

"Dead to the law."

F. B. Hole.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 13, 1921, page 195.)

Romans 7 is mainly a chapter of experience, yet, even so, the first six verses are occupied with what is doctrinal, with a statement of the bearing of Christ's death upon the believer in relation to the law. Verse 4 in particular sets that forth.

Verse 1 reminds us that death sets a term to law's dominion, being, so to speak, the boundary of law's domain. Verses 2 and 3 illustrate the working of that fact by referring to its operation in the relationship of husband and wife. Verse 4 gives the great application of the fact before the mind of the Spirit in connection with the death of Christ. The believer has died to the law in the death of Christ. His history, as under law, was judicially ended there.

We say judicially ended, to distinguish from what may be historic or experimental, but perhaps an illustration may be helpful.

A great lawsuit comes on before the courts, let us suppose. It turns upon the validity of a will disposing of a vast estate, and its result is a judicial decision which destroys the title of the man in possession of the property and establishes that of the claimant. Here, then, at once, the former owner's hold upon the property is *judicially* ended. For a few days, however, he is still in residence in the ancestral mansion, and then he has to turn out bag and baggage, and the new owner enters amid congratulations of servants and retainers. The former owner's hold upon the property is now *historically* ended. Even yet, however, there is much to be done. There are many agents and factors, and a host of accounts to be transferred and small details settled. After some months the last item is closed. The whole transfer in all its ramifications is complete. The former owner's hold upon the property is now *experimentally* ended.

The illustration is as usual imperfect, but it serves to distinguish between what was fully accomplished judicially at the cross, and what is reached historically at conversion; and, again, that which is experimentally learned and accepted by the believer. This last is not something which takes place once and for all, but something to be wrought out "line upon line, here a little and there a little" under the teaching of the Spirit of God.

In verse 4, then, the law is considered as the old husband. Up to Christ, the Jewish saint naturally turned to it for the direction and counsel he needed, and yet, at the same time as he obtained the counsel he got also a deep sense of his own shortcoming and necessary condemnation if law without mercy were applied to his case. Psalm 119 is a fine example of "wifely" affection for the old husband. The law is magnified under many different titles, and the spirit of the whole is, "oh, how I love Thy law!" (ver. 97). Yet all through are interspersed confessions of failure judged by its holy standards, cries for quickening — the law never could quicken (Gal. 3: 21) — and prayers for deliverance.

We, however, have been made dead to the law "by the body of Christ," i.e., by His death, for He took the body prepared for Him in order that He might suffer (Heb. 10: 5-9). Having thus died and our connection with the law having thus been judicially dissolved, the object in view is that we should be "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead."

The believer then is to look up to the risen Christ as the One with whom his new links are formed — links of a far finer and tenderer character than ever existed in connection with law. Do we want

support, direction, wisdom, counsel, all those things, in short, for which the wife should turn to the husband? — if both are according to the divine ideal — we turn to Christ risen with whom all our associations now are. He is the living Source of them all. Under His love, and direction and fostering care, the believer brings forth fruit unto God.

"Beautiful!" we probably ejaculate in our minds. "The idea is wholly admirable; but, oh, when one comes to take it up as a matter of experience — to work it out experimentally — how deep are the troubles into which we are plunged."

Exactly. Hence the wonderful passage, verses 7 to 25, experimental in the highest degree, which follows. These troubles and exercises, this anguish of mind, are all portrayed from the rich knowledge which Paul himself had of the practical working of the thing.

It is noticeable that in this passage the first streak of light amidst the gloom is when he reaches the knowledge of the utter badness of the flesh (verse 18). The fact is that this is the "Hougomont" of the great "Waterloo" of the soul — the point around which all the battle of exercise and anguish rages. Let that point be really and decisively carried, and the believer soon learns to look away from his worthless self to Christ the risen One, and in His risen life and by His Spirit (Rom. 8: 2) all this "fruit unto death" is changed to "fruit unto God" and the path of victory.