9. Union with Christ: The Means of the Powerful Transformation in Us

9.1. The All-Embracing Doctrine of Union

In Paul's thought, all of the blessings that flow to Christians flow to us from the finished work of Jesus Christ. What Jesus has done is transferred over to us; hence, we receive the benefits of His work. The manner in which this transfer takes place is union with Christ. The blessings of God flow to us and are received by and through the mechanism of our being united to Jesus Christ.

As we have already noted, the doctrine of union is one of Paul's fundamental axioms. It is through our union with Christ that all of the blessing of the new covenant flow to us. In Ephesians 1:4 we find that election is related to union. As we have already seen in Romans 5, we are justified before the law by reason of our federal legal relationship with Him. Now in Romans 6, where Paul explicitly uses the doctrine of union, he goes on to apply our union to Christ to show the internal effects that this union has upon us; that is, the internal changes that God works in us though His Spirit as we are brought into the new creation. Once we have dealt with this aspect, then we will go on to consider how union and the death of Christ affects our relationship to Law of God.

As we exposit Paul's doctrines in Romans 6 on union, we need to be aware that we are developing the text from two differing angles. First, we are exploring the concept of new life coming through union; that is, union is the basis of all new life. This angle is a more general approach to union. Secondly, we need to realize that Paul is also dealing with a very specific issue in Romans 6 – that of the power of indwelling sin and how it no longer has power over us. In this respect, the context of the general discussion the very specific discussion of how, due to our union, the believer has overcome. Then again in chapter 7, Paul again refers to another very specific question, how our death and union with Christ affects our relationship to the Law.

9.2. Providing the Context for Romans 6

In order to properly understand Romans 6, we need to remind ourselves of the argument in chapter 5, especially Paul's statement that sin, far from being restrained by the law, actually abounds.

Romans 5:20-21

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

9.2.1. Implications

At the end of Romans 5, Paul has argued that due to the finished work of Christ all men were justified, irrespective of what they had done in this life. This was through their union with Christ.

Romans 5, properly understood, makes the individual subjective righteousness of each believer irrelevant. The test is not what have I done or not done, but what the two representatives, Adam and Christ, have done, and which one of the two is my representative. In this context, one's personal behavior is irrelevant; it is only what one's representative has done that matters. (Note: Paul deals elsewhere with the fact that we are subjectively and personally responsible for our own sins).

Romans 5:20 can be misinterpreted to justify continuing in a lifestyle of sin. The law was given to expose the abundance of our sinfulness. As sin abounds more and more, God's grace which covers our sin must abound more and more as well. Thus, the more a person sins, the more God's grace will abound, to His praise. Since when sin abounds then grace abounds even more, some might say, "I will just continue in sin. It does not matter what I do; in fact the more I sin, the more grace will abound, and the more God will be glorified."
This argument is, in effect, radical antinomianism and Paul deals with this in the next chapter. Romans 6 is written to reject antinomianism and explain why an evil lifestyle is impossible for the Christian. It is written to show that a Christian cannot and will not continue in sin due to his union with Christ.

On a practical note, it is interesting to note that Paul's answer to lawlessness of the believer is not to stress law-keeping. It would have been easy for Paul's to say, “No, do not misunderstand me, you do need to keep the law,” and yet Paul does not follow this line of reasoning at all. In contrast, Paul's argument is that the remedy to sin is not to stress the law; rather he stresses union with Christ that has given us power to break the bonds of sin (Rom. 6) and the ongoing powerful walking in the Spirit that allows us life with God (Romans 6 & 8).

To Paul, holiness and grace come through the mediation of Christ, and that only operates through union with Him. The answer to indwelling sin is to understand what Christ has done for us in His death and resurrection and what He has done in us by union.

This union brings about a twofold result. Firstly, we are united to His death, (and hence to sin); secondly, we are united in His resurrection (and hence to life). Since we are united in His death and the likeness of His resurrection, we have died to sin and we are called to walk in newness of life. If we have grace through Christ, we can no longer walk in the old way (see Romans 8).

In developing his argument, Paul keeps the closest possible link with his thoughts in Romans 5. To rephrase Paul's argument, the basis of justification is union (Romans 5:12ff), and the basis of sanctification is also union (Romans 6). In both cases then, the answer to the problem of the guilt (Romans 5) and the corruption of sin (Romans 6) is our union with Jesus Christ. Romans 5 deals with union in the objective sense (legal, forensic, alien righteousness). Now we will explore the effects of this union (power of life) in a practical, personal, internal, and personally experimental sense. If we were united to the old man Adam and were powerfully controlled by that realm of sin and death, then we are also united to the New Man, who brings life, the Spirit and holiness. Our union will affect every aspect of our lives. (Note: While our union to the death and resurrection of Christ controls every other doctrine of salvation, we will limit ourselves here to the doctrines of regeneration, the outpouring of the spirit, and sanctification).

9.2.2. Paul’s Counter-Argument Summarized

In Romans 6:1-11, Paul will now argue that all believers are united to Christ in His death and resurrection. The closeness and power of that union make it impossible that we can continue in sin in order that grace may abound. Here Paul stresses the death of the old man (the fleshly power of sin linked to the old Adam) and the resurrection of the new man (linked to the raised Christ), which allows us to live in newness of life.

9.3. Exposition of Romans 6:1-11

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?
2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?
3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?
4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,
6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.
7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.
8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,
9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

9.3.1. We Cannot Continue in Sin (Rom. 6:1-2)

The rhetorical question that Paul asks in verse 1 is this: Once we are saved, can we go on living a sinful lifestyle? Since more sin will lead to more grace, shouldn’t we keep on sinning?

In answer to his own question, Paul answers in the strongest terms. He is emphatic and decisive: “Certainly not!” (v. 2). Since we have died to sin, he asked the question, “How can we live in it any longer?” Just as death and life are opposites and cannot coexist, even so we cannot be both dead to a thing and alive to it. There is no way that a Christian can continue in sin.

A key to this section is found in the words “we who died.” In the Greek, it is an aorist tense, meaning a completed past action. The verb is “have died,” not “are dead.” “Have died” indicates an act that took place in the past. This is to be distinguished from merely “are dead,” which would indicate a current state of being. While it is true that persons who have died are dead, the emphasis in Greek is on a single action in the past.

The point that Paul is trying to make here is that a once-for-all definitive break has occurred. This event is linked with Christ once for all with His death upon the cross. Christ died to sin once; thus, the believer who is linked to Him has also died once. If this first part is true, then the second part of the equation is also true. After Christ's death comes Christ's resurrection, and just as He has been raised into another realm, even so the believer has been raised to another realm. This dual process – dying and rising – results from union with Christ. In consequence, a believer therefore cannot live in sin. It is simply not possible. In addition, we are not still dead; rather we have been raised in the newness of life. If a person has no change in conduct, no matter what he says he is not a believer.

9.3.2. United in Death and in Resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4)

9.3.2.1. United in Death

In verse 3, Paul begins to explore the relationship between our union with Christ and death.

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

The Apostle shows how we are dead and defends it. The essence of Paul's argument here is that the believer died to sin when Christ died. Paul stresses that the link (or the identification) of ourselves with Christ occurred when we were baptized. In this context, Paul argues that our baptism also shows our inclusion in His death.

9.3.2.2. How is Baptism Being Used in These Verses?

This appeal to baptism means that the Christians in Rome understood the importance of baptism to them (Murray, p. 214).

a. Baptism into Christ means baptism into union with Him (cp. 1 Cor.10:2; 1:13, Mt. 28:19). In the foregoing examples, the key idea is union; not necessarily union into His death and resurrection but certainly union (see section 2.1 on the general importance of union).

b. In this particular example, Paul is stressing union into the particular aspect of Christ's death and the benefits that flow from that. Baptism into Christ means a union with Him and all the privileges that Christ brings as mediator of the New Covenant. Union is therefore union into His death. We are united with Him in His death and we died with Him in His death.
Diagram 9.1  Baptism Includes All Facets of Union

Diagram 9.2  One Facet of Union Is His Death and Resurrection

In these verses there is no evidence that baptism does something in itself, i.e. baptismal regeneration or sacerdotal theology. Rather, Paul is arguing that baptism is a good description of the process of death and resurrection of the union (Murray).

In this baptism, the corporate idea is again dominant. What once took place in Christ is also applicable to His own. They are buried with Him, and they have died to sin with Him. Here, the Church is directly involved in the historical redemptive event of Christ. When Christ died, they died also, and His death was their own. They are likewise joined to Him in the glory of the resurrection.

9.3.2.3. United in Burial

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

In verse 4, Paul again reiterates the idea of death but adds the additional element of burial to it. That is, not only did we die with Him, but we were also buried with Him.

There are two reasons for adding the element of burial (Murray).

a. The burial completes the emphasis on His death. The burial was proof of the reality, certified and confirmed, that Christ died.

b. It leads us to a union with Christ in His resurrection. We were buried with Him in order that we might be raised with Him. In this regard, burial is not only the proof but it is also the transition point that sets us up for the resurrection.
9.3.2.4. Walk in Newness of Life

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Being dead to sin is just the beginning; it is the precondition of living a life that is a result of grace. We have already seen this in the context of justification (Romans 5:15, 17, 18-21). Now Paul is stressing the same with respect to sanctification. Baptism not only applies to death, but also refers to life. It refers to a union with Him in His resurrection life. In the original Greek, they are purpose clauses in which the newness of life of a believer’s walk is compared with the resurrection of Christ. The newness of life must come because of the resurrection; there is no middle ground. At this stage, Paul is merely introducing the idea of new life, a theme that he will develop at length in Romans 8 where that new life is spelled out.

9.3.2.5. Through the Glory of the Father

The resurrection is through the glory of the Father.

In this clause, Paul sets up the Father as the active agent in the resurrection of Christ. In this, he mirrors an earlier argument in Romans:

“... who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:24-25).

In these verses the active direct agency of the Father is seen as the driving force of the resurrection and thus of the resurrection life. (See also the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit in Romans 8:11).

The Father is thus the key to the powerful resurrection life of believers. That same glory that raised Christ from the dead is brought to bear on us. The power of the Father is also brought to bear on us, empowering us to obedience and guarantying its certainty. As Christ walked, even so we should walk in newness of life. As surely as Christ rose from the dead, so we shall rise in the resurrection life. This idea of Paul is mirrored in Eph 1:

17... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you ... 19what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:17, 19-20).

Hence, both Christ and believers have been raised from the dead by the same power. This is a great comfort to believers. What strength and power are in these words! If it is the Father’s power, then surely there is power enough to save you, to raise you, and to keep you. Also, what glory is in these words!

9.3.2.5.2. What Does the Phrase the “Glory of the Father” Mean?

It is unclear what this phrase means. This phrase can either refer to the glory that God has lavished upon Christ in His resurrection body; or it can mean the glory and the majesty of God’s attributes that raised Christ from the dead.

If it refers to the latter, then it is referring to the majesty and perfection of God as He raised Him from the dead. This would parallel the idea in Romans 3:25, where Christ’s death is seen as a formal witness and demonstration of the righteousness of God. Here in Romans 6:4 the resurrection would also have a revelatory nature. As His death was a formal witness, so would His resurrection life be as well. We can see the glory of the Son in His vindication, knowing that He was righteous in His death. We see His justice in the resurrection.
9.3.3. United in Likeness (Rom. 6:5)

Verse 5 confirms verse 4. The main stress is on similarity, but there is also the ideal of a distinction between Christ and us due to union. The similarity is in the idea of being “united” and in the word “likeness.” However, the word “likeness” also implies distinction; although we are like Him, we are not exactly the same as Him.

The Greek word for united in verse 5 is “grown together”, used only once in the entire New Testament. It shows the intimacy of the union. We are united or “grown together” in His likeness, not His actuality. Paul deliberately uses the Greek word for “likeness.” The importance of using this word is that the parallel incorporates both similarity as well as distinction. We are incorporated in likeness, not actuality. There is both an agreement and a distinction in our union. Christ comes as the last Adam, and as such, Christ came in the likeness of His sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). He was like us but He was not completely like us because He was not born in sin nor did He ever sin. This aspect of His being is not completely like us because He was not born in sin nor did He ever sin. This aspect of His likeness is why He is both like and unlike the first Adam. He is like the second Adam in His death and yet dissimilar to him, having never sinned. The same is true of the similarity between Christ and the church. Christ is both like the church and yet not like them. We were actual sinners; He was not.

The idea of being “grown together” has another important implication. The thrust of the word is not a process (i.e., “we are growing together”), but a condition, a state, a completed action by God. Here we are seen as having grown (past tense, completed action) when He did.

This similarity between Christ and His church is found not only in His death and resurrection, but also in the other side of the equation, with respect to the breaking of the dominion of sin. Both sides of the equation are true. We will begin by looking at the death of the old man first and then go on to consider the life that the new man has in Christ. This change from death to life is seen in the following diagram:

Diagram 9.3 Death to the Old Power, Living to the New Power

9.3.4. The Old Man and His Death (Rom. 6:6)

As we look at verse 6, our focus begins to switch to the impact that our union with Christ has upon the old man. In looking at this we will consider the following: 1) Who is the old man who dies?; and 2) How has the old man died? and what are the consequences of his death?
9.3.4.1. Who Is the Old Man? – The Subjective Personal Nature of the Old Man
Murray takes the personal and subjective line of reasoning. The old man denotes our old man or ego, a personal unregenerate man in his entirety. The “body of sin” means man as a whole organism. If this is correct, then at the time that Christ died in the flesh, our old man, our old ego, and our old selfishness were put to death. That idolatrous core and root of our being, being indwelt by sin, has now been done away with. Therefore, with its death, the bondage in which it held us as slaves to sin and self has been also done away with. This would accord to the internal working of the Spirit of God.

Diagram 9.4 Murray and the Old Man/New Man

9.3.4.2. The Objective Corporate Nature of the Old Man
Ridderbos has a different vision of man here in explaining this verse. To Ridderbos, the old man refers not to the individual past of a particular believer in their unconverted state, but as the supra individual mode of existence (i.e., all men who live in Adam). Christ suffering in the body refers then more to a human mode of existence (i.e., the life of all men before Christ).

Here the logic is that God judged sin in the flesh in a corporate sense (Rom. 8:3; Eph 2:14). Our old man is crucified and judged with Him, so that the body of sin should be rendered powerless. Here the human mode of existence has been rendered dead. The bondage of sin has been done away with in the cross and the death of Christ.

Diagram 9.5 Ridderbos and the Old Man/New Man
9.3.5. Freedom from Sin through Death (Rom. 6:7)

7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

This is a short and difficult verse, but it outlines the principle from which Paul is working. Simply put, death is the end of sin. In death, the power of sin is taken away. In death sin is rendered powerless.

In this context sin is personified. As long as a person is alive, sin is an authority; it has the power to command, to hold in subjection, to exercise its claims. It is a force which has power over us. Romans 5:21 says that sin reigns; that is to say it has and holds dominion over men, and it does so in death or unto death. Sin, says Paul, reigns in death and also in all men, since all men are sinners (from Adam). Thus, all men are under the power of sin and all men will die, for all men are under the reign of sin that leads to death.

In this verse, Paul puts forward the remedy to this powerful reign of sin and death. The only remedy to this is that sin itself has to die, as that is the only way to bring an end to sin’s power. If someone is already dead, that person has paid the toll that sin demands and is no longer under sin’s power. If one is dead, that person is no longer controlled by the force of sin. It is only by going to the very end of the power of sin that one can be free from it, but the only way to get to the end of sin’s power is through death.

Diagram 9.6 Sin’s Rule in Life unto Death

At the point of death the power of sin ends, and it cannot stretch into the next life. The push of the force of sin is ended in death, and since Christ has been through death the force of sin is ended.

It is a strange thing for us to think about the fact that death brings freedom. But once the life force of sin with its reward death is ended (for the wages of sin is death), then, and only then will the end of sin be reached. It is only when sin has lost its ability to control us that we move to a place of freedom. We tend to associate death with the lack of freedom: when you are dead you can’t do anything any more, you are powerless. What we fail to realize is that as long as a man lives, he is under the power, rule, and force of sin. It is only when he has died that he is free.
9.3.6. Freedom from Death through Union with Christ (Rom. 6:8-10)
This idea applies first of all to Christ and then to all of those who are united to Him.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

9.3.6.1. The Principle First Applied to Christ
Paul is arguing that Christ, not by His life but by His death, went to the end of the power of sin and beyond it. Once He had paid for its demand, He was now free.

This applies in the first place to Christ: “for the death that He died, He died to sin once for all" (6:10a). At that time the dominion of sin had been broken and He was free. Free to do what? He was now free to pursue another direction, a direction of life toward God: “but the life that He lives, He lives to God” (6:10b). Since Jesus freed Himself from sin, He has also escaped from its power. Having been raised, He now lives to God under God’s power.

9.3.6.2. The Principle Applied to Those in Union
8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

Since Christ did this, then the church did this with Him. Due to our union, we too have died to sin’s power once for all and have been raised by God once for all. Even as the death was a singular and decisive action, even so the life will likewise be singular and decisive. We will live, but instead of living for sin, we will live to God forever.

Note: the contrast that is being made here is between the reign of sin and the ability to live to God. To be free from sin means that we have the capacity to live to God, even as Christ lives to Him now in heaven. The antithesis to sin and death is the holy life of Christ and living to God. There is no such thing as being just left free. If you are united with Christ, you will live as He lives. “And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). This sort of life is “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21).

Diagram 9.7 The Two Spheres of Dominion

9.3.7. What the Church Must Understand (Rom. 6:11)
11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This doctrine must form and inform the church’s understanding of itself. All of the above represents the basic understanding that the church must have of herself if she is to fight against sin. She cannot
continue in sin due to her union; it is not possible. A great transaction has taken place in the death of Christ freeing her from sin. Likewise, a second great transition has occurred that in the resurrection of Christ; she now lives, not for sin but to God. Thus, the church is dead to sin and alive to God. She cannot continue in sin. In addition, she must reflect on this fact. She must reckon these things to be true and act upon the truth of them. This is living by faith. Paul clearly states this in verse 11: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What has taken place once in Christ, believers must actualize in their life. They are no longer to put themselves at the disposal of sin but at God’s disposal in the newness of life.

9.3.8. Application: Living in Obedience
This first part of Romans 6 has set the basis or the foundation upon which Paul will build in the second half of the chapter. In the second half Paul will exhort believers to flee sin and pursue righteousness. In effect he is saying that you have already been freed, and now you should serve God yourselves. Since the great work has been done, go to work. We will come to this section later when we look at the new obedience that Christ demands of us. The work is done but not yet fully complete as the rest of Romans 6 indicates.

9.3.9. Conclusions (Rom. 6:1-11)
First, we have seen that Paul uses the doctrine of union in Romans 6 when dealing with sin and sanctification, just as he used it in Romans 5 when he was dealing with justification. The doctrine of our union with Christ is a vital doctrine, explaining both the legal and inner sanctifying workings of God.

Second, in a narrow context, Paul has clearly laid out the remedy for lawlessness. It is not more law, or a deeper understanding of the law, but rather the answer to our lawlessness is found in our union in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. True life sanctification begins with this principle of the death and resurrection of Christ: in it, the power of sin is broken; and in Him, we are freed to live a new and holy life unto God.

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter13: Of Sanctification
13.1. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them, the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

While this section concentrates on progressive sanctification, Romans 6 really lays down the basis for a once-for-all break with sin.

9.4. Union and Death to the Law
In the above section on Romans 6:1-11 we have laid down the fundamental principles of how Christ had freed us from the power of sin by union with Him. However, this union frees us not only from sin, but also from many other aspects of the old life, or life in the old world. In some cases Paul speaks of us being dead to the law and its demands. In other places Paul speaks about being dead to the first principles of this life. To Paul, all of these words—the law, sin, and the first principles of the world—mean the same thing: the power of the old world with its context of death, corruption, and rebellion against God. Clearly, our union with Christ has delivered us from all of these things, and it is to each of these individually that we will now turn.
Christ delivers from us: 1) from the power of sin; 2) from the power of the law; and 3) from the first principles of this world. We have already seen how God though our union with Christ has delivered us from the power of sin. Now we will look at how Christ’s death has freed us from the rule and dominion of law. After that, we will look at how Christ delivers us from what Paul calls the “first principles of this world.”

9.4.1. We Died to the Law

In Romans 5, Paul has dealt with justification and our being brought out of the legal realm of the law. In Romans 6, Paul shows how our union breaks the power of indwelling sin in us. Next, in Romans 7 Paul develops the argument that freedom from the power of sin also includes the freedom from the ongoing demands (dominion) of the law.

What is the law? It is very important to understand what Paul means by “law” in this case. When Paul is referring to the law in Galatians and in Romans 5:20, he seems to be referring to the Mosaic covenant. This covenant, given at Sinai, placed men under the clear express threatening and curses of the law (cp. Gal 3:10-11). The law “was added because of transgressions … it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Gal. 3:19). As such, it was given specifically to Israel. I was a mere empty letter, written externally on stones not internally upon the heart (cp. 2 Cor. 3:3, Hebrews 8:8-11). By itself, the law had no power to change man, only to threaten him with the thunder and lightening at Sinai.

Our starting point with respect to our new position in Christ is in Romans 6:14: “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Paul then goes on to develop this theme in Romans 7:1-6:

1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?
2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.
3 So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.
4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.
5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.
6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.
Pauline Theology II

What Paul is saying here is that due to our inclusion in the death and resurrection of Christ, we have likewise been transferred from the jurisdiction and sphere of the law. It can no longer touch us, hold us, or threaten us. We are no longer even under its dominion or rule, for we are dead to the law.

The outline argument for verses 1-4 is simple:

a. The law is no longer the master; you have died to it.

b. Your old marriage to it is over. The idea of marriage is used often in Scripture for the relationship between God and His people. When Israel was given the law, God drew near to her as a husband.

c. Your new marriage is begun. See also Ephesians 5:23-25, in which the church is seen as the bride of Christ.

The reason you need to die to the law is because it owns you and controls you. As long as you are under it, it controls your relationship.

There are two aspects to this control. First, it means that we are under its power and dominion; that is, we are under its kingdom. Secondly, verse 5 stresses the relationship between the law and the sinful working of the flesh: “For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” In this second respect, the law is powerless to aid us and so leads us to death. The demands of the law will only create further enmity (Rom. 8:7) or failure. If you try to be obedient by telling yourself that you can be, by sheer mental will, or by using your natural resources, you will not be able to do so. The law will not supply you with the power to be fruitful (Rom. 7:4). Rather, the flesh will rise up and try to destroy us.

The law exercises two controls over us. First, we are under its jurisdiction; and second, due to the flesh, we are under its power. Both of these strangleholds need to be broken if we are to live. Paul gives us the remedy for both in the death of Christ in Romans 7:4:

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

The argument in Romans 7:4 can be summarized simply: 1) You have died to the law through the body of Christ; 2) since we are dead, we are discharged from the law that held us captive. We will examine both this argument and its consequences below.

9.4.2. Christ and the End of the Law

We will begin our discussion by looking at Christ and His relationship to the law, and then we will apply it to ourselves.

9.4.2.1. Our Starting Point for Examining Christ and the Law is Galatians

In Galatians 4 Paul points to the humiliation of Christ. One aspect of that humiliation is that He was born under the law: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Before Christ came to the earth He was not under the law given through Moses, but when He was born, He was born under that law and was therefore subject to it.
Notes on Diagram 9.9: While the law is an expression of the very will of God for men as they reflect His image, this means that it has a definite beginning—the law was given through Moses. In the first position ①, Christ is not under the law. There are two reasons for this. First, the Son is the lawgiver. He is the king, and so He is not subject to it. For example, the First Commandment (“You shall have no other gods before Me,” Ex. 20:3) cannot apply to Him. In addition, the law as given on Mt. Sinai is a reflection of God’s holiness as it applies to men. Before the incarnation Christ was not a man – He was Spirit only – and so He was not under the law in the same manner. In the second position ②, Christ, in His humiliation as mediator, is born under the law and therefore subject to it all the days of His life. In addition, in His death (third position ③), He pays the debt it is owed. Once He died, He is freed from the law (Rom. 7:1-6). Now He is in a new position ④, to live unto God, free from any dominion or scope of the laws power.

From this analysis there remains a couple of really interesting questions. What is the nature of the obedience of positions ① and ④ in contrast to position ②? What impact does that has on the other sons of God who are in union with Him? We will address these questions in the section on the new obedience (section 13).

9.4.2.2. Applying it to Ourselves

In Galatians, Paul takes this line of reasoning with respect to Christ and applies it to himself and to believers generally.

19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal. 2:19-20)

Here Paul contrasts living for the law and for God. Who are you placed under? Who has jurisdiction over you, the law or God? Those who are dead to the law are no longer under its power. They have been freed from its rule and are now under the rule of Christ. We will explore what it means to be under the rule of Christ more fully in the section on the new obedience (section 13). For now, I have listed below a few of the advantages of not being under the law, of having been freed from its jurisdiction.

a. The law blocks the way to life. The law is hostile to man and brings him under its jurisdiction:

23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:23-24)

In contrast, to be under Christ’s jurisdiction means that we have the fullest blessing of God upon us – we have full access to the favor and the mercy of God. We are sons, we are heirs, we are in Christ and, we have the Spirit of God:
4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.  6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”  7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 4:4-7).

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15).

b. **The law is totally and utterly performance driven.** The only thing that matters under the jurisdiction of the law is your performance.

12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them” (Gal. 3:12).

To be under Christ’s jurisdiction is to be under a jurisdiction that is controlled by love – His love for us. He does not love His sons based on their performance: He will commit Himself to them even despite their performance.

14 I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men (2 Sam. 7:14).

c. **The law has no flexibility;** if you sin you must die.

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them” (Gal. 3:10).

A single sin leads to the curse of the law being imposed. In contrast, the great overriding blessing of being in Christ now is that He can either forgive your sin without consequences or He can use the evil of your sin for your own good.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

d. **There is no ground for pardon in the law.** Even the sacrificial system offered no ground for pardon unless it was linked to Christ’s death on the cross.

1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.  

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.  

3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.  

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4).

If we are under the jurisdiction of Christ, he has borne the law for us and so there is forgiveness with God. In the jurisdiction of Christ, we are already justified and we have forgiveness and intercession from Christ.

33 Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.  34 Who is he who condemns? 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 (Rom. 8:33-34)

e. **The law can do nothing to aid man with his predicament of sin.** The law is rendered powerless, since it is merely a letter, an external code written on stone and not on the heart. In contrast, those who walk by the Spirit are aided in their walk unto God.

4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).
The above shows the biblical distinctions of being under the law and under grace. In Galatians, to be under law is to be a slave (see Galatians 4). There is no family relationship, only rules and obedience. It is a relationship regulated by law, not love. In contrast, to be in Christ is to be a Son. The bondage that held you has been removed, and the nature of our relationship is changed to one of love.

9.4.2.3. An Overview of Paul’s View of the Law in Romans

In Romans 1-3, Paul shows that we are all under the dominion, the scope, and the power of the law and its sidekick—sin. In Romans 5, Paul shows how we are legally justified, not by our own works but by the works of our representative. In Romans 6, he shows that due to this selfsame union with Christ, we are considered dead to the power of sin and so we are alive to God. Paul develops this further in Romans 7 to show that when Christ died, He also died to the demand and claims of the law. He is now in a position where the law has no power over Him. Due to our union with Christ, we too have been freed from the demands and scope of the law. Romans 8 applies this, for now we walk not according to the law but according to the new life of Christ in the Spirit (position ③ in diagram 46 above).

Let us all thank God for the freedom in every area that we now have to live not under the jurisdiction of the law but under the jurisdiction of God.

Diagram 9.10  Two Distinct Spheres of Dominion ...

Diagram 9.11  ... Not Two Overlapping Spheres of Dominion

WCF 19.6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them ... as a rule of life.

We will be looking at the usefulness of the law as a rule of life later.
9.4.3. Freedom from the First Principles of This Life

Not only do we have this freedom from the law, but due to our union with the death and the resurrection of Christ, we also are freed from any manmade rules or regulations that might seem to help us towards holiness, but in truth are merely hindrances.

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—

21Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,”

22which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

23These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

Here, Paul is concerned with rules on eating and drinking, the classifying of some things as clean or unclean, and the allocation of some days as holy. These are all things that might seem helpful, but they are in fact of no value in the fight against the flesh. Paul has many words to describe these manmade things – the world, the first principles, the weak and beggarly elements of this world, the things of the earth and human wisdom. They are all things that belong to the old creation but have no power to help us in the new creation. In order to live in a new creation way, these things of the old world must be left behind.

13For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh [i.e., manmade things].

14But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation (Gal. 6:13-15).

In Galatians 6:13-15, Paul cautions us regarding anything coming from the flesh that gives grounds for human boasting. He stresses that in the cross, the world and the things related to the world are put to death in Him. Circumcision or any other manmade regulations that might be the grounds for boasting or dependence upon for salvation are worthless. Outside of Christ, the keeping of the law and the observance of circumcision is of no avail. They are merely “the weak and beggarly elements” (Gal. 4:9). The only thing that matters is that you are part of the new creation in Christ.

Diagram 9.12 Man under First Principles or under Christ