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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Wednesday evening 31 August 1927

ROMANS 7 v 25

"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So  
then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but  
with the flesh the law of sin"

This remarkable chapter may be divided into general heads. The first six verses relate to the church of God as to her standing, her relationship to God. They show that it is a new standing, that she is in a changed, and a remarkably blessed, condition; that, whereas she was, with all others, under the law, the law to her is dead, and that she is likened, in that condition, to a widow; her husband is dead; and being a widow she is free to be married to another. An important doctrine, this. How many professors there are who are not dead to the law, to whom the law is not dead, but who, notwithstanding that, attach themselves by a general and an easy profession, to Christ, the Lord alone knows exactly, but it becomes us to look into so solemn a question. Are we dead? Is the law dead to us? Has it killed us, and in killing us, died, so to speak, so that we really are as a widow? Having no husband we are free to be married again. See dear friends, if so solemn, so wonderful a condition is in you. If it is then you are at liberty, free from the first husband, the husband who is dead; he has no authority over you, no right to you. You are not to be tied to a dead husband, but, being freed from him, you are free to be married again. To whom? Jesus Christ. Dead to the law by its operation, the law dead to you by the body of Christ, and you, really in a widowed state. The Lord may take no notice of you for a time, but the day must come when He will be married to you. You will be joined to Him. This is the teaching of these first verses, a teaching which, may the Lord help us very narrowly to look into. All doctrines are indeed of infinite importance, but this, O this doctrine of being married to Christ honourably, because the first husband is dead, is very wonderful. Men die; when they are killed they die, and when the law is dead to them by the body of Christ there is the honourable state to come into, the holy state of marriage to the Lord Jesus;

union with Him. I wish this might be understood experimentally by us; that those of you who really are now under the law might come to realise that it is dead; - "That being dead wherein ye were held" - that in this case there might come to you in your experience this wonderful marriage; that you are free to be married again. Free in God's sight; free in the judgement of the gospel; free in the efficacy of the cross, and free by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Take notice of this; this may invest these verses with an importance that perhaps has not hitherto been felt by us, at least some of us.

Then the Apostle, having taught this great doctrine, asks a question. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin?" Here is a sinner under the law and all the law could do in him was to provoke sin, and condemn him for sin. The law worked wrath; wrath in God, and wrath in the affections and mind of the sinner who was provoked by its sentence. "Is the law sin?" No, it is righteous, holy, just, good. "I had not known sin" says Paul, "but by the law". I should not have known that I was a sinner but for the law coming. I was alive without it. I had no knowledge of lust, and never should have had, if the law had not come and said to me "Thou shalt not covet". Do you know what sin is? Are you troubled, any of you, that you have not properly known a law work? Now see if you know what it is to be covetous. I do not mean ordinarily, but in this particular, this powerful way, that the very thought of wishing for a thing that is not yours, is sin. And that brings out the word of God: "The very thought of foolishness is sin", and the law shows it. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment - that provoking law that forbids a mad man to go in his mad way, making him still more mad - sin in me occasioned by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence, for without the law sin was dead. There is no sin where there is no law. There could be no law if there had been no forbidding of certain things. Sin is the transgression of the law. Because the law forbade this and that, therefore taking occasion by this and madly saying I will do as I like, this sin works all manner of concupiscence in the heart, in the mind, in the understanding, in the will. "For I was alive without the law once". Now the Apostle comes to his own case. We have, as it were, left the first part of this chapter, and now, says he, I will relate to you my own case. "I was alive without the law once". I was a Pharisee and proud of being that; a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and

boasted of my pure blood. I was zealous for the glory of God, and my zeal led me to persecute the Church, for I judged the Church was altogether heretical, nothing right. I judged the Church to be wicked, and my zeal for God moved me to persecute the Church of God and waste it. That is what religion has done in the past ages and may do again. The Papists' religion has invented the Inquisition, erected the gallows, lighted the fires, to persecute the saints. Paul's religion did not make him a holy man. His Pharisaism made him a boastful creature and his ignorant zeal led him to be an injurious person, hailing to prison men and women whom he found in, and of, this hated way. But when the commandment came; when I did not read it only, but when it read me; when I not only believed that it was given by God on Mount Sinai, but it came to me as the very word and voice of the living God, and the thunder I heard, its lightning flashes I saw, then I died. And sin deceived me and I saw it had been deceiving me always. I saw that what was apparently right to me was wrong; that my way led to hell. I saw all this; sin had deceived me. O, the blessedness of being taught of God what sin is; the mercy of knowing the evil of sin as God sees it, as He judges it by the law. Sin is nothing to us except God show it to be evil in His sight. "And the commandment, which was ordained to life I found to be unto death", said Paul. As soon as the commandment came, the Apostle said, I died. I died to my goodness. The law, being just, a reflection of the perfections of Deity, comes as God's voice and God's light and shows a sinner what sin is. I have often said to you that this is the beginning of real religion. God's life and light coming into the soul whereby the sinner realises something of God; then he knows something of himself.

Now this was Paul's experience. "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" Not in itself. "God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful". Look at a fabric in the dark, or a very dim light; it may be full of faults but you do not see them. Put it under a powerful light, then its faults become exceedingly clear to you. So with regard to our nature and our life. Seen in our own miserable light, which is but darkness, it is not very wrong, if anything at all. But let the pure light of God in His law come and shine on the same thing, the same action, the same motive, the

same empty profession, and it will make sin, in each of these particulars, exceeding sinful, and, says the sinner, now I know that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin". Does not this make us poor creatures? Does not it make us great sinners? And does not it cry death on all forms of religion that do not lead to the Lord Jesus? Does not it make us poor, empty things?

Empty of good and full of ill

A lifeless lump of loathsome sin

nothing better.

And now the Apostle enters upon a very painful experience which he had. This law working in him brought him very low. But now he comes to another law, the law of sin in his members. This law of sin rules in every man, woman, and child, but it is only known, felt and mourned over, by the grace of God. Each quickened and exercised child of God, will feel in their measure what Paul describes here. "That which I do I allow not". Though I really hope, and at times believe, that I hate sin, that I do not sin wilfully, yet this law of sin in my members is too strong for me except the Holy Spirit strengthens the new man to prevail over it. When feelingly brought into captivity, and grieving over it and my sins, it is true as Paul said, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me". This was Paul's experience. I do what I allow not, what I do not love. What I would do out of my heart, in the fear of the Lord; what I would do, with regard to faith, and hope, and love; what I would do in secret, realising that that is my life; what I would do, I cannot do. What I hate, I do. What a strange experience. No wonder that people who come to a so-called perfection in religion and in their nature say that this was not the experience of regenerated Paul. I do not wonder. I would not; but for some experience of a painful nature, I should not be disposed to believe this myself of the Apostle Paul. But O it was so. It is so. It was so with him; it is so with us. But now if we really had power to follow the bent of our regenerated hearts, which way should we turn? Should we run willingly into evil or sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus? Should we boast with the Pharisee or pray with the publican? Should we run after some sin or follow after the Lord? This may be a proper way of testing ourselves at times. "The

good that I would I do not". I would fear God, I would be tender, I would be spiritually-minded, I would mind the things of God. I would seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. I would leave the world, its enmity, its bitterness, its ignorance, its ways, its foolish and wicked passions; I would leave it. I would leave a name to live and have only that blessed life of the Lord in my soul. I would leave frivolities and cleave to His holy Word, and follow Him in my spirit. This is the good that a man born again would do. Ask him if he does it. No, he says, I know Paul's complaint. I do it not. I know it for myself my friends and some of you know it. We hope one day to be away from all this, but as we now are this is our painful experience. But then he had an unction, a teaching from heaven, which enabled him to conclude, what sometimes we would like to conclude, if it could be true of us, "Now then, it is no more I that do it". I myself - the man called as he approached Damascus, to whom Jesus appeared; the man who was baptised in Damascus; that man who later saw unutterable sights and heard unutterable things when carried up to the third heaven - I, (look at this), I do not the evil. Sin that dwelleth in me, the law of sin - (here you get another law; not the law of God, it is dead to me by the body of Christ; but the law of sin in his members, the law which desires to reign) - that asserts itself, claims obedience. The law that comes upon the mind, the law of sin, seizing the affections, guiding the thought and the eye, setting forth certain things before it; this law, do not you know it? I know it. "Sin that dwelleth in me". Can you make this distinction in your own cases? Could you write a letter as Paul wrote these words? Could you write a letter to a godly friend and say, now I am a good deal troubled. I have got a law in my members and it captivates me, it robs me, it steals what I have had, as I hope, from heaven. Steals away my evidences, darkens my mind, confuses me in my thoughts, and yet I am able to say this, I do not do those things. Can you say it? The inward man, the inner man, this inner man, he does not those things, nor does God impute them to him. And he knew this; "I know that in me, (that is in my flesh)" - this corrupt, old man - "dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." It all hangs on this; I would not do it. I, in my mind, my affections, my will, my thoughts,

do not those things. Have we the gracious wisdom enough to make this distinction in our own sad experience of the law of sin? "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" - this is the law of sin in his members - "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man". This is another law. And what law? Not of Sinai, for that is dead, as dead as a husband who is buried, that is dead. But there is a law on Calvary, a law proceeding out of Zion, the house of the Lord built on the top of the mountains, and above all the hills. There, there is a law; it proceeds from the Saviour. This is the law after which, in the inward man, the Apostle delighted, and after which, thanks be to God, some of us delight. O the cross, what a delight it has been to us. Free grace, what a delight. Sovereign, electing love, what a delight. Predestination to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, what a delight. "I delight in the law of God"; in the gospel, in the promises, in the precepts, in the directions of God, in His holy gospel; in this I delight. It is a great mercy to be made to say this, at times

O Lord I would delight in Thee  
And on Thy care depend

"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" and the effect of that was his misery, here expressed. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" O wretched, miserable sinner that I am! Who shall come and take me out of this bondage, deliver me from this wretched body of corruption that is tied on my back? A solemn question; do you ask it? If you have got the body tied to you, you do. O, the sickness of it, the shame of it, the poison of it, the weight of it. Who is able? And as to all creatures, there is but an echo; Who? But as to Christ there is the answer. "I thank God". My beloved brethren I would for a few minutes direct your attention to this, the triumphant cry of faith that reaches out beyond the mist of time, beyond the mist of evil, of sin - that poison. Such a faith looks beyond all present, painful things, beyond even that present, that painful, that defeating thing, the law of sin. The Apostle looked beyond all these things, and he saw a mighty deliverer, a Saviour travelling in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save. He saw One whose garment was dipped in

blood, who gained a victory over sin and death on Calvary's cross; who appeased divine anger by His vicarious death. He saw Him, and so he said: "I thank God". He sent His Son to die; His Son became obedient unto death. He died a wondrous death. Death is ignominious to men, but Christ's was glorifying to God. That glorious death seemed shameful to men, full of indignity, but glorious before God, being the one offering for sin. This, by faith, was Paul's liberty. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". The doctrine that emerges from this, to which I would just draw your attention, is this, that the only hope of a sinner born again, burdened with a body of sin and death, defeated frequently by the law of sin which is in his members, the only hope of such a sinner of deliverance, final deliverance, and deliverance in experience from time to time, is in God in Christ. Now that will do; we need nothing else; we can have nothing better. We need nothing else. All remedies for our soul sicknesses, all deliverances from our captivities, all healing of our broken bones, all blessed outlooks, and all gracious outgates, as the Scotch would say, we have here. To use Paul's glorying word: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Now dear friends, I am sure you approve of this doctrine. Burdened and grieved and shamed as you are, you approve of this doctrine, do not you? As warmly, as heartily, as understandingly as Mary approved of Jesus Christ when, having the privilege granted to her, she sat at His sacred feet. Nothing hasty in that choice; just a deliberate, believing, humble choice of her heart to sit at His sacred, gracious feet and learn of Him. This is the loadstone that will catch the life of grace in you. This is that that will make you say

I could from all things parted be  
But never, never Lord from Thee

This is that that inspires a living hope in the soul and brightens it from time to time. This is that that says, in Christ God has, by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, afforded strong consolation to such as I am; fleeing, having fled, still fleeing from the wrath to come to lay hold of the hope set before me. This is the thing, this is the point. May we be at it. This is the

gate, may we be waiting at it. This is the door of hope and the door into heaven.

It is clear that the Apostle had received some very gracious manifestations of the Lord to him in his conflict and that had brought the Lord Jesus before him. He unites the Father and the Son in this exclamation: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We need distinct things. Sin is a distinct evil, a distinct power, a distinct poison, a law in the members, issuing commandments, bidding the sinner obey. Sin is an evil and indeed strictly there is no other evil existing. Sin is the only evil in existence. Trouble is regarded as an evil, and it may be an evil as sent from God for punishment, but strictly there is only one evil, and that is sin, and that is distinct, and distinctly known by the people of God. Now if it be so, that on this wrong side there is distinctness, shall there be no distinctness on the right side? If you say, I know, I feel I am a sinner; I know and feel my sins in a certain way; I realise that I am wrong here, and I am wrong there, is the remedy just to be indistinct? If you see yourself to be vile, are not you then to see, in a state at any rate, to see that there is a blessed holiness for a sinner? If you distinctly feel unjust, is there not in you a capacity, so to express it, to receive and distinctly feel justification? "I thank God". He had got something to thank Him for. We all have something to thank God for. Our being, without its sinfulness; the measure of health we have, every breath we draw free from pain, every meal to which we sit down, and all the comforts of our homes, the sweetness of relationships, these, these are things for thankfulness. That we live in a world where liberty is had, and where at least there are still some little bits of Protestantism, and where also, thanks be to God, there are a goodly number of saints. These are things for which we should be thankful. But O the one thing to be thankful for, above all others - that for which we should take the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God - is I thank Him through, I thank Him for, and I thank Him in Jesus Christ our Lord. This is exclusive of all other things. He contains all that we need; that we can ask. All life; "I give unto My sheep eternal life." All righteousness; "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord Our Righteousness". All holiness; He is made sanctification. All wisdom; He is the wisdom of God. And all victories, all redemption. The man who looks for any



spiritual good apart from the cross of Christ, from the Person of Christ, is, in that, looking for vanity, for what does not exist.

And then the Apostle had received something; he had received something. So have some of us, have not we? He said, I had a revelation. "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me". And that is what is wanted by many; by all who fear God - a revelation such as the Apostle speaks of in the Ephesians, when he prays that that highly favoured church might have given to it the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. That they may have also a revelation of the mystery that a poor Gentile is united to Christ, equally with an elected Jew. We need this revelation. Dear friends, we need His Word. In that amazingly beautiful, spiritual chapter, the 17 John, the Lord Jesus says to His Father, I have given these, My disciples, Thy word. "The Word Thou gavest Me I have given them". May we not make a mistake in thinking that when we have the Bible Christ has given His Father's Words to us. The two things are not the same. You may have the words of Christ given to you when you are reading the Scriptures; you may have them given to you when you are not reading the Scriptures. Some may be spoken to you here, or on your knees, when you are in trouble, but they must be given. "That Thou givest them they gather". And Paul had promises. O, fear not, said the Lord to him, abide in this city, for I have much people here. Fear not, He said, when he was in that dangerous position with all with him on board; the ship shall be broken, but not one with you shall miss; God hath given you all. Now my friends, when we are in trouble, we want something from God. I ask myself sometimes, what have you had from God? What has He said to you? Do you not ask the same? What has God said to us? And has He promised victory? Has He promised that where He is there we shall ultimately also be? Now this is it. "I thank God." I shall get through this trouble, I shall be rid of this enemy, I shall be delivered from this body of sin and death. Trouble I shall have while I live, but I shall come through it. What a mercy it is to have a gift from God, in, and from, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now in conclusion he says: "So then with the mind I myself" - I, the Apostle Paul, the man quickened and converted just near Damascus; the man to whom God sent Annanias to preach the gospel and proclaim salvation - "serve the law of God". And one can say a poor sinner in

Galeed, in his room in trouble, serves God. Lord, he says, I gladly would submit, I gladly would give my will up and have Thine only. I gladly would cast my burdens on Thee and my fears and bring them to Thee. I gladly would walk with Thee and leave the world behind. This is serving God with the mind. You have got a mind; it is expressed in the Romans in the 8 chapter, a spiritual mind, minding the things of the Spirit, the things that belong to Christ and come by the Spirit; the things of the Spirit. Now my friends, it is not a state of mind above the world in a sense. It is not a state of mind abstracted from all care and difficulty and afflictions. But under all that may come, and especially with respect to the law of sin, in that state, and with this cry hardly out of his heart, "O wretched man that I am", in that state and with that cry he says "I thank God" I shall be brought through. I shall be brought honourably to my grave, I shall say, I have finished my course, I am ready to be offered up, ready to depart. O what a blessed faith, what a blessed faith. I with my mind serve the law of God. Let me again say, this must be another law, different from that which is in the first six verses spoken of, and then indeed in the other verses. This is the law of love, the law of Christ under which all His dear people are. I serve that law, I fear God. I quit the world, I leave the things of it. I would quit myself if I could. This myself is my burden, my grief, my snare, and my weakness, my shame, but I do serve God. Come now, you who are full of fear, and often of confusion, what have you to say to this? Dare you say it does not belong to you? What would that mean? It would mean that you deny you fear God, that you desire Him, that you seek Him. With my mind, I myself - that self that is going to heaven, that is dear to Jesus, that is the purchase of His precious blood, that has grace, the quickening, and the enlightening, and again and again the enlivening grace of the Holy Ghost, that self, I myself - serve the law of God. "But with flesh" - the old man, corrupt according to the deceitful lusts - "the law of sin." The law of sin; the law of sin was never issued by the Lord; it never came from heaven. God will destroy it one day in the church; it will never disturb her in heaven. It has disturbed her here; it does disturb her. It has wrought confusion, it has scattered saints, it has divided churches, it has withered many good things, but it never came from heaven. Think of it, dear friends, whose faces are toward Zion and God; think of it. The law of sin, it has no divine authority in you. It is an opposer of God in

every saint, and it is destined, not only again and again to be defeated in each tempted saint, but it is destined to be destroyed. Zion one day will be in heaven; there with her Lord, there with her husband, and no law of sin, no contrary affections, no passions, no lust, no covetousness, none of these evils will be there. Well, may the Lord help us to lift up our heads, believing that our salvation is nearer than when we believed at the first, believing that He will not forsake the work of His Own hands, but that there is now no condemnation to us and that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

AMEN.