

The Transcendent Law of the Spirit of Life

Our real condition dawning upon us

In Romans chapter 7, Paul is discovering all the various factors that are present in living the Christian life. In verse 6 he says, “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what *we were held by*.” The Greek word translated “we were held” can also mean “retained” or “restrained.” This describes the inward drag that we feel at times. It is difficult to describe this inward drag, but it feels as though we are being held by an unseen force. This is characteristic of a person who is not in the law of the Spirit, but in the flesh with its law of sin and death. These feelings are real to us. We have all experienced them. This inward drag is just the way the flesh feels. It is part of the flesh. For example, when you talk to someone about the gospel, they may say, “I don’t feel like I’m ready.” There is a drag in them. That feeling is part of the unbelieving flesh, because the nature of the flesh is drag. So we should not relate to that feeling.

What happens through our interacting with the commandment in Romans 7:5-13 is that sin becomes exceedingly sinful. Verse 13 says, “. . . that

sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” It seems that things need to get bad enough to find out that this is not you. This is something else in you. Paul comes to this point. Then in verse 14 he says, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am [fleshly], sold under sin.” Our real condition begins to dawn upon us. In verse 14 Paul is admitting, “My real condition is dawning upon me. I am sold under sin.”

When you spend adequate time with the Lord alone — just waiting and beholding Him, and drawing from the Word and the writings, being quiet, just sitting there letting Him talk to you — often the light comes and starts to shine. When the light shines, we find out how bad our condition is. The pride is so deep. The nature of the flesh is so corrupt. We may have thought we were okay, but when the light shines we realize our corruption is bottomless! Our real condition dawns upon us.

Free to be transparent about ourselves

Let me say that until the day we die, even if we live to be 110 years old, maybe on our last day it will dawn upon us once again how utterly bankrupt this

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flesh is — that in me dwells no good thing. When this dawns upon you, and you know Who your righteousness is, you know where your source is, and you know where your supply is, you are like the most free little child that could ever be on this earth. You are freed from pretense. You are freed from your effort, your energy. You are freed from trying to be what you are not and what you will never be. You are free in Christ! You are free, rejoicing! When the church is made up of saints in this realm, the church is so genuine. Here are saints who really know that no good thing dwells in them, so they can afford, so to speak, to have a hole in the bottom of their shoe.

Years ago a professor of mine named Dr. Donald Cole told this story about himself. When he was a young boy, his dad told him, “Son, tonight we are going to have a very special person come to our home. He is a millionaire. We have to be on our best behavior.” So Dr. Cole was all prepared mentally for meeting a millionaire. Then the wealthy man came to their home. While he was talking to the father, he crossed his leg, and Dr. Cole noticed that on the bottom of his shoe there was a big hole. Dr. Cole said to himself that he could not wait until the man left to tell his dad that this man was not a millionaire, because he had a hole on the bottom of his shoe. So the man left, and he said, “Dad, I thought you said he was a millionaire.” His father said, “Well, he is.” Dr. Cole replied, “But Dad, he had a hole on the bottom of his shoe.” And his dad said, “Well, son, I want to tell you something that maybe you cannot appreciate right now, but someday you will.” Then he said, “If you had a million dollars, you could afford to have a hole on the bottom of your shoe.”

This principle is the same in our Christian life. When you have the riches of all that Christ is, you can afford to say, “I’m sorry!” You can afford to say, “Amen, that was *me!*” You can admit that you have “a hole,” even that you *are* a hole. It is only when you do not know that you are a person “in Christ” that you are afraid to be transparent and to admit you were wrong. It is only because you are still alive to self and your righteousness is in

yourself rather than Christ. But one day, after trying and trying and trying again to live the Christian life, it is going to dawn upon you that you are sold out under sin. Our irreparable condition dawns upon us, and that is the greatest day for us because we realize that we have no life apart from God. The realization of our wretchedness intensifies and forces us into fellowship with Him. This is God’s way of bringing us into Himself, because we realize, “Apart from You, Lord, I can do nothing.”

So it is no longer a matter of trying to spend time with the Lord. You do not have to set up schedules to make sure you do it, as a good religious person. Rather, you are stopped because your awareness tells you that you have no life apart from God. You cannot breathe without Him, you cannot talk without Him, you cannot react without Him, you cannot do anything apart from Him. This becomes more of a spontaneous reaction within you — that you need God — because you know your real condition. There is a lot of hope in this.

*Struggles that bring in
hopelessness about ourselves*

Romans 7:15-24 shows us the inward struggles that bring in hopelessness about ourselves. In verse 15 Paul says, “For what I am doing, *I do not understand,*” or, “I do not know,” “I do not allow,” “I do not acknowledge.” These are different ways to express this phrase. Then Paul continues, “For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.” Here we see the struggle that is going on in a person who is in the wrong realm — “What I want to do, I do not do; and what I hate, that is what I do.” He is in himself, in his good intentions. He is in a working out of this commandment. He is in the realm of trying to conquer a problem in his life, the one thing that always defeats him. If it were not for this one thing, he would feel that he is okay; but this one thing makes him feel hopeless about himself. This describes Paul in these verses, struggling in the wrong realm. This struggling happens especially in those who know the law, in those who have knowledge about

proper and improper reactions. You may know something, but what is crucial is the source you come from with that knowledge you have.

The realization of the need for Another Person!

Then in Romans 7:24 Paul cries, “O wretched man that I am!” Just look at “I am” and then look at the first word of the next phrase, “Who.” You have two persons here. “Wretched man that I am” means that I have exhausted expecting anything from myself, looking to myself, working on myself. This is wonderful. Then Paul steps out of his self-effort and says, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He has transferred from one realm to another. His words show us his realization of the need for Another Person.

Finally, Paul says, “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25). Here he has absolutely shifted, not in his experience but in his sight. Sight comes before experience. Look! Let God reveal it to you. Before you have “a track record,” before you do anything, before your experience — don’t even count experience — just see that God put you in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:30) and say, “Thank You.” That is vision, that is revelation. Then what issues out of this is living in the proper realm: “I thank God through Jesus Christ.”

We may think that Romans 7 should have ended with “I thank God — through Jesus Christ.” According to our natural view, it would have been better to end Romans 7 in this way and then go directly into Romans 8. But in verse 25 Paul goes on to say, “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” Many commentators and Bible translators have tried to analyze why Paul seems to revert back to a Romans 7 “sinkhole,” leaving the victory of Christ in the middle of the verse. They have thought that maybe the textual reading is wrong here and that they should reverse it. And some have even tampered with the text, translating it differently.

But the original Greek text records the way Paul said it. First he said, “I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord,” because he knows this is a

realm. Christ is the Person who is the factor of our total deliverance from the whole realm of the law of sin and death. Paul summarizes the real state of our situation by saying, “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” In other words, if you leave me to myself, if you leave me to my own flesh, this is the way I work. This is the way all human beings work. This is the way every regenerated person works, even with Christ in you. If you are in the wrong realm, you will find yourself saying, “so then with the mind I myself . . .” Notice the words *I myself*. Grammatically, “myself” is a reflexive pronoun. Here Paul places the emphasis back on himself. This is the wrong source — “*I myself* serve as a slave the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” In this passage and in Romans 8 Paul is admitting the real situation. He says in Romans 8:10, “And if Christ is in you, *the body is dead because of sin*, but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” This reveals how these two different realms work — the realm of our spirit and the realm of our body under the effects of sin.

If you are in the wrong realm, in yourself, and are not living up to your expectancy — not fulfilling that commandment, not overcoming — this will surely breed all kinds of feelings of being condemned. Your conscience is going to be deflated. You lose your boldness. You lose any kind of confidence in interacting with God, because you are caught in the mire of yourself. You are staying in that realm and letting it kill you. Paul said, “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me” (Rom. 7:11). Paul was condemned because he was coming from his own energies and his own striving, doing something out of himself. So eventually at the end of Romans 7 condemnation is the result — “O wretched man that I am!”

Feelings of being condemned and categorized

Because condemnation is the result of relating to the Lord in the wrong realm, the realm of the law, Paul begins Romans 8 with, “There is therefore

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The Bride of Christ

Part 2

A Relationship Permeated by Love

The church's relationship with the Lord must be permeated by love. Love must "fill the atmosphere" of the relationship between Christ and the church. We all know that in every relationship, there is a kind of atmosphere. For instance, some relationships have a formal, businesslike atmosphere. Others have a friendly, amicable kind of atmosphere. But when it comes to our relationship with the Lord, love must pervade the atmosphere. Love must dominate and control. Love must be the chief characteristic in our interactions with Him. Otherwise, how could the church be His bride? Is not a bride, by definition, someone who is so enthralled with and captivated by her bridegroom that she can think of nothing else? All of her heart and mind and soul is incessantly consumed and preoccupied with her lover. This is how the church should be toward our Lord Jesus. Love should be the predominant feature in our relationship with Him.

Of course, on the Lord's side of our relationship, there is no problem. His love for us is deep and pure. It is unwavering and everlasting. And it is strong and eternally secure. The Bible tells us that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25; Rev. 1:5), that He has loved us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3), and that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35). What a love! He gave up His own life for us not when we were lovable, but when we were very unlovable. It was *while* we were sinners, enemies of God, and dead in our sins that He offered Himself up to die on our behalf. What further proof of His love do we need? The infinite depths and absolute purity of His love were demonstrated at the cross. Moreover, His love will never run out. We know by our own experience that human love quite often runs out. But the love of Christ will never fade or diminish — it is everlasting. It is eternal. It is infinite. And finally, His love is so strong. Paul declares that nothing, including tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, or any other created thing shall be able to separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35-39). In other words, His love is more powerful than any other force in this universe! Nothing is stronger than the love of Christ. What a security! What an assurance! Hallelujah for the love of Christ.

Not only so — have you ever considered that we are being loved by the Lord as His bride? This is not just the love of a

friend, though indeed He is a Friend. Nor is this merely the love of a father or brother, though He is the "Firstborn among many brothers." Amazingly, this is the love of a bridegroom for His bride! In other words, this is the love of a romance. This is *intimate* love. Too often we think of the Lord only in terms of being a master. That is, He is the master, we are the servants, and we would never dare to consider ourselves worthy of being the objects of His intimate love. That would be unthinkable. But the Bible clearly states that the church has "ravished" the heart of Christ, and that His desire is for her (S. S. 4:9; 7:10). This is how He feels about the church! He loves the church! Though we may never have dreamed that this would be the case, it is nevertheless an unquestionable fact of the Bible. How privileged we are to be the Lord's bride, to be the sole recipients of His intimate love. No one else and nothing else in the universe is the blessed object of such love. Only the church, as His bride, experiences His intimate love.

Now let us consider our side of this relationship. Yes, the Lord loves us, but what about our love for Him? Is the church to reciprocate with love to Him? Obviously, the answer is yes. It takes two to have a love relationship. And just as a bride responds in love to a bridegroom, so the church is to respond in love to Christ. We all know that one of the great commandments in the Bible is to love the Lord our God (Deut. 6:5). In fact, this is why God made us with a heart — to love Him. We have the God-given capacity to love, but we must ask, to whom or to what did God expect us to direct our love? Certainly He never intended us to waste our love on the self, the world, or sin. He gave us the capacity to love in order that we would love our Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:24; 1 Pet. 1:8). Loving Jesus is what our heart was made for. Indeed, this is the highest use of our heart.

And what *kind* of love does the Lord expect us to have toward Him? It is not a tepid, halfhearted, or perfunctory love. It is not a secondary or mediocre love. No. We are to love the Lord with *all our heart*, with *all our soul*, and with *all our strength* (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). He is worthy of not merely a part of our heart. He is worthy of our *whole* heart. Why? Because the Bridegroom with Whom we are engaged is the very Son of God! It is not a small matter to be in such an intimate, sacred, and privileged relationship with Him. Jesus Christ is worthy of our whole heart. And since we are His bride, the Lord expects nothing less of us. Suppose you were a man who was engaged to a bride who professed her love for you, but at the same time had other loves. Yes, she has a spot for you in her heart, but she has a spot for others in her heart as well. Would that not be an insult to you? Indeed, it is an

insult to the Lord to profess that we love Him, yet love so many other things besides Him. To the church in Ephesus, He gave a strong rebuke not for lack of good works or maintaining good doctrine, but for lack of love. He told them, “You have left your first love” (Rev. 2:4). This does not mean that the church in Ephesus did not love the Lord at all. No doubt they did. It simply means that Jesus was not the object of their first, best love. He held perhaps the second or third place in their hearts. He was not first or foremost. He was not supreme. He was not the single object of their best love. The Lord Jesus expects His bride to love Him supremely, preeminently, and solely.

Regrettably, the love of the church for Christ has often become lukewarm. It has frequently grown cold (Rev. 3:16; Matt. 24:12). But the church’s love should be burning. Our hearts should be occupied with an intense desire to be with Him, to know Him, and to bathe in His love. We should be those who, as Paul worded it, “love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). That is, each day we should anticipate His coming again. Just as a bride eagerly awaits the wedding day, so the church should be eagerly awaiting the coming of her Bridegroom. It may be, though, that we do not feel such a love for the Lord. We would like to have a burning love for Christ, but we do not find that kind of love within our hearts. Then the question is, how can we get such hearts? How do we acquire such a love for Christ? The answer is quite simple. *It is by being filled with His love.* The Bible tells us that we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:10, 19). The Bible also tells us that His love has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom. 5:5). The Lord commanded us to simply abide in His love (John 15:9) and Jude charged us to keep ourselves in the love of God (v. 21). The reason our love grows cold is because we leave off abiding in Christ. We do not spend adequate time participating in His love. But as we spend time with Him, opening our hearts to Him, He fills us with the very love we need to love Him in return. Our need is simply to behold Him and be filled with Him. As we are filled with Him, the Spirit transmits His love into our hearts so that without effort we find a spontaneous love flowing back to Him. We need not stir up a fabricated love out of ourselves. We know that will never last. We need only to spend time in His presence, enjoying His beauty and participating in His love.

The Bride Must Be a Pure Virgin

How can we acquire a heart that loves the Lord? As we have seen thus far, it is by spending time with Him and being

filled with His love. But there is something additional we must see. Whenever we are filled with His love, He will begin to speak to us about items in our lives that occupy our hearts and usurp our love. We must realize that He is a jealous God — He wants our *whole* heart. We must also realize that He is the heart-knower (Acts 1:24; Rev. 2:23). He searches our hearts and knows what they are secretly attached to. He knows where our affections lie. Thus, as He fills us with His love, simultaneously He asks us to deal with all competing loves. He asks us to put away everything that our heart is drawn toward. To put it in different terms, He asks us to purify ourselves.

The apostle John says that everyone who has the hope of glory at the Lord’s coming purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:3). To purify ourselves means that we take practical steps to deal with those items that usurp our heart from being set exclusively on Him. It is not just a matter of theoretical love toward Jesus. Nor is it a matter of merely telling the Lord that we love Him. Nor is it a matter of occasionally experiencing some emotional warmth toward Christ. No, our love must go much deeper than that. There must be practical dealings in our lives whereby we rid ourselves of competing loves. For instance, if our heart is attached to the things of the world, be it money, careers, status, possessions, pleasures, hobbies, entertainment, or sports, then as we spend time with the Lord, we can expect that He will speak to us about these matters. He will search our hearts and tenderly speak to us to rid ourselves of them. And so often His requirement entails a practical dealing. It may mean throwing away a certain object. It may mean breaking off a certain relationship. It may mean terminating a certain habit that we have indulged for years. Whatever it means, often the Lord asks us to take practical steps. We may ask, why? The answer is, because our heart is most often attached to practical things. Practical things require practical steps.

Although carrying out the Lord’s requests is often painful to our self-life, it always results in one thing — more love for Him. The more we purify ourselves, the more we love Him. There are two reasons for this. First, it is because He responds to every step we take toward Him. He flows Himself out to us in a greater degree as we obey Him. And the issue is a deeper love for Jesus. Second, when we purify ourselves, the affections of our hearts are freed up to love Christ. The more our hearts are emptied of other things, the more room we have for Him to fill us with His love, and the more capacity we have to reciprocate in love to Him. But conversely, if we ignore His

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now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The condemnation he is referring to here is the kind of condemnation that categorizes you. You are being condemned over one thing in your life. That one thing in your life categorizes you as a certain kind of person — “You are this way, and you will never be any different.” It is a subjective condemnation resulting from a history of inward or outward defeat in one area. This is the particular kind of condemnation in Romans 7 and 8.

The sphere of “no condemnation”

After Paul says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,” he says, “For . . .” “For” is the Greek conjunction *gar* (γάρ), which joins verses 1 and 2. You cannot separate verses 1 and 2. They are absolutely joined together. They are married, so to speak. So you have to unscramble which one comes first. Even though verse 1 is chronologically first, it may not be first in our experience. Paul says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freed me from the law of sin and death.” Actually this verse is first in our experience and verse 1 is the issue, the result — “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The law of the Spirit of life that frees us from this realm of subjective condemnation is working and operating in only one sphere, *in* Christ Jesus. So there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. When Paul says, “The law of the Spirit of life *in* Christ Jesus,” he is telling us that this law operates and works in only one realm, and that is in Christ Jesus.

The main thing in our experience is not to consider “I myself.” This means we do not consider our feelings or our condition, but we find our repose, our rest, and our focus totally in Christ. When you and I stop solving our problems, we are freed from *the law of sin and death*. This phrase, the law of sin and death, encompasses a whole history with a scenario of interacting with yourself. It is *you* trying to overcome the flesh. It is *you* trying to fulfill the commandment. Yet all the while you are “under it,” being defeated. The law

of sin and death encompasses the whole scenario of relating to God from ourselves. We are freed from interacting with that realm and its feelings of obligation to it. Where are we freed? In one realm, in Christ Jesus. This means that you and I have to learn how to rest in and be satisfied with the finished work of Christ over us and for us and upon us. He has been made our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. Christ has become everything to us so our focus is on Him. He is the One we are oriented to. If you are oriented to yourself, to your own wretchedness, in the sense that you hope it will get better someday, then the law of the Spirit of life that is operating *in* Christ Jesus cannot free you from the law of sin and death. It operates only in Christ Jesus.

Freedom is in the realm of enjoying Christ — in the realm of the Spirit. When we are in the realm of the Spirit, we are freed from the whole realm of condemnation. When we are in the Spirit we can look at our wretched self and say that it is far worse than we even know at this moment. But we have a Christ in us Who has lived a human life, passed through death, been raised, and is ascended far above all. Now He is transmitting that victorious life into our spirit. And we know He is going to carry out this victorious life in us.

Being occupied with Christ, not self

Our occupation is not with our feelings, but with Christ. It is critical to know that the law of the Spirit of life is in Christ Jesus. It is in this sphere. The Christian life is in knowing our position in Christ. It is in knowing the facts; it is in knowing the truth and uttering it. When you know you are in Christ, and you call “Jesus!” your “Jesus” is not an ascetic practice. In Matthew the Lord said that some who pray think that by their many words they will be heard by God. Prayers, things that we know spiritually, can become works to us. There is only one place where all was finished, and that is Calvary. God is eternally satisfied with the blood of His Son. Eternal redemption has been accomplished once and for all. This truth is what hangs

as a banner over us. This is our real situation.

So our source — where we come from — is more than crucial. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus already freed us from the law of sin and death. This means that in the realm of the Spirit, in the realm of this law that is operating and working in us, we are freed from the experience of Romans 7. We are freed from expecting anything out of ourselves, freed from living in that whole realm.

The transcendent answer

Our transcendent answer to the defeating cycle of Romans 7 is union with Christ. Positioned in and focused on Christ, being oriented to Him, being freed from solving our problems — all of this issues in *no condemnation*. The law of the Spirit operates in Christ Jesus and frees us from the law of sin and death. This helps us to see that the realm of the law of the Spirit is transcendent. It is not our religious doing. It is accomplished in Christ. We need to learn how to be a person who beholds Him and enters into the depths of what He did for us on Calvary. We need to sing songs about being identified with Him and what He did. We need to take our spirit into that realm and let it feed on truth. The more we do this, the more our minds will be renewed and fixed on His Person, and the more we will be out of that other realm — the realm where we are doing it, the realm that only brings sin and death, the realm of Romans 7. The law of the Spirit that frees us is transcendent, is above, the law of sin and death. This is because we are in another Person and we are enjoying that Person. Of course, Romans 8 is just an explanation of all this.

In Romans 8 we see that the nature of our problems in relating to the Lord are in the realm of being a debtor to the flesh. But we also see the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus freeing us from the realm of the flesh. We know that we are freed from the realm of handling ourself, reforming ourself, and we are learning to cultivate Christ — what He is and has done. Then there is no condemnation, because condemnation is really due to living in the wrong realm. This is why we

experience condemnation.

What is behind condemnation?

We may think the condemnation in Romans 8 comes merely as a result of being defeated. We were defeated, so we are condemned. And this is where we stop. We stop with the fact of our defeat, concluding that this is what produced the condemnation. But God is saying, “You are freed from the condemnation that *comes from the law of sin and death*.” Go back and study that law. How does that law work? That law works in this way: your mind knows to do good so you interact with yourself, trying to accomplish “the good” out from yourself. This just brings defeat. This interacting out of your flesh is what brings condemnation. This is the condemnation Paul is talking about. It is not just the defeat side; it is the resolution side as well. It is being in the flesh — in the good flesh and then the bad flesh, and in the bad flesh and then the good flesh. By being in this whole realm, you are bringing in condemnation. You are setting yourself up for condemnation. So, we can declare, “God, thank You for Christ.” I walk right out of Romans 7, just as Paul walked out. Thank God through Jesus Christ. There is no track record, no history. There is just walking out, because I am in Christ Jesus. God put me there.

Now, by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, I am in a state of having been freed from the law of sin and death. Because I am in Christ Jesus and I have a human spirit joined to this risen One, I simply need to enjoy and exercise my crying spirit with “Abba” (Rom. 8:15). In this joined state, we are according to Christ, following what He is in us. This is how we are in the good of the Lord’s Person and finished work.

The struggle in Romans 8

There is struggle not only in Romans 7 but also in Romans 8. Have you ever noticed that at the end of chapter 8, in verse 35, there is tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and

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requests and allow our hearts to love the things of the world, then the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15). In other words, if our hearts are filled up with worldly loves, then there is no room left in our hearts to love God or for God's love to flow in our hearts (Matt. 6:19-25; 2 Tim. 4:10). How crucial it is then to heed His speaking concerning every item that competes for our affections.

Now we must realize that such a purifying process is not just for our individual Christian lives. Although most of our dealings with the Lord are individual (that is, each of us must deal with the Lord ourselves — others cannot do it for us), the goal of this whole process is corporate. Let us remember that *the church* is His bride. There is only one bride, and that bride is a *corporate* entity. Thus, the Lord desires a people who are collectively purifying themselves. Paul told the Corinthians, "I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Also, he told the Ephesians that the Lord desires to "present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that [she] would be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). In other words, the Lord wants a people who corporately constitute a virgin bride — a people who have kept themselves exclusively for Him. All of their affections are reserved for Him alone. This should be the kind of atmosphere that we enjoy today in the church life. The church life should consist of a group of believers who together simply love Jesus Christ with a burning love, who are anxiously awaiting His coming, and who are heeding His voice to put away everything competing for their affections. May the Lord's desire be satisfied and may He gain such a people on this earth!

— Kirk Eland

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sword? Then verse 36 says that for the sake of Christ we are being put to death all day long. Also, verses 38-39 mention death, principalities, powers, things present, and more. And in verse 23 there is groaning because of the sufferings of this present time. In the midst of the struggles in chapters 7 and 8, because you are under a kind of distress, you feel like you did something wrong. You interpret everything as God being against you. You think you have a relationship with a mean God.

But look at what verses 33-34 say: ³³ "Who

shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns?" Here Paul mentions condemnation again. Then he answers, "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Yet, to this we say, "But Lord, wait a minute. You do not understand. I have a problem, I have something to be condemned about. It is my problem, and I have to fix it." But Paul is saying, "Who is he that condemns?" Paul totally bypasses talking about my problem and completely re-routes me instantly to this: "It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who has been raised, who is even at the right hand of God." We may ask, "What does my problem have to do with His death, His resurrection, and His ascension?" We are solving problems, but God takes us straight to the throne to see what He did for us to bring us out of this problem realm and into being occupied with Christ. This is wonderful!

And then Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v. 35). This shows us that Paul was a person who knew there was only one realm to be in. Whether he was passing through distress, tribulation, famine, nakedness — all those kinds of struggles — he knew there was only one realm, and that in that realm nothing could separate him from the love of God. He was locked into Christ. In the same way, in our struggles we can remain locked into Christ and enjoy the transcendence of the law of the Spirit of life.

— Bill Freeman

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