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EXEGESIS OF ROMANS V-VIII

(continued)

IV. LAW AND GRACE (VI. 15-23)

(v. 15) Are we to sin then merely because we are not under law but under grace? Of course not. Are we to sin as usual, that is, because in consequence of Christ's mediating death God justifies us? No!! (v. 16) Don't you remember? No man can serve two masters. A slave belongs to *one* master as regards obedience. Christians know two alternative slaveries; they may be slaves either to sin with eternal death at the end, or to God in obedience with righteousness in heaven at the end. (v. 17) Thank God, though you *were* slaves of sin, you gave obedience from the heart to the type of teaching into which you were transmitted (or transferred)—the teaching about and of Christ, i.e. Christ's teaching about Himself. (v. 18) The perfect freedom is slavery to God. When freed from sin Christians, made Christians thereby, become the slaves of righteousness. So that, no mistake, the slavery which is perfect freedom is still a slavery. Man was *never* created free or even neutral as to what he *ought* to do. He was made free to obtemper his servitude to God. The alternative to this service which is the only perfect *freedom*, is slavery to sin which is the *perfect* slavery, although it is responsible from A to Z. At our most civilised and cultured we are never free. Only God is free. Our freedom of will is our power to choose our allegiance to God. (v. 19) I must address you in human terms, knowing the weakness of your flesh. Here is your alternative, if God gives you grace to see it and to choose properly. As you once presented your limbs enslaved to uncleanness and to iniquity, present them now enslaved to the righteousness which leads to sanctification, i.e. which contributes to a process to be made complete only after the death of the body. (v. 20) When you were slaves of sin, you were free men as regards righteousness; you can only be enslaved to one *or* the other. It is Christ Himself who declares, that no man *can* be the slave of *two* masters. Since we all must be slaves, we should choose Christ rather than sin. But: *Either—*

Or! Christian messengers (slaves of Christ) deliver Christ's ultimatum, which is executed either way for each individual, according to his chosen type of slavery. (*v.* 21) St. Paul here glances back at the pre-Christian state of his Roman correspondents. What interest did you get on the things of which you are ashamed to-day? The upshot of them is death. (*v.* 22) As it is now, liberated from sin but enslaved to God you draw interest tending to sanctification, and culminating in eternal life. (*v.* 23) Naturally, the wages of sin is death. But God's largesse is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord, the largesse of the LORD to His slaves, His property, His children as well—in Christ.

CHAPTER vii. St. Paul now proceeds to show how law binds in this life, and how death alone gives release; noting that it is the corruption of man's nature that makes the law such a burden. May I say that I consider that "law" or "the law" *in this chapter* means the law of Moses—at least primarily?

V. LIBERATION FROM THE LAW (vii. 1-6)

(*v.* 1) You are well aware, brethren (I am addressing men who know a law—Jewish Christians), that the law is a man's lord as long as he is alive. (*v.* 2) A married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is alive; if he dies, she is discharged for good from the husband [in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of heaven]. (*v.* 3) Very well, she will be called an adulteress, if in her husband's lifetime she be joined to another man. But if the husband die, she is free from the law; she is no longer to be called an adulteress, though she actually be joined to another man. The analogy is rough and imperfect, but the point is perfectly plain. (*v.* 4) You, my brethren, like the woman, are made dead to the law through the body of Christ—here the marriage metaphor is dropped—so that *you* are joined to another, Him that was raised from the dead, in order that *we* might bear fruit for God. [The "you" become "we" through Christ, by thus coming to belong to the body of Christ, the totality of which members, or limbs, constitutes the Body of which Christ is the Head.] (*v.* 5) When we were in the flesh, the sinful passions arising through the law were working in our

limbs to bear fruit unto death. (v. 6) But now, in Christ, we are discharged from the law; we have died to that by which we were once held; and now we serve (are slaves) in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.

VI. LAW AND SIN (vii. 7-25)

The following verses describe the way the law works, in view of the close connection between the law and sin. Recall vi. 14 ("sin shall not have dominion over you: ye are not under law, but under grace"), vii. 5f. ("when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions . . . wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we have been discharged . . . so that we serve in newness of the spirit"). In what follows it is *the regenerate man* who *speaks from his own experience*; such at all events is my view of the meaning. I.e., we have no picture of unregenerate experience, but the righteous man's retrospect; for he alone is in the position to assess the slavery of sin.

(v. 7) What shall we say? Is the law sin? Not at all. But I had not known sin save through (the) law. I had not known evil concupiscence ("coveting"), except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. (v. 8) But sin, receiving occasion through the commandment, wrought in me all manner of lusting (coveting). Apart from law sin is dead. [When sin gets a chance, it uses the commandment to make us covet in many ways. Were there no law, we would be unconscious of sin's *vitality*—and so of sin's existence. This is really an ethical commonplace, very commonplace and so ignored.] (v. 9) Once, says St. Paul, I lived apart from the law. But when the commandment came, sin leapt into life. (v. 10) I died; and the commandment which was intended for life turned out to be death to me. (v. 11) Sin, taking off from the commandment, deceived me and through it slew me. [Here death does not mean atrophy or paralysis of this or that living function. It means wholesale death, the kind of thing that drove St. Paul to a frenzied persecution of the Way, to a mania of hatred towards it, which the Lord alone "cured" by the vision on the Damascus road. Every law-begotten covetousness (i.e. evil concupiscence) must have leapt into a new heinousness, as the Christian looked back upon the frenzied baiter and persecutor

and understood the misery of his hatred—as Paul looked back upon Saul. Such a view of the passage is to me anything but extreme or fanciful.] (v. 12) What is the result? That the commandment defeats its intention. It has life in view; it ends in death. And life is life, and death is death—ultimates! *Either—Or!* Yet “the law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good”. Not a thing wrong with the commandment! Inherited sin, original sin, finds in the law its base of operations and outwits and deceives, and, but for Christ, kills. (v. 13) “Well, was it in any instance the good [i.e. the law] which in my case turned out to be death? God forbid! Sin, that it might be exposed *as* sin, was the cause, working death to me through the good, in order that through the commandment sin might become supremely sinful”. *Sin* is the mischief that waylaid and slew Saul. The divine intention, in his case as in so many others, was to show sin in its true colours, since it turned God’s blessing, the law, into a curse. Sin becomes, sin rather is, personal.

(v. 14) “We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin”. The law is from God who is Spirit; it has its provenance from Him, its affinities with Him. “Sold under sin” well expresses our *slavery* to sin. Many claim to see in these words a description of Saul the unregenerate. We need *not* assume the unregeneracy of Saul from his resistance to a Messiah utterly false in his eyes. Life, true life, I feel, had begun already for this Pharisee, though not yet fully Christian; of course not. No human being could describe the pre-believing state unless he were a believer, nor could he (the believer) paint it as other than a *tohu va-bohu*. Only a regenerate man can describe the unbelieving state. (v. 15) And here is the description: “That which I work I know not. What I do is not what I want to do. What I do is the thing I hate.” I am a slave, an instrument in other hands than my own. (v. 16) “But if I do that which I would *not*, I agree with the law that it is fine, beautiful, noble (*καλός*). (v. 17) In which case it is no longer I that act thus, but sin dwelling in me”. My very knowledge of my state before God is the sign of regeneration. Says James Denney: “To be saved from sin a man must at the same time own it and disown it; it is this practical paradox which is reflected in this verse. It is safe for a Christian like Paul—it is not safe for everybody—to explain his failings by

the watchword, Not I, but indwelling sin. That might be antinomian, or Manichean, as well as evangelical. A true saint may say it in a moment of passion, but a sinner had better not make it a principle." This is too paradoxical. Every converted sinner is a saint and vice versa: if you know your conversion you may say it; you cannot really say it, unless you are converted. This is clear from *v.* 18—"I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. To wish is present with me, but to effect what is noble is not. (*v.* 19) The good I wish, I do not; the evil I don't wish, that I do. (*v.* 20) But if what I wish I don't do, it is no longer I that effect it, but sin dwelling in me". Which is *v.* 17 over again; and the writer sums up the argument: (*v.* 21) "So I find the law, that when I wish to act nobly, evil is present with me". In other words, (*v.* 22) "I delight in the law of God as regards the inner man, (*v.* 23) but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin existing in my limbs. (*v.* 24) Wretched man that I am (says St. Paul, putting himself in the convicted sinner's place, the place where he had once been himself), who shall rescue me from the body of this death [from this death's body?]? (*v.* 25) Thanks be to God! God, through Jesus Christ our Lord (has done so)". Hence the dualism which wars in our members all the days of our flesh. "I myself with my mind am slave to the law of God; but with my flesh to the law of sin." And the solution, pursued in chapter viii, the solution is presented, that although we do not cast the sinful body until the hour comes at which it is appointed to us to die, yet we are justified once for all and live by and to Christ.

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