

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 7: 4-5

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 7. We will read verses 4-5 today.

The law has authority over a person as long as he lives; when he dies, the law no longer has the power to bind him. Paul uses the example of a woman and her husband: as long as her old husband is still alive, the woman is bound by the law and cannot belong to another man; if she belongs to another man, she is an adulteress. But if the old husband dies, the woman is released from the law of her husband and may belong to a new husband; even though she belongs to a new husband, she is not an adulteress, for the law cannot condemn her. Paul gave this example, which is very simple, consistent with common logic, and easy to understand. Yet in its typological meaning, this example becomes very difficult, and one important reason for this difficulty lies in the theological framework that creates obstacles.

In John Calvin's commentary on Romans, he compares the old husband to the law, the new husband to Christ, and the woman to us. Concerning the woman and the new husband in the metaphor, there is no controversy, but in making the old husband represent the law, John Calvin himself also felt that the metaphor was not quite equivalent, because the law does not die. Therefore he said that although Paul used the word "law," Paul's meaning referred to the power of the law; when the old husband, that is, the power of the law, dies, the woman is free.

Most commentators follow Calvin's interpretation, saying that the old husband represents the law, but if we carefully align Paul's example, we find that this interpretation is indeed somewhat forced. Some teachers among the Brethren, in order to make Paul's metaphor more balanced, since the new husband is Christ, take the old husband to represent the old man. This interpretation is somewhat better than saying it is the law, because the Scripture tells us that the old man has

been crucified with Christ; when the old man has died, we are released from the law and may belong to the new husband.

In the past I also accepted this interpretation, but this time when I reread Romans, God opened my eyes to see that when Christ was crucified, the devil, who had the power of death, was destroyed; this is what Hebrews 2:14 tells us. So not only was our old man crucified with Christ, but the very source of sin and death, the devil Satan himself, was also destroyed, annulled, and brought to an end. It turns out that the cross of Christ is a cosmic garbage disposal site; all the dark powers related to Satan, all negative and destructive things, were once for all dealt with, ended, and terminated on the cross. This is a historical fact that already took place two thousand years ago.

Today, all our negative and destructive matters already have a solution. Even so, on the positive side—that is, the building up of God’s new man—this work has not yet been completed; many sons of peace who belong to God have not yet returned home, and those who have already returned home have not yet been built up to become one bride. Therefore the age of grace is still continuing. We who have received grace and salvation in this age of grace and have been joined to the church are the woman in Paul’s example; Christ is our new husband, and Satan is our old husband.

But this Satan is very cunning; he first came to incite man to be independent from God. He began with Eve—Eve first became independent from Adam, and then Adam became independent from God, and as a result all the descendants of Adam were constituted as the old man. The characteristic of the old man is that he thinks he has become independent, that he no longer needs God, that he is a man of stature in himself; but in reality he has fallen right into Satan’s snare. This old man who is independent from God has become a follower of Satan; he is subject to Satan and becomes Satan’s woman. If the saints agree with this interpretation, then following this line of thought, let us continue reading verse 4.

Verse 4: "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."

"My brethren, then," Paul now begins to apply the example of the woman and her husband that he mentioned earlier. Paul speaks directly to us: "Beloved saints, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ." Notice that Paul here is not saying that the law has died, but that we have died—and we have died to the law. The word "died" in the original language is put to death, so it is not an active death but a passive one, a death inflicted. Paul adds the word "also" here, indicating that there is another one who has been put to death. How are we put to death? It is through the body of Christ.

That is, when Jesus was hung on the cross, during the last three hours God came to judge Jesus, because God laid upon Him all the sins of humanity; it was not that Jesus had sinned, but that all our sins were counted on Him. Not only our sins, but even the source of sin, Satan, was judged together, making it a painful process. Jesus cried out loudly on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And when at last Jesus said, "It is finished," not only was the great work of redemption accomplished, but Satan's power was terminated, this old husband was annulled, and our old man was crucified with Christ, dying together with Him.

Therefore we have died to the law; the law has authority only over a person while he is alive, and the dead are released from the law's binding. When Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we also were made alive with Christ. This new man, possessing resurrected life, regained the identity of the woman and is to be united with Christ, who has risen from the dead. The Chinese Union Version translates this as "归于," NIV renders it as "belong," and KJV as "marry." The Greek word here is *ginomai*, meaning "become" or "being born"—to become or to be generated. This emphasizes a transformation of life: the old man has died, the new man is born, and now belongs to Christ, destined to bear fruit for God. With new life comes the beginning of belonging to Christ; this life must grow, developing the nature and character of the new life, and these, the spiritual fruits, must all be offered to God.

Verse 5: “ For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.”

Here Paul uses a comparative method to help us recall the state before regeneration. At that time we belonged to the flesh; the word “flesh,” in Greek *sarx*, is generally used to describe a negative condition, and in English it is translated as “flesh.” The body is expressed with another Greek word, *soma*, which is neutral, and in English is translated as “body,” as in the body of Christ or the body of sin—the latter being the term used in Romans 6:6.

After Adam sinned, sin entered and took up residence in the human body, turning the human body into flesh. At this time, the human body still existed and still required normal eating and drinking to sustain life. The flesh enlarged and intensified the needs of the body, transforming them into the lusts of the flesh. The body also has many members, and these members obey the control of the body’s master. Before we were saved, we belonged to the flesh, or rather, we were in the flesh. The evil desires produced by the law act upon our members. The Chinese Union Version translates this as “evil desires,” but in the original text the phrase is the passions of sins, where “sins” is plural, referring to all kinds of sin. Sin produces emotions or lusts, and the word “passions” is also plural.

Here Paul introduces a new concept, which perhaps the saints need to quietly reflect upon and compare with their own past experiences in order to grasp his meaning. The law was originally given by God and is good, but when man fell and became flesh, once the law was established, the sin dwelling in the flesh was aroused by the law. It seems that before the law existed, these sinful desires had no target and therefore remained dormant. Once the law was established, sin sprang to life, and the sinful desires emerged, acting in direct challenge to the boundaries set by the law. These sinful desires then drive the members of the body—here “members” is also plural—meaning that all the members coordinate and operate together under this influence.

I believe that saints who have studied law understand that lawyers always operate along the edge of the law, seeking the greatest advantage for their clients,

constantly looking for ways to stretch the boundaries of the law and proposing all sorts of unusual and novel interpretations. The evil desires produced by the law—that is, the lusts to sin—are provoked by the law itself. This is the concept Paul presents, and perhaps an example will make it clearer. There was once a case in the United States involving a very famous actress who was caught stealing a lipstick in a department store and made the news. She was not without money; the lipsticks given to her by the cosmetics company she endorsed alone would last her a lifetime. So why steal lipstick from a department store? She, of course, knew that department store lipsticks must be paid for, and once this law was in place, her sinful desire was provoked—not because she needed lipstick, for she had plenty at home, but because the act of sin itself was stimulating: if she could take it without being caught, she could enjoy the thrill of committing the crime.

Once the sinful desire was aroused, the members of her body began to cooperate. First, her eyes scanned the surroundings to see if anyone was nearby, then she checked the direction of the security cameras. Finding an angle that would not be filmed, her feet moved to a suitable position, her waist turned to block the camera, her left hand opened her purse, and her right hand quickly and precisely slipped the lipstick inside. She had performed these actions many times before, so her movements were very skillful. It was only when she was caught this time that it came out she had stolen more than a dozen times before. Sinful desire always acts along the edge of the law, and those driven by this desire will sooner or later be caught, with the inevitable result being death.

The law, instead of restraining the lusts of the flesh, actually provokes sinful desire. Once desire is aroused, it drives the members of the body to coordinate in committing sin—this is the state of our old man. In Germany, some highways have no speed limits; the result is that everyone drives at a speed they personally feel is safe, and no one breaks any law. On American highways, if the speed limit is 60 miles per hour, most people drive between 60 and 70 miles per hour. It's not necessarily to save time, but because they feel that driving below 60 is a disadvantage, and driving above 60, though technically a violation, is usually not punishable because speed detection instruments typically have a 10% margin of

error, so the police cannot issue a ticket. What people actually follow is not the law's prescribed limit, but the limit at which they will not be penalized. This is a good example of how sinful desire is provoked by the law and then drives the members of the body to sin.

The result of sin is death, but God sent His Son, who became flesh, and through His body provided our ransom, accomplishing salvation. All we need to do is believe, and we are saved by grace, forming together the new man in Christ. Today, God continues His work of salvation in us—not only is our spirit belonging to Christ, but our soul must also undergo the process of sanctification, partaking in God's nature, and our body must live healthily before God.

God values our body greatly, as well as every member of our body. These members must work together in coordination so that we can attend the Lord's Day meetings and serve in the church. When Christ comes again, He will transform our corrupt, mortal body into a glorious, spiritual body. The completion of our salvation occurs when our body is redeemed, and that is the moment when God's salvation is ultimately fulfilled.

In these two verses, Paul leads us to recall our state before salvation, when we belonged to the flesh. The sinful desires, aroused by the law, produced acts of sin in us, bearing death as their fruit. This old man, through the body of Jesus Christ, died with Christ and was released from the law; in resurrection, he becomes a new man, belonging to Christ, and bears spiritual fruit for God. May this transformation not remain merely in doctrine or knowledge, but be an experience we live out daily in our lives.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Through Paul's description in chapter seven of our state before receiving grace, help us see how the old man operates. Although we have been saved by grace and have new life, many times our old self still rises up, and we still sin. Through Paul's depiction, help us understand how to belong to Christ, how to be freed from the power of sin, and how to be free in relation to the law. Even though we may not fully grasp all the details Paul describes, we ask You, Lord, to help us understand in knowledge and doctrine, and also to experience it

practically in our daily lives: to be released from the dominion of sin, from the corruption of the old self, and from the lusts of the flesh, so that we may increasingly be free from sin, no longer needing the law's restraint, and become people who belong to Christ. Bless my daily life, and we pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.