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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 5 October 1927

Romans 7 v 6

But now we are delivered from the law, that
being dead wherein we were held: that we should
serve in newness of spirit and
not in the oldness of the letter

There are two covenants in the Holy Scripture in one of which we are. Out of these covenants grow two dispensations of God in the world toward men. These covenants are the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Under the covenant of works God makes a just claim on men. If you take your tale of perfect obedience God will accept that and give you your wages, but if you fail in one jot or tittle of that covenant then the terrible sanction, the curse of that covenant, will come upon you, if you live and die in it - "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them". With nations, communities and persons under this covenant, God deals, and according to their behaviour, so they find, or will find, He deals with them. Conditions are in it; inexorable claims it makes. We have no right to absolve ourselves from our obligations; we have no power to do so. As God's creatures we are dependent on Him. As His subjects we ought to obey Him. This is our condition, this is our state before God as His creatures and His subjects. This law holds us; it must hold us. Christ did not come to destroy it but to fulfil it on behalf of those in whose cases, for whose persons He became a Surety, whose debts He undertook, whose liabilities He undertook to meet. This law holds all who are under it. It is likened to a husband and that intimates the close relationship and the binding duty of a person under it and further it intimates that the person under it can never be free from it so long as it lives. How many professors there are who think themselves free from this husband and by profession say that they are married to Jesus Christ while yet their first husband lives, the Lord alone knows, but it is a very solemn thing for any person to profess union with Jesus

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Christ before the law is dead to them, before they are dead to it. Look at this my friends, look this in the face as a great truth, that if the law is not dead to you you have no right to be married to Jesus Christ. You cannot have two husbands at the same time. The law is likened to a husband. He is a good husband, that is to say, the law is good. It is spiritual, it is good. Good in this, that it is absolutely just in this that it will always reward obedience when the obedience meets its requirements, that is when obedience is perfect. Not enough to do well today and cease to do well tomorrow. It must be always. It is a good law, no flaw in that with respect to people who are under it, but this it cannot do; it cannot justify a sinner; it cannot give life to a dead person; it cannot smile on sin; it cannot allow transgression. It is just the expression of the holy nature of God, the manifestation and declaration of His will and, being so, it is good, it is just. But, being so, it is very severe on disobedience. How do you stand with respect to this husband, the law? The Apostle says "The woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he liveth". This intimates a very serious condition of things with regard to sinners. If the law be dead the woman, the wife, is free to be married again. Look at this point. You cannot kill the law yourself. It can kill you. You cannot liberate yourself; it will always hold you until it dies. But if it is an everlasting covenant in respect of what God gave it, how can it die: How can it ever be dead to a person? How can that law that God gave, that He wrote in our nature when He wrote it in the pure heart of Adam, how can that law ever die? Does the Scripture afford us an answer? Yes, a blessed answer, a saving answer. The answer is this that there came another, another Man and made Himself under that law, or His Father made Him under that law, and every duty, ever debt, every sin, and all the curse of that law due to persons He represented He undertook, he fulfilled, and came at last to death itself, and He died. In no other way can the law be dead to us, can we be dead to the law. This becomes an experience, a very solemn experience. It becomes an experience first by the Holy Spirit bringing the law as the Apostle tells us in this chapter - "The commandment came, sin revived and I died", but not the law at that point. The law did not die just then to him; he died to it; by its killing authority, by its just commandments he died. Sin revived, sin that he did not know to be sin before. The sin of zeal for the glory of God under a very mistaken

notion of what the glory of God was. He was zealous, as he thought, for the glory of God and that zeal was altogether mistaken and wicked for it led him to persecute Jesus Christ. But he was brought under the law, he was led into Damascus a poor, blinded, condemned creature. His companions in that wonderful journey heard something, they saw the lightning, they fell to the ground, but they heard not the voice that spoke to Paul. "Saul, Saul why persecutest thou Me?" He was led into that city and very quickly the law became dead to him for Ananias went to him. "Brother Saul" he said "the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest hither hast sent me unto thee that thou mayest receive thy sight. Arise and be baptised and wash away thy sins." Christ came to him and the law was dead to Saul, was dead to him. And that is how we must know that the law is dead to us. Dead first on the cross, dead by the death of Christ. That is the only way first of all. O doctrine underlies all experience that is good. The doctrine of the gospel underlies all gospel experience and may we be made clear in this. It was a beautiful thing for Saul of Tarsus, afterwards Paul, so to find the law dead to him. The law that bound his sins to him was taken away by the truth of Christ's death for him, as Peter said of Christ - "Who Himself bear our sins in His own body on the tree that we, being dead to sin, should not live any longer therein". Now this is not a divorce. The law allows nothing of that to a sinner. It says, you belong to me, you belong to God as His creature, you belong to Him as His subject, and I shall hold you; you cannot divorce or liberate yourself. No, it is a death, and then the poor woman is a wife of youth, refused, till the Lord Jesus comes and says "I have married you". A wonderful experience this. It invests true conviction, what we ordinarily call a law work, with a remarkable solemnity, divinity, if I may so express it. It puts a beauty and a glory upon the law, and that beauty and that glory the sinner recognises, he feels. He says with Paul - The law is good but I am wrong; that is right. It is spiritual; I am carnal, I am sold under sin. It is not everyone that passes through the law work in a way of distinctness so as to express it as Paul expresses his own experience, but sooner or later the sinner knows that by the law is the knowledge of sin. If you know sin in this way you know it by the law. Sin is the transgression of the law, and the man who is arrested may not be able to say he was arrested by the law - no word of curse came to him perhaps - but he has been

arrested. He is arrested, he is convinced, he knows God. I would always maintain this, that when a person is born again, a measure of life and light is given to him whereby, first of all, he sees God and in the measure in which he sees God, he sees himself, he sees his sins, and that work of conviction is by the law. "By the law is the knowledge of sin". But now, we who have gone through this, Paul and all following him, were delivered from the law. It did not give us up; it died, as Paul says. It may be a gradual work but, as he says in the Hebrews, "That which waxes old and decayeth is ready to vanish away" and, as Christ comes, so the law goes. There is one sweet inshining today and, in the measure of that inshining in the heart, the law, under which a person may be suffering and labouring, weakens and has not the same great authority in him that it had before, but it becomes dead to him. "That being dead wherein we were held". And this expresses the most wonderful truth, that the law has no more to say to the sinner to whom it is dead. And as it can only express curses where sin is, it can no more express a curse against a person to whom it is dead. Oh child of God, see the liberty that you have, see the wonderful liberty that God has given you. As a husband dies and is buried out of sight, so the law, as a husband, died when Jesus said "It is finished". And, as Moses was buried by the Lord and no man could find his grave, so the law is put out of sight, out of the way, and no child of God shall ever find him again. He may have a fear, many convictions, many a qualm of conscience, many a smiting in his conscience, but he will never be under the curse of the law; that is dead. "That being dead", dead as a covenant. As a covenant binding you it is dead. A covenant only remains in force so long as there is life. This covenant of works dies by the body of Christ. May we be brought into an experience of it. The foundation of all gospel liberty is the death of the law. All liberty to pray is by that death; all liberty of access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, is in that death. All bright hopes, all inshining of grace, all love visits, all sweet promises, all sights of the gospel, come from this great thing. We are free from the law and are under another dispensation. Touches of love never come by the law, but by grace. Sweet smiles on God's face never come by the law, but from God in Christ reconciling us to Himself. Promises of help never come from the law, but from the gospel. I say again, O child of God, see what a liberty you have from that husband that, though good in himself, can

only be severe to you as a sinner.

"That being dead wherein we were held". This holding is known in the continued conviction of sin. It is known by the binding of the spirit, by the shutting up of the sinner, so that he has no liberty, no comfort, no peace. The law pursues him, threatenings pursue him, the sword hangs over him, hell is opened to him. What can the law do but this? When it is different, and as it became dead to the church by the death of Christ, so it becomes dead to a sinner in a way of gracious experience. I would like, if enabled, for a few minutes just to point this out, how the law becomes dead to a sinner. I just quoted a Scripture that is very beautiful - "That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away". Two dispensations are there set forth. One of them waxes old and decays and is ready to vanish away. It is just so with the law of God. It comes in all its stringency, in all its inexorable commandments and says to the man it arrests "Pay me that thou owest". It may not come to some of you in exactly that way, but you had convictions, and have them; strong, or perhaps not very strong, but conviction. Convictions of the Being and the majesty and the omnipotence and the justice of God. I sometimes think I am a little thankful for the way in which the good work was started in my own case. Distinctly I remember that the first ray of light that was in my conscience, with, I trust, life in my soul, brought me to say this - "Where that God is I shall never be". The more we know of God as He shows Himself in the law, the more we are ready to flee away from Him, the more we shrink, because He is holy and we are unholy, because He is just and we are unjust. Now this binds the soul, this keeps before the soul its desert. The law deserving and the hell deserving of the sinner is realised, and solemn is the realisation of it. The state of the sinner is very solemn in his own conscience and so long as this is alone there is nothing but condemnation and a deserved hell before the sinner. This husband, O he is so severe. He says you have been unfaithful to me, you have broken all my commandments, you have never obeyed me at all, and the sinner says, it is so, it is true. When you feel full of sin, do not do one thing. Do not say the devil tells you so. He does not; it is not his business except sometimes, when a person feels his sin, the devil comes and tries to press that poor creature into despair. But it is the law that tells a man he is a sinner. It is God, in the law, that tells him so. Then this poor

creature is driven; O the driving, O the hard thoughts of God that come into his spirit. O the judging of God now and again, as perhaps with respect to some things in providence. There the man is; he is just a condemned person and he sees no way of escape. But perhaps, after a time, before liberty comes there is some hint, some inkling of the gospel dropped upon his spirit. Perhaps some view sweetly, suddenly, comes into his soul of the blood of Jesus Christ and he really believes there is a remedy in that blood. He does not feel able to believe that it is a remedy for him, but the sight does affect him; O it deeply moves him. It may rise in his spirit "Perhaps He shed that blood for me", and if you can follow this as having been your own experience or as perhaps being your experience now, you will see, as the Lord may enable you to see, what a kind work of the Spirit this is, what tenderness there is in this, that He who has administered rebuke and brought conviction and smitten you down by that holy and just and good law of God, should come in another way and dispensation and let the gospel, in some few drops of it, fall upon your soul. How welcome these drops are. O when I first got a sight of what the blood of Christ could do, it affected me very deeply. It is a wonderful thing to see what the blood of Christ can do, You may say, it has not done it. No, but it will do. O but to see what it can effect in a person. Well now that causes the law to wax old and begin to decay in your conscience. It begins to decay as to its power in you because that Holy Spirit comes into you and is in you a Spirit of grace and supplications. Yes, you may have said in your simplicity, "Lord, I cannot rise from my knees till I get in my soul what the blood of Christ can bring". You may make a mistake, but the Lord is not displeased with that. What He is pleased with is the prayer. He takes no notice of the mistake so as to reprove you for it. When a parent is teaching a child to walk, his stumblings are not an offence to the parent. A poor creature who prays mistakenly thinks I must have offended the Lord in saying such and such things, and perhaps you feel one day, I will go and ask the Lord to forgive me for being too bold. I once, in my early days, did that and I found, instead of saying that to Him, I was more bold still. The work of the gospel is very wonderful, its degrees are very remarkable. Watch them. O, any of you under the law, watch these movements of the gospel in you; take very particular notice of any touch of mercy, any glimpse of Jesus, any view of His righteousness that may be given to you. Take

particular notice of them, for this is the gospel coming to turn out the law, or rather, to keep to the word of the text, to kill it, that it may become dead to you. But the thing that does it, after all the motions, movements, energy, faith, hope, all those things, together with repentance and humility, the thing that does the turn is Christ coming, claiming you, a wife of youth, refused, and saying "I am married to you; you belong to Me. I have bought you with My blood". That does it. O sweet moments, never to be forgotten, when sin was removed from the conscience, when the Lord was reconciling you to Himself and when you were clearly delivered, and said in your spirit "Now it is as easy for me, would be as easy for me, to die as it is to lay my head on this pillow". This is being dead to the law, the law being dead to the sinner. A separation, a true, real, everlasting separation from a killing commandment.

Now see the end, the fruit of this, that we, thus blessed, should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. When we tried to pray under the law, what terror there was, what bondage was felt, what woe filled the heart, what guilt was on the conscience. Now that being removed as a great load, and the law being killed by the gospel in us, we serve God differently. There is a difference in the experience, in the feeling, in the apprehension of the person, who worships and serves in newness of spirit. He goes to God as a person who knows his God. "I will give them a heart to know Me that I am the Lord". He knows God as a Saviour, not a stranger, not a smiter, not frowning, not cursing, not keeping the sinner at a distance, not repelling him and holding him at a great distance, but as a Saviour. The sinner comes to Him, and He says "Come unto Me". Beautiful is that word of Joseph's to his brethren when he said "I am Joseph" and they trembled at his presence, but he said to them "Come near to me". He said "Come near, I am not angry, though lord of Egypt. I am not angry, I am not against you. Come near to me". And they came near. You know what that means, when sometimes you are indulged to get very near the Lord, very near to Him; no frowning of you away, no repelling of your approaches, and your humble advances, no turning away from your requests, but an encouraging, a drawing, a sweet power on your soul, enabling you to open your mouth wide and, having a little heaven in your heart, you ask for more of it. Having peace in your conscience, you pray for a continuance of it, an increase of it and He

smiles the while. You serve the Lord in righteousness and it is said in the Old Testament, in Malachi I think, that the people shall bring to the Lord an offering and it shall be pleasant to Him. But what have I to bring, one may say, that can be pleasant to the Lord? A broken heart, a contrite spirit, a trust, a relying faith, an appropriating faith. Sometimes, a saying "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" and sometimes feeling you can say in some matter what the Apostle Paul said in the matter of his hearing a voice from Macedonia "Come over and help us". He said "Assuredly gathering that it was the will of God that we should go, we went". And you will find sometimes that by this and by that teaching and mercy you assuredly gather that the Lord has "thoughts of peace to you and not of evil to give you an expected end", and you serve the Lord in that way and bring an offering to Him in righteousness, a pleasant offering. "The offering of Judah" He says "shall be pleasant", pleasant to Him. O what a wonder, is it not, that we, poor, unworthy sinners, still full of sin, with no proper reason to hope that we shall, as long as we live, be free from sin, should, notwithstanding, have grace given to us to take an offering that shall be pleasing to the Lord. We serve Him in newness of spirit when, though we have been unwise and spent a little money the Lord has given to us, and experience something of what Solomon says "There is oil and treasure to be desired in the dwelling of the wise but a fool spendeth it up", and we have to say, we have been that fool, yet a newness of spirit in us, that is the gospel of Christ, a full Christ, a glorious Christ, says "Now come unto Me", and faith goes to Him. Faith goes to Him for a fresh supply, more grace, more faith, more hope, more love more power and a nearer approach to God and a closer sense of union; that is newness of spirit. The law keeps a person at a distance from God. Said God to Moses, when He was about to give the law in that peculiar and marvellous form, tell the people not to come near the mount. Fence the mount round about; do not let them approach it. So everyone under the law knows what that means. You may not come near holiness divine. But now the gospel acts a kinder part and says to the worthless "Come near". "Come near" said Joseph to his guilty brethren "Come near to me. You sold me, but come near to me. I am your friend, your brother; I am Joseph, and I will keep you alive, I will nourish you. So Jesus says that in spirit, "I will nourish you. Look on Me whom you have pierced; I will nourish you; I was sent to the

cross for your life. My death shall nourish you, shall be the bread of life to your souls. Come near". And we go to Him. We go relenting and repenting and we go with trouble and sorrow and we get nourishment and mercy, free mercy, mercy converting, mercy sustaining, mercy helping and mercy comforting.

"That we should serve Him in newness of spirit" when in trouble. we can say, the Lord will help us through. That was good service, that was good service that the Apostle Paul rendered to God, in newness of spirit, when he said to all with him on that ship that was to be broken, and he knew it was to be broken "I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me". Abraham served God in newness of spirit when he believed the Lord in His promise and it was counted to him for righteousness. Go, my friends, go to God in Christ, and every time you do that you serve Him in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Go with your troubles; He will take them and take you with them. He will bear the lot, He will bear everything. This is serving Him when you cast your burden on Him as Peter says "Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you". The law says, you brought all this on yourself; bear it. The law wont let you get relief. Sin brings trouble, and trouble is bound on us by the law. Now the gospel is different; it is another dispensation, another manner of God's dealing with a sinner, another manner of His expressing His mind to the sinner. He says "I am married to you; I am your husband, you are My charge. My wife, My care, and all your happiness I have designed and will accomplish. Thus, when we go to Him in our weakness, as well as in our wickedness, and look to His blood and righteousness, we serve Him in newness of spirit.

And one more word. When we can go to Him in a dispensation that mortifies the flesh, that brings out the stubbornness of a perverse will, and from the heart, through the Holy Spirit moving us, can say, "Thy will be done" (not easy, but good) that is serving Him in newness of spirit. A new dispensation bringing new affections, new service, new views of God, new views of the way in which He will have us to walk. Walk by faith; saved, not by works, but by grace; justified, not by the deeds of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. "We conclude that a man is justified without the deeds of the law".

"Being justified by faith we have peace with God".

Now dear friends, look into this matter. See who your husband is, to whom you are married, to whom you owe everything. Do you owe yourself to the law? It is a terrible debt you owe, a debt you cannot pay. But are you in this happy state, though troubled perhaps in many ways, that Christ is your friend and, you hope, your husband. Then He says, now come and serve Me. All My service is just this, "Depend on Me, depend on My grace, and on My power and on My promise and on My love". That is all the service He will have, all He asks.

May the Lord bring us to a point and give us to understand that this is true, that the only real liberty and deliverance from a broken law is union, sweet union with the Lord Jesus.

AMEN.