the Greek highlighting the difficult nature of bridling and caring for the physical body in mortality according to the principles of Christ's gospel. The first-century context describes those who are living in an ancient Epicurean mindset of "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die" as established in the previous verses. Thus, Paul warns that living a lifestyle focused only on physical pleasures instead of spiritual ones is not pleasing to God. He has stated many times in this section that those who focus only on their bodily senses are not godly, but He does not go so far as to say that no mortal can please God, nor does he articulate the later doctrine of original sinfulness (which holds that sexuality and humankind are completely depraved). Sensuality, lust, and fixation are the problems.

In the Greek words translated as "cannot please God," the word for "God" does not have a definite article before it, and so perhaps Paul is not referring here to God the Father but to the Holy Ghost, a member of the Godhead. Restoration scripture describes this special member of the Godhead as a personage of spirit who will "not always strive with man." The Holy Ghost is not pleased and will not be one's constant companion when an individual seeks after hedonistic desires instead of those focused on service to God and others. Joseph Smith supported this view in his inspired translation of Romans 8:8, stating, "They that are *after* the flesh cannot please God," instead of the King James Version's "*in* the flesh."

Romans 8:12–17. The Righteous Are Heirs of God

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, we are heirs! Heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ if we truly suffer with him so we may together be glorified.”
(Romans 8:16–17)

Roman law stipulated that only natural-born children or legitimately adopted individuals could inherit anything upon the death of the testator. The verb *sympaschomen* usually means suffering but also has the nuance of experiencing a little of what Christ did in mortality and proving faithful.

Regarding verse 17, Joseph Smith taught,

These are the first principles of consolation. How consoling to the mourners when they are called to part with a husband, wife, father, mother, child, or dear relative, to know that, although the earthly tabernacle is laid down and dissolved, they shall rise again to dwell in everlasting burnings in immortal glory, not to sorrow, suffer, or die anymore; but they shall be heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. What is it? To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a God, and ascend the throne of eternal power, the same as those who have gone before. What did Jesus do? Why; I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds come rolling into existence. My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to my Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take his place, and thereby become exalted myself. So that Jesus treads in the tracks of his Father and inherits what God did before; and God is thus glorified and exalted in the salvation and exaltation of all his children. It is plain beyond disputation, and you thus learn some of the first principles of the Gospel, about which so much hath been said.⁴

While some may be offended by Joseph’s teachings, in another reference to this verse Joseph stated, “To become a joint heir of the heirship of the Son, one must put away all his false tradition” since “all men who become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ will have to receive the fulness of the ordinances of his kingdom; and those who will not receive all the ordinances will come short of the fullness of that glory, if they do not lose the whole.”⁵

Likewise, in Luke 12:42–44 Jesus taught, “And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?’ Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.” In sum, through entering into ordinances in Christ’s new covenant and demonstrating faithfulness, each individual qualifies as a legitimate son or daughter, an heir of all God has.

Romans 8:18–25. The Eternal Weight of Glory Yet to Be

In verse 24, Paul asks a question that reminds his readers that more is yet to come: “For we are *beginning to be rescued* by hope! Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” Hope is crucial, along with faithfulness and charity. But hope implies that more is yet to come.

The verb here translated as “we are saved” is not quite that simple. It is in the aorist tense, a tense that refers to something that has happened and is still continuing forward. Speaking of Romans 8:24, one famous New Testament scholar noted that the use of the aorist past tense here implies that the phrase “in this hope” should be understood as indicating “that our full enjoyment of it lies in the future,” implying that we are now just beginning to be rescued by Christ.⁶ But, in contrast, Reformed Protestant commentators have argued that the verb here only means that one has already been definitely saved, ignoring the nuance of the so-called ingressive aspect of the aorist, which refers to something that has happened but also is just beginning to progress.⁷ In other words, one is not saved in mortality because there will yet be a Final Judgment. The verb for “saved” here usually means “to rescue” and does not have the baggage of the later theology of gaining a deterministic status of immediate salvation by faith alone. The King James Version’s “we are saved” does not fully render Paul’s ingressive aorist meaning.

The verbose King James Version is expressing Paul’s truism that an element of uncertainty in the principle of hope inspires a desire for understanding or faith. We read in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Romans 8:26–30. Follow the Holy Ghost according to God’s Plan

In order to progress, we must pray for and listen to the Holy Ghost, who will strive with us and help us according to God’s will (Romans 8:26–27). This is “because God knew us and planned—beforehand, and foreordained us to become the same form as the likeness of his own Son, whom He foreordained to be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (8:28–29).

The Greek verb *proegnō* means “to know about something before but which does not necessarily change the outcome of an event.” Surprisingly, this verse has often been quoted as a proof text for the doctrine of predestination. *Proginoskein* is a compound verb that recurs in Romans 11:2 and reflects the Old Testament use of the Hebrew word *yada*, as in Genesis 18:19, Jeremiah 1:5, Amos 3:2, and Psalm 1:6. It means “to know,” as “to know with affection, predilection.” It is not a purely speculative knowledge but refers to God’s knowledge prior to the human love of God and even to His eternal foreknowledge and plan.⁸

“The first born of many brethren” signifies that many are called to fill special roles in this life. Paul here steps back from the stage of history to survey God’s gospel purpose from the past, to the present, to the age to come. “Before we were born,” he says, “God foreknew us.” The *fore* prefix (Greek *pro-*) expresses not only that God cares for us in this life but that His purposes embraced all humankind before the world

was made, and it implies that He will care for everyone in the next. Before anything was organized, He had determined that all those that He could tell were going to be penitent of heart, were to share this glorious fate—namely, that they were to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Romans 8:31–39. Who Can Separate Us from God?

With God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost on our side, we are assured that we can succeed. “If God is on our side, who can prevail against us?” (Romans 8:31). “Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” (8:35). The answer to these two questions is not always clearly understood. These are not rhetorical questions. While it is certainly true that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor powers, present or future, . . . can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38–39), in fact there is one thing *can* separate us from God—namely, ourselves. Indeed, we can separate ourselves from God. We all enjoy God the Father’s gift of moral agency (2 Nephi 2:26–27; Moses 4:3).

Notes

- 1 Roy A. Marrs, *Paul—New Testament Lawyer and Advocate of Grace* (Lodi, CA: Hignell, 2001), 208.
- 2 Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans—An Exposition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1966), 87.
- 3 Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1971), 515.
- 4 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1938), 347–348.
- 5 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 309, 321.
- 6 F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 165.
- 7 In contrast John Murray concluded, “The [aorist] tense of the verb indicates that what is in view is the salvation which the believer has already come to possess, not the future salvation reserved for him. The thought is not that he will attain to the future salvation by the instrumentality of hope.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 308.
- 8 Compare Galatians 4:9 and especially 1 Corinthians 8:3: “If one loves God, one is known by him.”

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